

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Melbourne — 23 November 2012

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Mr I. Lawther.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee I welcome Mr Ian Lawther. Thank you very much for your willingness to appear before this hearing this afternoon.

Mr LAWOTHER — It is an absolute pleasure to be here.

The CHAIR — Is it all right if I call you Ian?

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes. Lovely.

The CHAIR — Ian, all evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. This hearing today is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript. Following your presentation the committee members will ask questions relating to your submission that you have provided to us and the evidence that you will give to us this afternoon. I know that you are going to be speaking for around 40 minutes, and I will remind you at around the 35-minute mark when that is coming up.

Mr LAWOTHER — I think I will fill the 40 minutes easily, so do not hesitate to stop me.

The CHAIR — We will do so. Please continue, and thank you again for being before us.

Mr LAWOTHER — Thank you. It is a pleasure. All I ever wanted to do was talk to somebody who was in authority in the church, which is impossible. I might say as little as a month ago I was being ignored. I was ignored by Les Tomlinson, and I was ignored by a bishop in Brisbane. They cannot claim it is historic; it goes on now. I tried and I tried, and I thought if I wrote enough stuff I would eventually upset somebody, they would put a court case on me and I would try to get everything I have got on record. You people have called this inquiry, and I now have everything on record, and I thank you. And I will have my own copy — the Hansard copy. Fantastic!

My file starts off with a link to a story about the papal nuncio, transferred recently from Australia. This is the same nuncio I delivered my fair dinkum letter to the Pope to, written in the World Youth Day year — 2008. I wrote this letter for World Youth Day because I was highly insulted that they would bring World Youth Day here when in my parish there was an active paedophile priest. In my parish there was a mother who knew that this priest was probably at World Youth Day and nobody could find where this paedophile priest was because he just disappeared, as paedophile priests do. I handed this letter out outside St Patrick's for four or five Sundays in a row, and it is not a very comfortable feeling standing outside a cathedral handing out a letter that knocks somebody's religion. But as the letter says, it explains everything and it is pretty readily available on the internet. I got absolutely no response to it, except a very threatening letter from the church's QC, because he felt I defamed him because I criticised his so-called independent thing.

But the nuncio sent me a letter acknowledging he had received my letter and forwarded it to the highly competent office of the Holy See. I now refer to it as the highly incompetent office of the Holy See. A few weeks later I heard he was taken from Ireland for not following directions from the Murphy commission to make available documents on CSA cases. A couple of weeks later I was informed by a friend it had been sent to a never-to-be-replied-to section of the complaints office, and it has never has, apart from the threat to be sued.

This submission I am reading now forms only a tiny part; I think my main submission is four times longer than this, and I may double up, but I will try to make sense of it as I go, if you do not mind. This submission forms a tiny part of my reply to the ignorance and arrogance that is endemic and systemic within the institutional church. Israel was highly insulted that this man was appointed to its country by the Vatican, and it has voiced its disapproval accordingly.

My working life was cut short by 15 years, and I was forced into retirement and onto welfare as a severely vision-impaired person. Is it fair that my upkeep falls on the average taxpayer's shoulders, and on the shoulders of my children, grandchildren and your grandchildren? I do not think so.

I have heard many reports of people being told by the church, 'Give them your Medicare number and we'll pay the gap' — they are generous bastards with our offspring's money. When the final cost to this country is added up it will be billions, and yet bishops can spirit millions of dollars out of Australia for their hobbies. I am

referring to Domus Australia. I believe bishops are not answerable to anyone about diocesan funds. If they make money, the moral thing for them to do — ha, ha! — would be to pay back Medicare. Some of the money they pay back they have leeches off the Australian taxpayer.

I was fortunate enough to do a two-day restorative justice workshop at the Jesuit monastery in Kew. I did it under the impression that the spiral of restorative justice had been accepted by the Catholic Church. I had to stand up at the end and congratulate the leader of the group for its content and tell her I was amazed that this sort of stuff was anywhere within the Catholic system. I was told it was designed to bring the aggrieved and the aggressor together for peaceful mediation. That is all I ever wanted.

They were never interested. Who is fibbing? Is it the Jesuits, or is it the institution when it says it is caring for the sufferers of clergy sexual abuse? Every time a sufferer hears a bishop or a cardinal say, 'It is historic. We have fixed it', for the sufferer, who was to a large extent locked in yesterday, the abuse is reignited. I am assuming you have all watched the Brian D'Arcy documentary.

Carmel told me that if I get nervous, I should imagine the audience nude, and that would put me at ease

Mr McGUIRE — Do not get nervous!

Mr LAWThER — Fellas, you are okay. Ladies, I have to warn you, I am just learning Braille!

Cardinal Pell's bleating about Catholic bashing the other day was a typical example. I have done my best to not come across as a Catholic basher. All Catholics are victims of clergy sexual abuse, because of the lack of institutions that do anything fair dinkum about reducing the problem. All my anger has been directed towards the hierarchs for treating the God my kids were taught to respect as an idiot. To go against nature is to go against God, from the start of a priest's life when they are taught that anything to do with sex is a sin, to teaching Catholics that the way to God's good books is by praying, paying and obeying, and that your prayers will make you a better class of dead person.

I thank the inquiry for tackling this problem. I am delighted with the treatment I have received and the thoroughness with which you have covered the problem in the time you have had. After some mediation, some sufferers are asked to sign documents with words like this in it. If you remember back to documentary, Brian D'Arcy was talking about his abuse and how any time he thinks of his abuse he is thrown back to the age he was when the abuse took place. I have spoken to so many victims all over Australia and in different countries via Skype, and that was the best description of PTSD I have ever seen. I thank you for watching it.

I also did a four-night reconciliation course at a Baptist church in Brunswick somewhere. Along with the Jesuits they both taught that it is very important that you come together in a peaceful mediation and that the aggrieved gets acknowledgement of the sin from the aggressor. Every time Pell gets up and bleats about this, he is doing so much more damage to the sufferers of CSA. I use the words 'CSA sufferers', because even after the money, if they get a pittance, the suffering is still reignited in the way that Brian D'Arcy describes, and it is there for life; it is there for a long, long time. Every time George Pell comes out and gives his little rant about Catholic bashing or Catholic bigotry et cetera, there will be CSA sufferers all over the country reaching for an antidepressant. That is not fair on our kids because in so many cases victims are told, 'Give them your medi card; we'll pay the gap'. I said that bit before. Sorry about this.

The CHAIR — No, please take your time.

Mr LAWThER — There are people who have been abused who are at this very moment in danger of losing their homes because of their inability to work. Their arms feel like lead; they just cannot move. They know what they need to do but they just physically cannot do it because of the effects of PTSD.

As I say, I only know what I know about post-traumatic stress from talking to victims, from doing a couple of courses; because I was talking to a lot of victims I felt I should do something to learn something about healing. Plus I also lived with my father, who was a returned soldier, and they did not call it PTSD then, they called it shell shock or battle fatigue, and you did not talk about it. You did not talk about it. It was not manly to talk about your problems. That is exactly the same thing I see in CSA sufferers. I might add, I use the words 'CSA sufferer' because when Mary MacKillop was canonised I had a banner made up that said 'CSA sufferers' because I felt as though victims of clergy abuse does not describe it because they do not get over it and they

may not get over it for another 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 years. Denis Hart told of a victim who came forward after 80 years. What sort of suffering did that man go through in that time?

These people were forced, up until 2009, to sign release deeds. Once again, if we go back to Brian D'Arcy's movie, these people have been through what they call mediation. They are suffering bad, they could be as little as 12 years old, but they are asked to sign things like this under the heading 'No harmful statement or conduct':

... The releasor must not make statements, whether written or oral, about the claim, the subject matter of this deed or any other matter which is likely to harm the reputation of the releasee or all the released parties.

10.2. The releasor recognises that a breach of clause 10.1 of this deed is a breach of this deed and may result in legal action being taken against the releasor.

This disgusting piece of legalistic strangulation is what CSA sufferers had to sign after mediation.

The bloke who was locked into this was probably 12 years old at the time of the mediation and in no fit state to be signing his rights away.

Australia has a beautiful legal system that tries to be fair to all, and here we have not one but thousands of these clauses wrapped in the minds of CSA sufferers and wrapped in a burr-covered blanket deep inside the psyche of a CSA sufferer. The fact that most people when presented with this insult to Australian law have no legal representation and are in fact told they need none — as my 18-year-old son was, and ended up in a room with more than six lawyers before his tribunal hearing — is yet another way the church, in the fullest compassion it boasts of, intimidates CSA sufferers.

I believe this sort of contract was scrapped a few years ago, but the ones that are out there are very much alive in the mind of a CSA sufferer, and the damage they have done and again the antidepressants and drugs used by the CSA sufferers will be largely funded by the Australian taxpayer. It is another institutionally launched disaster loaded onto our children, our grandchildren, which is very capable of delivering current pain for many decades to come. And, once again, if George wants to get up and scream 'Historic', he is only doing a lot of damage to sufferers because he really needs to learn to shut his mouth. Because he obviously knows something — nothing — about the Jesuits' spiral of justice that they claim is being adapted by the Catholic Church.

Now I will go on to my first one. I really mean that: I got no pleasure at all out of handing those Pope's letters out outside St Pat's. I got no pleasure at all out of standing there with all my placards. But it is very, very obvious somebody has to do something. It did get us a bit of dialogue with the church, but they refused to talk to us if we were still protesting. We stopped protesting, and the dialogue stopped.

I am actually reading a report on David Daniel, which is in your submission, and I do not really think I need to read it out here, so I will just skip that. I might add, while I am trying to find where I am going, that this priest who got at my son also abused his nephews and nieces, yet our parish put out a child protection policy which said, 'You needn't worry about a priest if the child is a relative'. That is just so completely wrong. For that to be put out in our parish when they knew full well that the priest in our parish got at his own rellies was just a shocking thing to do.

The CHAIR — Ian, would you like some assistance to find the area you are looking for?

Mr LAWOTHER — Sorry?

The CHAIR — Would you like one of your assistants to help you?

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes.

The CHAIR — Or would you like the committee to ask a question?

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes, if the committee could ask questions.

The CHAIR — We are very happy to while you are finding the spot you want to refer to.

Mr LAWOTHER — Sorry.

The CHAIR — No, that is all right. Are you happy for us to ask questions?

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes, sure.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for speaking with us and going through your story. Would you like to continue now that you have found the spot? We can always come back.

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes. After David Daniel went to jail the authorities did nothing to help the families of the Healesville parish — or not much. Apparently a parishioner told Broken Rites in 2007, after David Daniel went to jail, that the Melbourne archdiocese was slow to offer help to the affected families. We tried so hard to get dialogue with bishops, and I guess my main thing here is to point out that we had three paedophile priests in a very short time. Yet to minimise things, in typical minimisation speak, the parish priest stood up and said there had been two in 30 years. This was a complete lie because after the second one had been convicted they brought in a third one right on top of him, who was a self-confessed sodomiser of a 16-year-old boy. He had been spirited out of America before he answered charges.

I was really up in arms about that. I approached a parishioner who I was on the parish council with and said, 'Look mate, this isn't good enough. This parish deserves better than this'. He was shocked and did not really want to talk to me about it, but I sort of said, 'Mate, we have to stop it. These blokes are out of control'. I know I say in my submission that I spoke to the priest, but the fact is that the priest will not talk to me. I am a dead man walking in my town.

You people are looking good!

Mr McGUIRE — I told you not to get nervous. Just calm, all right? Calm.

Mr LAWOTHER — The upshot of it all was that there ended up just about being a punch-up in the parish when a letter was read out saying that I was going to protest. Now, the fact is that it was Easter. I felt that people were entitled to their Easter without me stirring, and I had assured the parishioner who was talking to me on the phone — and I know the priest was next to him — that there would be no protest, but there was a letter read out that gave the impression that I was going to protest. The priest refused point-blank to give me a copy of that letter, but I did get a chance to ask him why he had been saying I was trying to destroy the church. I was not trying to destroy the church; I was trying to make kids safe.

I finally got a meeting with the parish priest about probably seven or eight weeks after the incident, but he insisted that Maria Kirkwood, who is spokeswoman for the Melbourne response, be there. I did not care, because what I had to say was that all I wanted to do was ask the priest for a copy of the letter. It also gave me the chance to ask why he and Maria Kirkwood — and I heard it from six people — were saying that I was trying to destroy the church. They both denied they said that, so I said, 'I'll just have to go back and tell the six people that told me you were that they're mistaken'. I am pretty sure I told him that there is nothing I can do to destroy the church; it is what the hierarchy have failed to do and what they have failed to do is protect our children.

Like I say, Catholicism is so ingrained in people. I say in there — no, I do not say it in there, and I will not start here. Actually, when I came in here, I promised Ingrid that I would not use any colloquialisms and I would not use any tradie's language. But when I said that, I thought to myself, 'No more than I hear parliamentarians do'. I did not actually say that, but I did reserve the words. So if my language comes out, I have not done anything to go against what I have said to Ingrid. That is mental reservation — and they do it well. Did I get that right, Tony?

The CHAIR — Ian, we are coming up to the 35-minute mark, so as I said at the outset I would — —

Mr LAWOTHER — I have got another 100 pages here.

The CHAIR — I will give you the opportunity for a few more minutes, if you would like.

Mr LAWOTHER — No, that is fine.

The CHAIR — Otherwise we can open it up to the committee members to ask questions.

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes, sure.

The CHAIR — Would you like us to do that now?

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you, and again thank you for the information you have provided to us. In your evidence that you have just given to us, you spoke about a release. Are we able to get a copy of that release that you referred to?

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes, sure.

The CHAIR — Thank you. That would be most helpful.

Ms HALFPENNY — Your submission talks about your seeing a private investigator's report that says the church knew about what Daniel was doing, his abusing.

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes.

Ms HALFPENNY — Could you elaborate a bit more on that?

Mr LAWOTHER — It is just a private detective's report that goes along with the Broken Rites report, that they knew he was a sexual deviant before they ordained him.

Ms HALFPENNY — And the report gives the explanations about why they know and how they found out?

Mr LAWOTHER — Look, I have never looked at it. A solicitor looked at it and commented that it seems clear enough. I just put that in there because it backs up the Broken Rites thing, and yes, I can supply it.

Ms HALFPENNY — Can I just ask about what you said when you were talking about the parish priest. You were told that he had been going around basically accusing you of damaging the church and so on. Was the hierarchy of the church aware of this and did they try to do something to stop that?

Mr LAWOTHER — Look, I can only assume, because we were so thoroughly snubbed by Denis Hart and Hilton Deakin, that the word is out that I am bad news for the church. As I say, the fact is that I just want to make my town safer for kids. They are certainly not safe up there now, and nobody can feel that they are safe because the code of conduct they brought out was an exact copy of that document, called — sorry, the name escapes me, but I will send a copy in.¹

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr WAKELING — Ian, thank you very much for your presentation and your submission. From your submission I would just like to draw out the issue with respect to the Melbourne Response and non-reference of matters to Victoria Police. If I could just read from your submission, it says:

Peter O'Callaghan and Susan Sharkey and Maria Kirkwood —

who were Carelink personnel —

obviously did not recognise these cases as criminal offences that should be prosecuted and so subtly discouraged going to the police. The need for privacy (silence) for the victims and the need to avoid gossip were stressed in a manner that led the parents to believe their children were better off in the Catholic system rather than going to the police who 'probably would not be interested' in their case anyway.

I would be really interested if you could perhaps provide some further information around that proposition.

Mr LAWOTHER — Yes, that all revolves around the case in Healesville that is current, whereby the whole family has been recognised as primary victims. She can go before the tribunal, but she must take out certain clauses in her statement. They have refused point-blank to give her her transcripts. It really is a case of what I

¹ *Integrity in Ministry – A Document of Principles and Standards for Catholic Clergy & Religious in Australia*, was provided to the Committee by Mr Ian Lawther on 12 December 2012.

call religious persecution in Healesville; the whole town turned against this woman. I go into in my statement how I used to walk around the town; I used to talk to parishioners, and I would hear different rumours — no names mentioned — of how the priest had said from the altar, ‘If you criticise your priest, you criticise God.’ That is where every hair on my body stood on end. I went to a men’s breakfast, and I was told, ‘No, no, no; it’s nothing like your case, Ian. It’s just some woman trying to get money out of the church.’ No names were mentioned; it was just ‘that woman up there’, ‘that woman up there’.

I was sitting at home one night and the phone rings, and it is a woman parishioner. I was on the welcoming committee of the parish council on the day they came; I welcomed them to St Brigid’s. I took them out the back, gave them a cup of tea and talked to them. I became quite good friends with her husband. I would see this family come into the church with two kids at first, always very neatly done. Eventually it was six kids, and I would think, ‘Well, they’re a good addition to the parish. I’m glad I got to introduce them’.

Then the phone rang and it was this woman. She asked me about the Melbourne Response, and the penny dropped I said, ‘I’m hearing stuff around town.’

I said, ‘I don’t like what I’m hearing.’ I said, ‘Do you know it took my son five years to get through with the system? You’ve got to be prepared for a long battle.’ But she has dug her heels in. She is not prepared to go before a court administered by a bloke who refused to recognise that she had any criminal claims against a priest, and I just hope she can stick dig in. She is at home with five kids and no hot-water service. There is absolutely no outreach in the Melbourne Response. They just want to shut you up, give you a few dollars and push you out the door. For Denis Hart to get up and say how worried he is about the integrity of a solicitor when you are actually questioning the whole basis of the legal system is just another way of torturing victims.

Mr WAKELING — Do you have any faith in the Melbourne Response process?

Mr LAWOTHER — Absolutely none — zero, zilch, none. As I say, they allowed my son into a room with six solicitors as an 18-year-old kid, no representation, told he does not need representation and he was questioned by this panel of six solicitors. I think it is disgusting that that can happen in this country. It is the biggest unnatural disaster that could happen to any country.

Mr O’BRIEN — Thank you, Ian, for coming to give your evidence. I was also taken by some of your comments today in relation to this suggestion that you and others who have come forward may be trying to destroy the church. I am not sure I can speak for the other members of the committee, but I can assure you that I do not take that to be your actions. In fact I would like to read your own words back to you, because they very much endorse the essence of what you have put before us:

There is nothing I can say or do that will destroy the church. It is what the hierarchies have failed to do that will destroy the church. What they have failed to do is protect our children, and in fact what they have succeeded in doing is damaging thousands and thousands of children and families, choosing carefully only the vulnerable and the young.

I would just like to give you that reassurance at least, as best I can, that that is how I treat what you have had to do.

Mr LAWOTHER — Thank you very much. It is reassuring.

Mr O’BRIEN — No problem. I would just like to then ask you another question if I could. What levels of accountability or apologies or statements of contrition have you received from the church hierarchy in relation to the abuse that has occurred to your family?

Mr LAWOTHER — Absolutely zero. Absolutely zero. As I say, I think it was three weeks ago I rang Tim Brennan in Brisbane about this woman, because her advocate had spoken to him and he had written this woman a letter. She was very, very crook at the time, and I just felt that after all my bitching about them not answering letters, we could not let it go. But because he is in Brisbane I felt he probably would not be able to act down here. So I rang him, and I stressed, ‘I am not Angie’s advocate. Angie can speak for herself, but she is too crook at the moment, and I didn’t feel it was right to not answer your letter’.

Then her advocate rang and found out I had been talking to him, and he said, ‘You’re not her advocate. I’ve had a phone call from her advocate’, another bloke, so-and-so. Unfortunately this woman reacted, and you cannot afford to react when you are dealing with the hierarchies, because they try to upset you. You have just got to

learn to sit there, take it, not show any emotions and analyse what they have actually said to you afterwards, because they are just not interested in listening to anybody — just not interested.

Mr O'BRIEN — What if I was to just follow up and ask you — forgive me if it may sound obvious to you, but just for our benefit and for the public record — what sort of accountability or actions would you like to see from the Catholic Church in relation to the issue of the abuse that is suffered by your family but also the other disturbing issue you raised in relation to perpetrators who were moved about and into your parish repeatedly?

Mr LAWTHER — I think there needs to be complete accountability. I do not think our children or vulnerable adults need to have an organisation in this country that can get protection from their bishops and run and hide behind their canon laws. There should be one law for every person in this country. As it is now, they are nothing but terrorists in the way they treat people. They sow seeds of doubt in the minds of their paedophile fodder, if I can call it that. They know exactly how the human psyche works, and they play on it. They just play the people for underlings from the word go. So, yes, just the same law for all. They should not be here under canon law. We do have such a thing as separation between church and state, but that came about years and years and years ago, when the church was not supposed to enter or use its power for political matters. Time and time again we see the church interfering in political matters, and they should be punished financially every time they do it.

Mr O'BRIEN — It is interesting that you raise the question — part of the background of now Saint Mary MacKillop, Australia's only saint, you are probably aware of. Whether it was her or her Josephite order is in dispute, but allegations were made against a Father Keating back in the 1880s, maybe for which or for an unrelated circumstance she was threatened with excommunication at the time. I am not sure if you are aware of that, but it is quite ironic given the position you find yourself in.

Mr LAWTHER — I do know her history. I am not Catholic. I did take all my lessons to be a Catholic, only because I wanted to be a do-as-I-do dad, not a do-as-I-say dad, and Pam was Catholic. I got nearly to the end of the lessons. Probably at the last lesson the priest said to me, 'Of course, you know there's more than knowing these lessons to becoming a Catholic, Ian'. I said, 'What's that, Father?'. He said, 'You have to convince me you'll be a good Catholic'. I was absolutely horrified. But all of a sudden I realised why grown men kowtow to the what I call men in black dresses. I almost did my block with an old man, and I am not proud of that, but I told him to eff off, in more subtle — no, they were not subtle words. I told him I did not need him to stand between me and God.

I continued my contact with the church because the kids' social life was tied up with it and my social life was tied up with it. I continued as though nothing happened, but he stood well away from me from thereon in, because they are not allowed to think for themselves. I say quite often in some of my forum posts that the greatest crime by the church is a crime against humanity inasmuch as they have absorbed people's individuality. People cannot think for themselves.

I will put this analogy to you. I feel life is life. The cells we have got are the same sorts of cells, the same atoms and whatnot. But if a dog breeder wants to breed a certain dog, he will breed into it what he wants, and he will he will breed out of it what he does not want. When that puppy is born and it runs with an adult dog for a very, very short time, it comes out knowing the commands, and it is just a very short time before he has got a good, saleable product. That is exactly how it is with Catholicism. If you are a generational Catholic, that pain I was talking to you about pulls from a long way back; it actually pulls from every gene in your body, and I got to realise after a while that that pain was genuine. They have been taught to behave this way — to pray, pay and obey — and I have tried to be kind to them. I quite often say on the forums, 'I am not a Catholic basher'.

I mean, sure, Pell can get up and he can bleat and bleat all he likes, but he is just calling; it is just his cry to arms, 'Hey, fellas, your leader's being attacked. I need you, I need you'. But the fact is that they have never led from the front; they lead from the rear all the time. On child abuse they have done absolutely nothing to change anything. I personally reckon that we can change it. We can decrease the amount of child abuse right across the board by being aware. All I have ever done is to try to raise public awareness, and I think that gets up their nose, which is exactly where it was meant to go — so a good shot!

Mr O'BRIEN — I think you have covered a lot of topics there, and thank you for that. It was a good summary.

Mr McGUIRE — Thank you very much, Ian, for coming here and testifying today; it is important. I wanted to follow on from that question of what you actually think needs to be done for victims, from your perspective?

Mr LAWOTHER — There is absolutely no outreach. I did supply Brian Lucas with information on the Madam Cumberlege report, which came out as an offspring of the Nolan report in England. It recommended outreach immediately, and it recommended, I think, a 14-week time from the end of the court case to compensation being paid.

Time and again — like my son, five and a half years — they just use time as a weapon. As I say in the fair-dinkum letter to the Pope, they use time as a weapon. That is what he got upset about. I was not allowed to say they use time as a weapon, but it is just so true.

I would like to see them adopt the Cumberlege report. I would like to see proper outreach. I would like to see it made absolutely compulsory for transcripts of interviews et cetera handed to the abused straightaway or within a couple of weeks, and I would like to see case workers installed in place so if there is a health issue in the office, somebody else is informed on how to take it over.

This current case in Healesville is an absolute disgrace. I bring up that Nelson Mandela said that a nation that cannot look after its children does not deserve to be called a nation. I am telling you, I reckon we are pretty close to that point now. But we can change it, and we can all work together for it. That is about it. Did I answer your question?

Mrs COOTE — Ian, thank you so much, and also thank you for your written submission, because it was really comprehensive. I think we all really have appreciated the time and effort that you have put into being here today and the information and knowledge that you have given us. Thank you.

In your submission you spoke at length about Peter O'Callaghan. Could you just elaborate a bit more? You say you believe he informed a priest that in fact the authorities were going to come and check him out and that therefore enabled that priest to be able to get rid of important material. Is that right?

Mr LAWOTHER — Absolutely. He was warned by O'Callaghan via his solicitor that he was under police investigation. I saw the letter, but I cannot remember exactly how it was worded. It was enough time for him to get rid of his computer records and to hold the whole investigation up for six months. When you are a mum with six kids and you have the whole town against you because a priest has said absolutely shocking things about you — —

I have had people say, 'Ian, we like what you're doing, but we can't go against the church'. It does make you feel good, but it is sort of a backhanded compliment, I reckon. It shows I am getting at the church, but what am I supposed to do with that?

I asked so many people when it first came up. I said, 'Look, this is wrong. We can stop this'. They said, 'Oh, no, you can't do that, you can't write a letter to the archbishop. You can't do this, and you can't do that'. I said, 'You can come with me. I'm not doing anything behind anyone's back. I'm telling you now, I'm going to do it'. No. All they are worried about is their church on Sunday, and if it takes one or two sacrificial children every 10 years, they will put up with it.

There has been no change in doctrine from the church in the 20, 30, 40 years I have been associated with the church in Healesville. There has been absolutely no change in doctrine or dogma. The priests are still hailed to be celibate — so a much better person than anybody else — because sex is just a dirty word.

Mrs COOTE — Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — Ian, before we conclude, would you like to make any final comments to the committee?

Mr LAWOTHER — Apart from the fact that this has been a real buzz? I really cannot tell you how much I appreciate the fact that you would listen. It is just a wonderful feeling, and I thank you all very much.

The CHAIR — We appreciate you very much indeed for coming before us and sharing your story with us. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you very much. Your evidence has been most helpful.

Committee adjourned.