

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 4 March 2013

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Witness

Mr J. Frederiksen.

The CHAIR — Good afternoon. On behalf of the committee I welcome Mr John Frederiksen, and thank you for your willingness to appear before this hearing. 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 this afternoon, the committee members will ask questions relating to both your submission and the evidence that you are about to give us, and we thank you again for being before us. Please commence when you are ready.

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is John Bernard Frederiksen. I think I am about 67 years old. I was born in 1968, so I think those numbers are right. I keep getting told at home it is not correct, but I think it might be. I was not going to try and go through the whole of the submission. I was just going to speak briefly to it, then I was going to talk a bit about the process of where I have gone through to get to where I am today, and then talk about some of the recommendations that I would love you people to maybe think about. Some of them might be a bit loony but see what you think, and I would love to finish up with a conclusion.

As I said, my name is John Frederiksen. I went to a Catholic school in Bendigo, St Vincent's College, as a boarder. My family were probably what you would call a middle class-type family, a pharmacist, and my mother was a chiropodist. In those days everyone aspired to send their kids to boarding school, but today I think people have maybe some different thoughts about it.

At the age of 14, I approached one of our staff. In the Vincentian order all of the teachers were ordained priests in those days, and there were about 9 or 11 of them at St Vincent's in Bendigo. They had a brother/sister college in Bathurst called St Stanislaus and they have still got that today, but St Vincent's has now gone. It has been amalgamated into the Bendigo Catholic college. At the age of 14 — I think I was in form 3 — I approached one of our home group teachers, I suppose they would be called today. I had been having lots of Catholic guilt about masturbation. I approached this guy and he said, 'Come and have a talk to me in the science lab'. So I went and had a talk to him in the science lab and it was there that he convinced me — —

I still feel like an idiot, but I dropped my pants and showed him how I masturbated. As a kid I was really concerned about it and obviously thought, 'This is maybe the way the Catholic Church operates, or this is part of confession or whatever'. As a kid I did not really know, but by about the age of 17 I had started to smell a rat and had become quite adamant against the church, much against my family's wishes. I finished up going off and doing an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic and then sold cars and then got married. I have been married for 45 years to Marilyn and I have two boys. All the time I have been thinking about what happened, why it happened and how it happened. When I was about the age of 30 I went back to school and got a scholarship to do a degree in social work and finished up running youth training centres, working in adult corrections and working in addiction centres. Over time I got to know a lot of paedophiles and know a lot about how they operate. I worked with the forensic unit extensively.

About 12 years ago, which would have been however old I was then, I heard Broken Rites talking on the radio one day. I want to give Broken Rites a terrific accolade because they have opened the doors for many people. I heard they were looking for this particular guy who had assaulted me, so I approached them and I said, 'Can you tell me anything more?'. They said, 'There is a guy in Sydney who is in dire straits'. His name is in here, but I will not say it because it is a public hearing. He is desperate and is trying to get this guy into court.

So for the last 12 years there has been myself and three others. Maybe one of those guys is here with us today. I have not had a look around the audience yet, but there are four of us who have been trying to get some legal justice. On 10 November two years ago the Supreme Court in New South Wales declared this guy was unfit to attend court. I would estimate that in those 10 or 12 years the Catholic Church spent maybe \$1 million to keep him out of court. In the end there were 40 witnesses lined up and it just did not happen. At the time I think probably the four of us all wanted to just get legal justice for what had happened to us, but when that happened we realised it was not going to happen. We have gone down other channels, including hiring a Canberra firm that specialises in this area, and we believe there may well be some compensation and resolution hearing. I know for me there is a date set for 16 April.

It has affected me from the point of view that I have obsessive feelings at times about what an idiot I have been; all the classic stuff you read in the literature. I was paranoid about my two boys getting involved in scouts and anything else where there may be some creepy males, but they seem to think they are okay.

From there what I wanted to do is go to — I have described what happened to me — deal with maybe what the problem is. The problem is huge, as you would be aware, but I think there are a number of things we can do as a society to try and stop it ever happening again. The first one is — and it is pretty common-sense stuff — that all sexual assault has got to be reported to police; it has got to be mandatory reporting. Working as a social scientist, working as a psych and a social worker, it has always been part of our mandate that that is what you did. I believe somehow we have got to make sure that schools and all other groups are involved in this and it is not swept under the carpet and all the rest of it.

I think there needs to be a national working-with-children register set up. At the moment — I think I have still got it — I have a working-with-children card which is Victorian. It is in other states, but these guys have been able to move around. Even with that card, this guy went from schools — I think he got kicked out of schools — and finished up working in parishes and he continued to do it in parishes as a tutor. That was his way of getting around it.

I think the Catholic Church has got to set up an independent compensation fund similar to the James Hardie-type situation. I think it has got to be independently administered. They just play games. About 18 months ago I went through the Catholic Church process. What is the process called?

The CHAIR — Towards Healing?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Towards Healing. They set up a mediation session with the head of this particular order, the Vincentian order, and they admitted, ‘Yes, this is terrible’, blah, blah, blah, and said, ‘It won’t happen again’, blah, blah, blah. They offered me \$5000, and I said, ‘That is just an insult’. What I said I wanted from them was \$2000 a year, which is \$100 000, and they laughed at that. But at least I got a note from them to say yes, they do agree that it happened and they are very sorry and there was an offer there of \$5000.

The Catholic Church hierarchy must be held accountable if breaches are proven. I think so often, even with some stuff that has been in the paper in the last few days, time and again there has been duck shoving. No-one seems to want to really take control or take ownership. The Pope has just resigned. There is lots of stuff. I believe probably one of the reasons he has left is that it is just too big a problem, but someone has got to take control of it and someone has got to become accountable. This is where maybe one of my loony ideas comes into play.

I think maybe a truth and justice commission, similar to what happened in South Africa, could be set up. There are lots of people who may be in the church and victims like myself who would be prepared to go through a process like that where someone does actually meet the perpetrator, does actually hear someone who is responsible. I know the South African truth and justice commission had something like about 7300 applications. It finished up that there were only about 5000 they accepted. The other 2000 or so were just too nasty; I am talking about murders and all sorts of stuff in that instance. I think in the end there were 498 that were settled, so it is not real big numbers. I do not think they are probably real big numbers here, but I think it is a model that could be done and could prove worthwhile. You tell me whether you think it is loony or not, but that is one of the things I think.

All religious orders should be split off from the state; there should not be a connection. I know that the Westminster system talks about division of powers and all the rest of it, but I think religious orders enjoying taxation benefits at all three levels of government should stop. It is just crazy. This is a group which is a blight on our society. I do not know how much it is costing, but one of things I am going to say at the end is that there has got to be a cost put on it. Whether it is tobacco, whether it is alcohol or whether it is any other blight, this is a similar blight. If a particular group of people are abusing that, they should not be having those privileges.

All state and non-government schools must be subject to the same level of public reporting and auditing of sexual assaults. This would apply to both government and truly independent schools that receive no funding. A lot of this stuff has happened in some other schools and there are other religions where it has happened where they are not totally independent. Somehow there has got to be an audit process or a control process. If you are dealing with kids — once again maybe it goes back to the working-with-children card — there has to be some

system so that independent people who are working with children under another guise cannot get away with it if it has happened, and it is still happening. As I said before, I think the cost to society of sexual assault must be calculated and published, similar to the costs of tobacco and alcohol.

In conclusion, I would just like to thank you guys. I would like to thank the government. I think it is a hell of a step the government has taken. I know the four of us have been doing all sorts of things. We have tried with this guy to get his Order of Australia removed by writing to the Governor-General. Every time there has been a chance to talk to the press to do something, we have actually done it to try and highlight what has happened and the unfairness of what has happened to us and to all these other people. It is a blight on our society, and I thank you for trying to fix it.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much indeed, John, for your presentation. You say that someone has to take control and be accountable. Is that somebody at a regional level, at a national level, at an international level? Who do you think that person is, or where should they be situated?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — I am not really up with the politics of Rome, but I think it has got to start there. I think it is such a huge problem worldwide that it has got to be absolute from the Pope down or a commission in Rome. Then there has got to be an ironclad — and I do not know how you do it — level of country, of state, of someone in charge of all this stuff. It is too easy to move people around. Every bishop in Australia has had the finger pointed at them of moving someone on, of trying to hide stuff, of sweeping it under the carpet, or ignoring, or stalling — all the classic terms. Like the stuff that has happened to us over the 10 or 11 years of trying to get this guy into court, it is just a Monty Python circus. It has just gone on and on, and the money that has been put into it is just amazing. So someone has got to really think about controlling it from there.

What is the cost to them? Why not bare your soul? You even hear almost an atheist using the word ‘soul’, but someone has really got to come clean and say, ‘Look, we are responsible. We take responsibility for it. We want to do something about it, and here are some concrete things’. This is where I think that maybe a truth and justice commission could be something that the Catholic Church could very well join in. I know a really good judge who maybe would be prepared to try and run something like that, but it needs that sort of level to really do it. Does that sound too loony to have a truth and justice commission?

The CHAIR — No, we are open to all ideas. Obviously we do not know a lot about the truth and justice commission, but you obviously do and other members might have questions relating to that specific area.

Mr FREDERIKSEN — A pleasure.

Mr WAKELING — John, thank you very much for your presentation today. Can I perhaps just take you back to the culture within the school? We have had a lot of evidence from people in your position that talk about the grooming behaviour of priests or people within the school. I would be interested if you could provide a bit of a further explanation about the grooming process, and, without obviously naming anyone, if there are there any other students that you are aware of who may have been affected by this particular perpetrator?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — The first part is I think the grooming process for this guy was he was a terrific friend to us all. He did things like, you know, he was always good to sit around. I am sure he was giving cigarettes to kids who wanted to smoke and was really like our godfather. I think he was our year coordinator, so that probably made him even more special. Probably one of the seediest things that he did is you could get him to talk about explicit sexuality stuff, even in class. We used to set him up. We would say things to him like, ‘What does fellatio mean?’, or something, so then he would go into this great big diatribe about it and try and make it really ultra-naughty. It was like it was overkill. It was just a bit odd. I can say this in retrospect. I would not have been able to say it as a kid. But as soon as I told my brother when I was about 17 or 18, he was in a year level about three years before me, and he said, ‘God, didn’t you know about that Sexy’ — they called him ‘Sexy Pig’ — because all the time he was on the make.

Then other stuff came up — things like he used to try and cuddle you and wrestle you. Now I am sure that when he was wrestling you there was an erection underneath the cassock. He used to wear one of those black cassocks, and the time when he was interviewing me I am sure that he was masturbating underneath his black cassock. He had a fag out in one hand, and he had his hand inside these big pockets. It sounds maybe a bit fanciful. All the way along he was doing this, but probably what even irks me more is that of the 9 to 11 priests in there, they must have known. This guy was always hanging around the change rooms. After school around

about 4 o'clock we all got dressed. We had to go down and put on our footy shorts and runners and do something, and there is a breezeway between the toilets and the showers where we actually got changed, so kids are running backwards and forwards half in the nude. And he was — you know, not 100 per cent of the time — but this guy was always somewhere to be found. It was reassuring in a sense, but, you know, when you think about how creepy it is.

Then the second bit is, yes, I do know of at least another three or four guys. The time that I went to him and spoke to him, what was happening is that I was masturbating with two or three other guys. I was concerned that I had been really, in terms of the Catholic Church, I told those guys after that I had been to see this guy. So I know that he approached one of those guys, and he bailed him up in a car — they were going to a doctor's — and got him to do exactly what he did to me. I do not know how many more there are out there, but it was definitely well known that I was a happy-go-lucky sort of a kid who just did my own thing. It was not until years later I realised I had been rolled.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you, John, for coming along. Just in relation to the efforts you went to bring your perpetrator to court, you said recently the church has now admitted it, or given you a letter; have they give you a formal letter admitting the offence took place?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Yes, I have got it here.

Mr O'BRIEN — Can you take us through that?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — When I went through Towards Healing — which is another thing that smells as well — the people who worked with me in Towards Healing were ex-religious order guys; they had been investigated. At the time I shook my head, but I went through it anyway. It just seemed really crazy that here is the lolly-shop keeper looking after the lolly shop and just putting their own lolly manufacturers in there as well. Anyway that was one process, but at the end of it they organised for me to meet with the head of this St Vincent's order from Bathurst. He came down here and I met with him. So what they did is they have got what is called a facilitation outcome report, but it is done without prejudice and all the rest of it. So it is a legal document in a sense, but they said to me — and my wife was there — unless I accept the \$5000, it is not worth the paper it is written on, I dare say.

Mr O'BRIEN — It says 'Without prejudice', does it? And I know you have got ongoing civil things, although we are protected by privilege here. But I just want to know what processes they have gone through to admit what has happened.

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Yes, and he was — but the sad part about it was about half an hour before I went in, this guy apparently had just escaped himself. He was charged and convicted. I do not know if you know about it, but at the St Stanislaus in Bathurst there has been a task force of, I think, five detectives who have been working against the Vincentian order trying to get 12 of them into court. This guy that came down, he was one of the ones that they did finally get into court, but the young guy that did it mucked up the dates or something. I do not know, but the guy got off because he proved he was in Rome or somewhere at the time and was not around.

I am pretty up-front. I put it right on this guy, and I said, 'Look I even hear that you've had the finger pointed at you'. He just went to water and sort of half tried to hide under the table. It is the insidious nature of the whole thing. It is a mob of guys who are just — it is like a club of paedophiles who are just, in my rude words — bloody hopeless.

Mr O'BRIEN — I appreciate that. I just want to direct you to what they have done to admit to your case, and then I am going to ask what you would have liked them to have done. So can you just tell us what they have said in that letter?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — What I said?

Mr O'BRIEN — No, what they have said about the extent to which the abuse has been admitted.

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Father Blah Blah

... said that he was prepared to accept 'without reservation' the complaint as described. Furthermore ... issued an apology for the behaviour of ... when John Frederiksen was a student at St Vincent's.

John said that he wanted compensation and that such an amount should be \$2000 per year for the 50 years since the abuse. Therefore, John requested the amount of \$100 000.

... said that he could not agree to provide such an offer ... offered \$5000 as full — —

Mr O'BRIEN — That is fine. In terms of understanding what you would like them to have done, instead of this 11-year process — for example, before your truth and justice commission, for argument's sake, what sort of process do you recommend the church should do in claims like yours in terms of full and frank admission at the earliest opportunity, and what would you be seeking from this commission if the church is not prepared to do it?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — I would not have been originally seeking compensation. What I wanted to see was justice. I wanted to see a guarantee that this is not going to happen again. But when I realised the stalling process and the rest of it, it has just made me and my other fellow victims nastier and nastier. We are trying to get whatever we can out of the church. If that is what it means, if they cannot be fair, open and honest, and do stuff. I did not want a razoo, but I sure as hell do now.

Mr O'BRIEN — But what would you be seeking from that commission in terms of a type of statement? Do you want a full admission?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — I want a full admission. I also said to the head of the church, 'Why are you still protecting this guy?'. Not only did they give him a stipend, they have got him in accommodation. They have got him tucked away safely. I think the stuff about how ill he is, is probably 80 per cent bullshit. I said, 'If this was private enterprise or if it was me running a company' — and I am involved in company stuff now — 'the person would have been chopped off at the knees 20 years ago, but you're still hanging on to him. You have moved him around, you have done all this'. He replied in response, and said, 'Oh, but he's one of us, he's an old man now and he cannot do any harm'. I just said, 'Well, I would want to see you remove him totally off your books'. I want to hear an honest admission. I do not want to be snow jobbed. I want you to tell me the extent of what has happened with this guy. This has what has happened with me, but how many others has it happened to and are you prepared to get those guys in and do the right thing by them as well? Some of the guys in our group — the four of us — are really in dire straits, psychologically and mentally. I am reasonably okay, but others have had extreme difficulty over their lives. I have been lucky enough to get on and survive.

The truth and justice commission dealt with some terrible things that happened in South Africa: murders and all sorts of stuff. People, when they heard an apology, when they heard, 'Yes, this happened', they melted. There is a famous clause that actuaries have come up with for doctors. They say that if a doctor in a surgery will give you 1 minute and 46 seconds worth of eye contact when you come in and do the right thing by you in that way, you will never sue that doctor. This is whether the doctor finishes up chopping off your left arm when you were supposed to get your right arm done. So it is common decency; it is just giving someone the time of day to say, 'Look, we are dreadfully sorry. This guy sort of did it but it was with this proviso of, 'Here is a crumb' and it was like, 'Go away'. Then probably the biggest insult on top of that was that Towards Healing just said, 'We can do no more', and that was the end of it.

Ms HALFPENNY — Just as an aside, when you said that you went to Towards Healing and you said that you deserved \$100 000 you said that whoever it was laughed. They really did laugh, did they?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — No, I have probably been exaggerating there, it was more of a sneer or a snigger. Maybe 'scoff' is a good word.

Ms HALFPENNY — Okay. As a social worker and also your experience and your dealings with other people who were children abused by this Father Hugh Murray, do you think that the church, in terms of Towards Healing, also provides any reasonable health care or counselling support? Have you seen that as being fulfilled enough?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Not really. I think, as I said before, one of the processes of using ex-religious order people to do it is just crazy. It is just ridiculous. It is like the Broederbund in South Africa. It is like a club that has got these crazy people running it and working in it, and I do not think that should be. It should be

independent, it should be away from them, and it is just not, and the teeth, in the end when they said, after I went through this process, 'We can do no more for you'.

Ms HALFPENNY — Thank you.

Mrs COOTE — John, thank you very much indeed. Could I just ask about the differential in that \$5000 that they offered you? Was there any hint there that Towards Healing said, 'Well, because this has happened to you we will give you this amount' or 'If this had happened to you we would have given you more' or was there a list equated with an amount? Was there any suggestion or feeling that you had of that?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — This facilitator had rung me two days before and said, 'Look, your case is not real high up there'. I said, 'I do not give a damn. This is what I'm looking for and this is what I'll be asking for'. He had not informed the head of the church that that was what I was looking for, and I think he was pretty flabbergasted that I said '\$100 000'. But the facilitator that organised the hearing through Towards Healing did indicate that there were levels: that for sexual penetration there was 'blah blah blah'. It is pretty sick, but there is a market for 'What can't we do for you today?' and 'Here's how much money we don't want to give you'.

Mrs COOTE — So your real understanding, just to clarify, is that you understood that there was a table or a chart that equated with various aspects of child abuse, specific ones?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — That is what he told me, but I also know; I am not dumb; I do not take anyone's word for anything. I did a bit of searching round and I know that they have paid \$400 000 and \$500 000 to people, which is not being declared. That is why I say in my 10 points that that has got to become clear. Stuff about buying people — I hope I read that bit out. They should not be having secret deals under the carpet. I know that in law there are settlements outside court and they are often done with secrecy. Maybe I am being Pollyanna, but in these cases I would love to see that stuff stopped. It is just ridiculous.

Mr McGUIRE — Just quickly, John, and thank you very much for your testimony: what success or feedback have you had on the Order of Australia issue?

Mr FREDERIKSEN — We have got one letter back. I might have two letters back saying that the G-G is looking into it. We have kept the pressure on. I even wrote to Julia Gillard the other night, when the feds said they are going to do a similar commission to you guys, and I mentioned it again. I think they have said either to me or to one of the others they are still looking into it. What we are trying to do is every time there is a public forum that we can actually get the issue raised. That is what we are trying to do. I just think that it is ridiculous that this guy would be given an order. I think she does as well but does know what to do about it. But we keep ringing and writing.

Mr McGUIRE — That is just recently too: the current Governor-General.

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Yes, the recent one.

The CHAIR — John, thank you very much. On behalf the committee, we do appreciate your time and your evidence this afternoon. Thank you again.

Mr FREDERIKSEN — Thank you. It is a great job you are doing.

Witness withdrew.