

# TRANSCRIPT

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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

Ballarat — 28 February 2013

#### Members

Mrs A. Coote

Ms G. Crozier

Ms B. Halfpenny

Mr F. McGuire

Mr D. O'Brien

Mr N. Wakeling

Chair: Ms G. Crozier

Deputy Chair: Mr F. McGuire

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Dr J. Bush

Research Officer: Ms V. Finn

#### Witnesses

Mr M. Crowe, and

Mrs C. Crowe.

**The CHAIR** — On behalf of the committee, I welcome Mrs Carol Crowe and Mr Michael Crowe. All evidence taken by the 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. Witnesses may be asked to return at a later date to give further evidence. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript. Please note that these proceedings are not being broadcast. Following your presentation this afternoon, committee members will ask questions relating both to your submission and to the evidence you provide to us now. I ask you to commence, and please take your time.

**Mr CROWE** — Thank you, Chair and committee members, for providing the opportunity for Carol and me to make a submission to the inquiry and speak at the hearing today. I am a registered teacher in the state of Victoria. I was employed at a Catholic primary school [**In accordance with the procedures observed by Parliamentary Committees when dealing with witnesses, as stated in the *Guidelines for the Rights and Responsibilities of Witnesses*, a section has been expunged from this place in the transcript – future reference to ‘text expunged’**] from January 2005 to January 2012 in an ongoing capacity. [TE]<sup>1</sup>. I was a religious education coordinator at the school.

In 2011 I was forced — blackmailed — into signing a separation agreement with the employer priest. This was a direct result of witnessing the then parish priest [TE] interfering with a child and grooming children at the school. This happened in an out-of-the-way office that the priest insisted on using to conduct one-on-one private meetings with young children behind a closed door and totally out of view, despite my objections. This priest was insistent on, even obsessed about, hearing child confessions and being invited by teachers in the classrooms to talk to children. I am prepared to provide more details to the inquiry regarding allegations against this priest in a confidential manner, if you wish.

This priest is a paedophile and a bully. I believe the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne are fully aware that he is a paedophile and a bully. Even so, the diocese of Ballarat still employs this priest and has appointed him to a parish [TE]. He oversees the Catholic primary school there. He is the employer of teachers and has unquestioned access to primary-age children. This priest recently went on a school camp for five days with a primary school group from the school.

The priest has a history of mental illness and suffers depression. His own letter to the [TE] parish outlines his mental illness, and I have a copy of it here. I do not think it has been tabled. He has had lengthy six-month absences from the parish to seek help for his mental illness. I do not know whether that is what they are for in reality.

The structure and governance of Catholic schools in Victoria is a major issue. The committee needs to understand that the CEOs and CECV do not act as the employers of Catholic teachers in the state of Victoria. The individual clergy members — that is, parish priest or administrators — are the employers. This leaves Catholic teachers extremely vulnerable in relation to the clergy and hinders mandatory reporting or a teacher raising any issues surrounding clergy behaviour. I have tabled a Fair Work Australia order here because it gives a full list of the current employers as priests separately.

**Mrs CROWE** — It demonstrates the point that they are in fact the employers.

**Mr CROWE** — Yes, it gives that evidence. This is a very different situation to employment of teachers in the state system. I recommend the inquiry compel Catholic Education to reform and have one body to act as the employer of all Catholic teachers in the state of Victoria. That would put it more in line with what happens in other parts of Australia. This would help to prevent the clergy interfering with teacher mandatory reporting or whistleblowing. Too much currently relies on the personality of the employer priest involved, which impacts on the safety of their employees.

I was yelled at and verbally assaulted by this priest in a very agitated state. A respected teacher and parishioner wrote a letter that exposes this priest’s aggressive behaviour and corruption of the school leadership group. That is no. 2, and I highlighted a section there that supports this. This letter details how when the priest does not get his way he just yells and abuses people. He abuses the power of his position as parish priest frequently and with impunity as the Catholic leadership and the bishop of Ballarat do not hold him to account. They fully support

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<sup>1</sup> Text Expunged.

their abusive clergy, no matter what wrong they do or harm they cause. Even this priest's own parish secretary was forced to react to his bullying behaviour and had a solicitor write a letter warning him to stop bullying her.

When this priest was removed [TE]<sup>2</sup> in August 2011, he went to Ireland for three months. Who does he associate with whilst in Ireland? [TE]. He was then appointed to his new parish at the normal cycle of priest movement time. This was designed to not arouse suspicion as to why a priest would be moved outside of the normal priest movement times. No doubt his new parish has no idea of his history. Priest movement is a major issue. Catholic authorities should have to provide full historical documentation of each clergy member's movements and appointment locations, including overseas localities, to state authorities. This would help police and victims groups track the movements of suspect clergy.

From the time I interrupted this priest [TE] I was persecuted, harassed, silenced, bullied and victimised by him, his school leadership group, his superiors and the Catholic education system. Nepotism was a huge problem. The principal, vice principal and literacy coordinator were all closely related. As a group they colluded to destroy my teaching career and deliberately put at risk the safety of my three children who, at the time, attended the school. This group has repeatedly made false and vexatious claims against me.

I recommend the inquiry and upcoming royal commission investigate corruption at the [TE] Catholic school as this would provide a current example of the strategies the church uses to silence whistleblowers and cover up abuse.

An act of reprisal was raising vexatious allegations of misconduct against me. This was aimed at destroying my credibility and kept me busy defending myself. The priest alleges that I called his close personal friend, [TE], who was then recently deceased, a paedophile. This allegation letter, which is appendix 3, was given to me by a CEO facilitator, I guess, and this is one of the four allegations.

In the staff room where a number of staff were present that you, in an agitated state, made a number of statements about [TE] whose funeral occurs today at 2.30 p.m. Those statements included that the deceased person was a paedophile and it was a disgrace that he was connected to the school. Unbeknown to you, the partner of [TE] was on the phone to —

a teacher. That is not the case:

[TE] was the chairperson of the parish education board and a number of staff and parents are grieving his loss. [TE] was obviously unwell and was found to have committed suicide.

He then goes on to say, or write, in his allegation letter:

Given the seriousness of these allegations and the unethical and unprofessional nature of the alleged incidents, I am required to investigate these matters.

I therefore require a written explanation from you as to these allegations. The explanation is to be provided to me within 48 hours of you receiving this letter. During the next 48 hours you are directed that you are not to have any contact with any employee of the school. Failure to comply with the directions contained in this letter will be seen to be serious misconduct.

The employees of the school would provide the evidence that these allegations were vexatious and false.

Written by a current clergy member, this was fully supported by the Ballarat diocese. This highlights that the current culture in Catholic education prevents teachers from raising suspicion in regard to child sexual assault allegations at their schools. Secrecy and cover-up are the norm, and to go against this is career ending in Catholic education. No wonder church spokespeople claim clergy abuse is an historical problem. Catholic authorities have put in place calculated strategic steps to prevent current allegations against the clergy ever seeing the light of day.

The then director of Catholic Education at the Ballarat diocese colluded with the then Bishop of Ballarat, and they both refused to listen to my complaints about their priest or those made by my wife, Carol. I was informed by CEO Ballarat staff that it was an educational matter. Even though my complaint was about a priest appointed by the Bishop, I was told not to contact the Bishop by CEO staff. So who do you complain to?

My wife, Carol, wrote to the director of Catholic Education for the Ballarat diocese expressing her concern that my safety was at risk at work. He simply dismissed her concerns and suggested she stop complaining as she

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<sup>2</sup> Text Expunged.

was not an employee. This is despite the fact she was an active parent in the community and we had three children at the school. I recommend that this inquiry and the upcoming royal commission investigate Catholic education bodies and their directors as to their aiding and abetting in protecting clergy from allegations of child abuse.

Whilst the parish priest [TE]<sup>3</sup>, the priest appointed [TE] as chairperson of the school board and fully supported [TE], a man who he described as a very close personal friend of his. [TE].

As a teacher at the school, I witnessed [TE] roam freely around the school, unescorted, on numerous occasions. It is my understanding that [TE] committed suicide very soon after, within 24 hours, being charged on summons by Victoria Police of 14 counts of sexual assault of a minor. These charges related to a period between 1999 and 2003. I have also been informed by a source I trust that [TE] left a suicide note admitting guilt.

The priest volunteered to conduct his funeral at a parish 90 kilometres away [TE], and the primary school leadership displayed their unquestioning and ongoing support [TE] by attending his funeral. How does this provide victim support or put abuse victims at the forefront of the Catholic bodies concerned? The school leadership's long association and continued full support [TE] has placed many students at risk, including our own three children. This situation has been completely covered up by Catholic education and the school. They completely ignored concerns and simply deny the possibility of child victims. The topic is taboo in Catholic education, and this is a huge part of the problematic culture of silence and cover-up in Catholic education in this state presently.

It is also my understanding [TE] had previously been employed by a Catholic school [TE] during the 80s and had been a dorm master. He had left this school under suspicion of paedophile activity. It is alleged that he supplied alcohol and pornography to boys under his care. It is not credible that Catholic education bodies and the [TE] school leadership were not aware of allegations and suspicions [TE]. It is my belief that the priest was well aware of [TE] time at the boarding school [TE]. [TE] came under public scrutiny and police suspicion at least 18 months before his suicide. Apparently [TE] was also sacked by his employer on the grounds of theft. All this time the priest protected [TE], maintaining that he was a good man and did all he could to prevent any allegations against [TE] becoming known in the school and local community.

I believe the priest was also trying to protect himself, because he had a close personal ongoing association [TE] that continued after [TE] left [TE] and up until his suicide. I think that this relationship extended to cooperation in targeting children. The priest held a secretive, unscheduled meeting with the school staff — not in the staffroom, but tucked away in a science lab. When the news [TE] surfaced, he ordered all staff not to talk about the situation. We were to direct anybody discussing the issue to him or his appointed principal. He said that we would hear a bunch of lies about a very good man and close personal friend of his. We were not to believe any of this and we were to say nothing. If we did say anything, we were guilty of spreading vicious, hurtful rumours and this would be considered misconduct. He suggested we pray for this good man as he was ill. Some teachers left very confused, as the priest did not name the man or explain any allegations. The priest never once mentioned victims or showed any concern at all for the possibility that there could be child victims [TE] currently at the school. This was despite [TE] being on the school board or chairman of the school board for at least seven years. The school remains supportive [TE] and shows no concern that students could be victims of his.

I was sickened by this meeting and felt that as a teacher I was being ordered by the priest to collude and cover up for a paedophile. Other former staff members will support this account of the meeting called by the priest. I say 'former staff', as I know of no current staff in Catholic education who will break the secretive culture for fear of reprisal. In fact many current staff will lie and collude together to deny any allegations against the priest, [TE] and the school leadership. I recommend that this inquiry look into [TE] and his history, as there could be possible victims of his [TE] and any other school or group he was associated with who feel threatened and silenced by the Catholic cover-up culture. Unfortunately [TE] suicide prevents his known victims having their day in court and being able to tell their story and receive some justice.

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<sup>3</sup> Text Expunged.

Why did [TE]<sup>4</sup> remain chairperson of [TE] Catholic School board for so long? Why did the school leadership or the Catholic Education Office in Ballarat not act to immediately remove [TE] when police became involved and allegations surfaced? This very recent and deliberate cover-up knowingly placed students at great risk. The continued support [TE] makes a mockery of claims by Catholic authorities that this is an historical problem and that they now put victims first. What child victim or parent is going to come forward with any allegation in a primary school where a suspected paedophile is fully supported and protected by the parish priest and principal?

I was cleared and found innocent by the Melbourne Catholic investigator of the first round of fabricated allegations that the priest created against me with his principal, so then he simply colluded with his principal and fabricated his own fresh allegations that he was going to judge me on. This situation makes a mockery of any claims by Catholic authorities that their investigations are impartial, fair and meet the principles of natural justice. Catholic authorities did not act to take away any power or right the priest had to investigate me, even though he was at the centre of my bullying and paedophilia complaints. Rather, they forwarded my evidence against the priest back to him. The CEO was prepared to allow the ridiculous and corrupt situation of having a priest investigate himself.

Internal Catholic investigations into Catholic teachers' conduct in Victoria should be reviewed. Corruption abounds and there are teachers who have been discredited and silenced by this abuse of power. I recommend the inquiry insist that the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) reopen all investigations conducted by Catholic education. The inquiry and upcoming royal commission should look into any memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Catholic education bodies in this state with the CEOs, the CECV and the VIT. These agreements need to be made public documents in the interests of openness, accountability and transparency. The inquiry should contrast the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigation processes and procedures into complaints made against teachers in the state system with processes and procedures used by Catholic Education investigations.

Children are put at risk in Catholic education because investigations are corrupted by the clergy. The outcomes of Catholic investigations have been hidden from the VIT and the public by Catholic education bodies. There may be many corrupted investigations resulting in teacher resignations that have not been reported to the VIT or police. The VIT makes the claim to be the regulator of the teaching profession in the state of Victoria. The validity of this claim is questionable, considering that the Catholic clergy are the employers of teachers in Catholic education and are not answerable to the VIT in any form. Catholic Education in Melbourne is said to be the sixth largest education system in Australia. I suspect the current MOU between Catholic Education and the VIT assists the clergy to cover up and hide child sexual abuse, bullying and corrupt behaviour in Catholic schools.

There are no truly independent investigations conducted in the Catholic system, only Catholic internal investigations. The VIT will only investigate complaints made against teachers, not clergy, and any complaint against Catholic teachers is referred back to Catholic Education to investigate. Even though there have been two internal Catholic investigations into bullying and corrupt staff behaviour at the [TE] Catholic school in the last 18 months, the VIT has no involvement with and has made no investigation of this school. The VIT is probably totally unaware of the internal Catholic Education investigations at this school. This is despite the school having employed unregistered teachers, and claims of physical and verbal assault on staff by leadership being raised with Catholic investigators.

The VIT, if serious about regulating the teaching profession in the state of Victoria, should immediately review and remove any MOU with Catholic bodies. This would be in line with Victoria Police, which has stepped away from any agreements it has had with Catholic bodies. The Victorian police clearly have no faith in the validity, openness and fairness of Catholic investigation processes such as the Melbourne Response and Towards Healing. In fact they suspect criminal behaviour is being covered up by these processes. How is it possible that the VIT knowingly keeps understandings and agreements with Catholic Education bodies, enabling them to conduct their own questionable, corrupt investigations when the Victorian police have made such concerns public? The fact that the same Catholic investigator who was involved with Melbourne Response and Towards Healing cases also investigates teachers in Catholic schools should be ringing alarm bells with the VIT and this inquiry.

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<sup>4</sup> Text Expunged.

The VIT, as a statutory body set up by the Victorian Parliament, has a conflict of interest if it enters into private agreements with any Catholic education body in Victoria. I was stood down from work on completely false and fabricated allegations on three separate occasions. One stand-down period was for six months. The CEOB's and CEOM's investigations made a mockery of due process. At no stage was I asked my version of events before formal allegations were made. What happened to natural justice? I was not informed of the process of the investigation they placed me under. I was given 48 hours to respond in writing to their fabricated allegations as failure to do so is serious misconduct. Catholic Education gives you no details as to how long it will stand you down for; it denies you your human rights. You are not allowed to contact witnesses who support you or who give evidence that disproves their bizarre and false allegations. Catholic Education's appointed internal investigators were hostile and simply refused to make contact or take statements from witnesses who would provide evidence that disproved the version of events and outcomes they wanted.

One Catholic investigator, Ms K, whose actual name has popped up in a few submissions to your inquiry, claimed to be a whistleblower protection officer. It is a clear conflict of interest that an investigator is also claiming to be the whistleblower protector. She provided absolutely no protection even though I informed her on numerous occasions during the three lengthy meetings I had with her that the priest in the school was bullying and illegally trying to get rid of me. I recommend that the inquiry gain access to all files held by the Catholic investigator, Ms K. I recommend the inquiry review Catholic Education's claim that it provides whistleblower protection. The inquiry may wish for Catholic Education and Ms K to provide evidence of any whistleblower protection they have ever provided to a teacher.

I believe Catholic Education corrupted the intent of the whistleblower legislation and used it as another method to gain information to protect clergy from any allegations raised against them. Prior to his appointment [TE]<sup>5</sup>, the priest was the overseer of the Catholic primary school [TE]. In 2003, while he was at [TE], a child was killed at the school, fatally punched in the head by another student. The committee should be extremely concerned about the track record of this priest as an employer of teachers and overseer of schools in this state. A former teacher at the [TE] Catholic school has shared how the priest would call children over to the presbytery for rewards, and this often involved the altar boys. This was unsupervised by school staff or other adults. How is it appropriate that this priest with his track record and mental illness remains the overseer of a primary school in this state? I recommend the inquiry compel Catholic authorities to hand over all documents they hold pertaining to this priest.

I have provided some of the detail of the investigation cover-up I experienced to highlight to the community that Catholic bodies have a strategic plan to deal with whistleblowers raising issues or complaints about the clergy or school leadership. It is designed to get rid of someone who is speaking out. Catholic Education Melbourne details on its website two different approaches to the handling of complaints. It also details its whistleblower protection policy, which is appendix no. 5.

If the complaint is against a teacher, a whole different approach is taken than a complaint made against clergy or religious. There is absolutely no support provided to a whistleblower within Catholic Education, despite their claims to the contrary. There is no external body that will assist a Catholic teacher expressing concerns about the clergy or school leadership. Catholic authorities were repeatedly informed that my family and I had received no care or support during our ordeal. No consideration for my wife or our three children was ever provided. The school paid for a few counselling sessions for me, but I believe that was all about addressing the OH&S legal requirements. Catholic Education also tried to further victimise me by claiming my counselling was for personal issues rather than work related. The priest employer stopped this support as soon as he could.

My wife and I consider ourselves and our children as secondary victims, to some extent, of clergy abuse. We all feel betrayed by the Catholic hypocrites, who suggest they act as Christians, leading Catholic Education. There is nothing Christian in their planned and calculated attempts to silence and discredit me. Their actions to victimise me have impacted greatly on our lives. Denial and cover-up of clergy abuse is cemented in the culture of Catholic schools. This is not an historical issue but a current huge problem that Catholic Education is doing nothing to change. Your inquiry and the royal commission must force change, as Catholic bodies will not self-regulate. They will just deny, minimise and continue the PR spin that clergy abuse is historical. I know that is a lie, as I witnessed it myself in 2010 when I taught in the Catholic system. I have no doubt that it is ongoing today. Their actions to hide this issue are strategic, legalistic and well-planned.

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<sup>5</sup> Text Expunged.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the many surviving victims of clergy and religious abuse. I am very sorry for ever being part of the Catholic Church, an organisation that I regard as corrupt from the top down and that has done so much to ignore, discredit and cause further harm to clergy abuse victims. I know the courage and commitment required in their attempts to seek justice from and to expose the Catholic Church for the horrendous crimes and cover-ups of sexual abuse by their clergy.

In summary — and before I hand over to Carol — there needs to be a complete review of the VIT and its relationship with Catholic Education. All existing memoranda of understanding the VIT holds should be made public in the interests of accountability, transparency and openness. Parliament should legislate so that the Catholic Church is compelled to create one agency that acts as the employer of Catholic teachers in Victoria. The responsibility for Catholic schools in Victoria should be placed beyond the realm of the clergy. They cannot be trusted, and the current situation is unsafe. Catholic education authorities should no longer be legally allowed to conduct internal investigations into allegations against teachers or staff in the Catholic system; this role should be undertaken by the VIT. An allegation raised by parents or teachers re child abuse should be referred to and investigated by the police. The Catholic school [TE]<sup>6</sup> should be investigated by the VIT or by the upcoming royal commission. All clergy in Victoria must be compelled to provide the Victorian police with the full, detailed history of all their appointments and locations. The priest at the centre of my complaint should be investigated by police or appropriate authorities. Any separation agreement or deed entered into by individuals with the Catholic Church or its agents should be investigated, reviewed and rescinded by the upcoming royal commission. The Catholic Church should be made to formally rescind any confidentiality contracts it has with former employees. Bullying and harassment laws need to be significantly strengthened in Victoria so that people can make disclosures without fear of retribution. Thanks, Madam Chair, and I will hand over to Carol.

**Mrs CROWE** — Three years ago I would have described myself as a practising Catholic. I enjoyed being part of the parish and was heavily involved with school in a voluntary capacity. I enjoyed the sense of community, and it was an important part of my life. I now feel that for at least 40 years of my life I was deceived and feel that I was stupid and naive. Through this experience of the last couple of years I have discovered that a number of priests I had significant contact with as a child — —

Excuse me. I don't want to come across as a blithering idiot, because I am not.

**The CHAIR** — Just take your time.

**Mrs CROWE** — I have discovered that a number of priests I had significant contact with as a child have either been charged with or confessed to child sexual abuse. This has compounded my sense of grief and disgust about what has happened to us in recent times. The last three years have been difficult ones for my family. We are fortunate that we have not personally suffered sexual abuse, and I am immensely grateful for this, as I know this has been more good luck than good management. I consider that we are very fortunate, as I cannot comprehend the pain of those so abused.

Our experience has been bad enough. We have been maligned, harassed and isolated by the school and church hierarchy. My children and I have received no support — apart from some individuals, to whom I am immensely grateful — or any counselling. We have had to sell our house — its proximity to the school made it impossible for us to stay there — and have moved twice, with our youngest children at their third school since 2010, and our eldest daughter, her fourth. This has had an unsettling effect on our family, and a very bad effect on our finances as well.

My written submission gives a brief storyline of our ordeal. But it would take me hours, and many pages, to tell our full story. The key points are: in February 2010 suspicions were raised that the then chairman of the school board was involved in abuse at [TE] in the late 1980s. The parish priest vigorously defended this man, stating he was a close personal friend and a good man, and that they were all terrible lies. In May 2010 Michael witnessed the then parish priest inappropriately touching a child after arranging for reconciliation to be done in a closed room, one on one. The set-up was at the priest's insistence, and against advice.

Michael was stood down towards the end of 2010 for supporting a colleague who had not had a contract renewed. He was physically assaulted by the vice-principal on this occasion. Michael was stood down nine days

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<sup>6</sup> Text Expunged.

into the 2011 year for restraining a child who was punching another child in the head. This was referred to investigation. By three weeks later, Michael had been cleared of misconduct and was cleared to go back to work by a CEOM investigator. This was never communicated in the community, and no attempt was made to restore any damage to his reputation. We lived in a small town, and this had serious ramifications for us.

Through concern that Michael was being targeted, we detailed some of the corruption and unethical behaviour at the school, including the close relationship of the priest to a man under suspicion of paedophile offences. This was over two meetings with the CEOM investigator. She had identified herself as the whistleblower protection officer. We did not detail what Michael had witnessed, as we — wisely, in hindsight — did not yet trust the investigator enough. We had concerns that it would be buried if we told.

On 9 March 2011 I called the bishop's office to make an appointment to meet him. He refused to meet, listen or discuss anything, hanging up curtly after telling me he was aware of the situation, there was nothing further I could tell him, and we should just leave it at that. On 15 March 2011 we had a meeting with the CEO Ballarat director. Michael was offered two other jobs, both requiring us to relocate our family, but with no guarantee they would continue past the end of the year. They were supernumerary positions and only funded to the end of the year. Moving Michael would not address the problems at the school.

On 24 June 2011 a CEO Ballarat investigator released her report into bullying at the school. Essentially she found that 13 per cent felt that there was bullying, 13 per cent felt there was an undercurrent of bullying, but that was not significant, as instances were low level. She completely ignored the physical assault by the vice-principal, and did not interview any witnesses who were not current staff. Thursday, 7 July 2011: the former school board chairman, charged with 14 counts of indecent assault against a minor pertaining to 1999 and 2003; committed suicide within 24 hours, thus denying victims any possibility of justice. Monday, 18 July: Michael returned to work. He had been off work from that first allegation — all of that time, even though he had been cleared — six months in total, which is very difficult for a teacher to do. In a small community people ask questions — 'Why is he not back at work?', 'What has he done?'

He was at work for 45 minutes prior to scheduled meetings. By lunchtime Michael was given another stand-down letter — you have a copy of that because Michael included that — alleging a further four things he was said to have done in 45 minutes that morning; a busy boy. He was given until Wednesday to respond and was directed that to contact colleagues would be deemed serious misconduct despite the fact that colleagues were the witnesses.

Michael was then given until Friday to agree to sign a separation agreement that suggested he had resigned voluntarily and without coercion. He was told that if he did not sign it the priest would find him guilty of misconduct and report the matter to the VIT for them to impose a penalty. If he signed, magically the matters would disappear.

Why did this happen? I think one of the main points I would like to make about that is the point that Michael said that in Victoria priests are the employers and ultimate authority in Catholic schools. They are all considered to be separate work sites. It is not one system, they are all an individual separate work site. Only Victoria and Lismore diocese in New South Wales have this dangerous and unsound arrangement. If the priest is incompetent, of unsound mind, a psychopath or a paedophile, or in some cases perhaps all of these, there is no-one else you can go to. There is no other authority higher than him because the bishop will say it is his school, or perhaps not listen to you, like in my case.

When you couple that with the dysfunctional, corrupt, nepotistic, bullying leadership, a truly evil empire can be built. No consultation, autocratic leadership, isolating and intimidating staff, showing favouritism, turning a blind eye to things that are unethical, and one of the examples of unethical behaviour that I was dreadfully concerned about was the vice-principal commencing a relationship with a parent at the school. As a nurse, if I were to commence a relationship with the parent of a patient of mine that would be considered to be heinously unethical, and yet this was apparently okay.

One of the things that concerned me is that it should not be the case that we wait for child abuse to occur and be reported by the child because as we know it takes an average of 25 years. If someone is exhibiting behaviours that are indicative of risk such as arranging meetings with children in closed rooms, the authorities should be

looking at that as to why this is happening. If they are breaching their own code of conduct over and over it should loudly ring alarm bells and the benefit of the doubt should always favour the protection of children.

I do not really have any more to add to it than that. I hope that helps.

**The CHAIR** — It does, thank you very much indeed. Thank you both for your submission and your presentation to us this afternoon.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Thank you for coming and I want to ask some questions about the actual concerns you had and the allegations about the inappropriate behaviour of the priest towards children. I ask you that because we have heard of some terrible treatment of teachers and the staff within the education system who have tried to report these sorts of things, but this was in 2010-11, so only a year or two ago.

Can you explain, for example, Ms K from the Catholic Education Office, did you advise her of the concerns you had with the priest?

**Mr CROWE** — I advised her of concerns I had with him but I was not going to share with her what I had seen, I reported that to the police. I had no trust or faith in her as an investigator. I felt she was hostile. Even though she found me — not guilty — but not to have committed any misconduct, her report of the incident painted me to be a villain because she was all about placating the parents of the child I had to restrain. I still felt abused by her process, even though I was not referred on to the VIT.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — At one stage you talk about how teachers are told about, for example, mandatory reporting, but there is nowhere to go. How are you advised of what you need to do? Or is there any detailed information provided, particularly in light of the fact that in 2010-11 there were a number of proven allegations of abuse within the Catholic school system?

**Mr CROWE** — I have had after-school professional development, so probably for the year you might have a half-hour session or over maybe a couple of years you might get a half-hour session, and it would talk about mandatory reporting, but it would always be in the Catholic system with the proviso, 'You should come and talk to the principal or senior staff or the leadership group'. You would not just go out as a teacher in a school and go, 'I am going to report this to DHS or to the police'. You just would not do that in Catholic Ed.

You would be advised to go and see the school principal. As soon as you tell anything to the school principal, that is going to be passed on to the priest, especially the priest in our situation who was either in the school daily or every second day.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Thank you.

**Mrs COOTE** — Thank you, Michael and Carol, very much indeed. That was a great deal of really current information which is extremely important to our inquiry, so thank you both very much.

I would like to tease out a bit about your written submission, when you talked about going to the police, because I am very keen to hear what their reaction was and what you said to them, and what was their reaction after you had been to them, given that you are in a small town?

**Mr CROWE** — For one, I have not gone into the police station. I have done it via the phone. I have had a lengthy phone discussion, I would say 90 minutes, with the police, with someone in a SOCIT unit [TE].<sup>7</sup>

I had a list of children that I was concerned about, that I said I would be prepared to provide, and I made attempts to phone back the detective. He was on leave and from that nothing eventuated. I never got back from the police. I never received another call back or anything like that.

**Mrs COOTE** — Could you tell me exactly when this was?

**Mrs CROWE** — It would have been November 2011.

**Mr CROWE** — November 2011.

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<sup>7</sup> Text Expunged.

**Mrs COOTE** — And did you give him the list of the children?

**Mr CROWE** — No, but I have got it here.

**Mrs CROWE** — You were willing to provide it.

**Mr CROWE** — I was willing to provide it.

**Mrs COOTE** — I think that be very helpful if you would be prepared to share that with us.

**Mr CROWE** — You also have to understand, I was apprehensive to give that list. I was living in a very small country town [TE]<sup>8</sup>. I give them a list of, say, 20 children. I live in a town where the parents of those children live all around me. You have got to understand the context of this. It is not easy.

**Mrs COOTE** — I think you painted a really clear picture of that. Can you also give us the name of the detective that you were dealing with? Not now, later. That would be particularly helpful as well. Thank you both very much indeed.

**Mrs CROWE** — You have to understand too that it came on top of what was a very long, extended period of intimidation and we even started getting hang-up phone calls to our house. We would have staff members doing slow drives past our house and things like that. We felt very under siege throughout this and that is why we have moved twice. We moved once out of town and now we have moved away. It has been hard.

**Mrs COOTE** — Thank you very much indeed.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for presenting to us today and for giving your evidence, providing your submission and those details that you have. On behalf the committee I thank both of you very much indeed. Your evidence has been most helpful.

**Mr CROWE** — Thank you, Chair.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

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<sup>8</sup> Text Expunged.