

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 29 April 2013

Members

Mrs A. Coote

Ms G. Crozier

Ms B. Halfpenny

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Witnesses

Father G. Chambers, provincial and

Father J. Papworth, former vice-provincial, Salesians of Don Bosco.

The CHAIR — Good afternoon. I inform members of the public gallery that this session with the Salesians order will be partly in public with the remainder of the hearing being heard in camera. The proceedings in camera are necessary as a consequence of matters which are currently the subject of criminal court proceedings. I ask you all to take note of that, and I will inform you when we move into the in-camera part of the hearing.

On behalf of the committee I welcome Father John Papworth and Father Greg Chambers from the Salesians of Don Bosco.

Fr CHAMBERS — Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for appearing before us this afternoon. 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. Witnesses may be asked to return at a later date to give further evidence if required. All evidence given today is being recorded, and witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript. Please note that these proceedings are not being broadcast. You will be given an opportunity to make a comment to the committee following the public part of the hearing.

I would just like to move to the first part of the session. Under our terms of reference the committee has been requested to look at policies and processes within religious and non-government organisations and whether there are systemic practices within organisations that have or may have contributed to the abuse of children. We are particularly interested in looking at policies and procedures, leadership issues and whether any changes to the law need to be undertaken to help prevent criminal abuse of Victorian children in the future. We have heard from a number of victims in relation to your order.

I note we have been given some information from you this morning. Obviously we were in a hearing earlier this morning and we have not had full time to read your submission, and on walking into the hearing this afternoon we have been provided with some additional information. I know committee members will want to have a look at that as we go through, but I just inform you that we have not had a proper chance to look at the information you have provided to us. Nevertheless I would like to go to a question in relation to the number of people we have heard from and who have come before us, and ask of you: what do you believe victims want from the Towards Healing process?

Fr CHAMBERS — I think they want to be heard, to have all their cases taken seriously, to receive due deference and respect, to have their particular claims fully and thoroughly investigated, and to have the perpetrators of that abuse brought to proper justice.

The CHAIR — And is it your belief that that has been what has occurred from the Towards Healing process?

Fr CHAMBERS — I think so. By and large the Salesians have fully cooperated with Towards Healing and have had many of their cases go through Towards Healing but also through the courts, through law enforcement and the public forum. In many cases, and in a number of recent cases particularly, it is obvious that many Salesians have been tried and convicted and imprisoned in the public forum, which indicates that we take all of these matters very seriously indeed and that we have been fully cooperative both with Towards Healing and other justice and law enforcement agencies.

The CHAIR — Can you confirm to the committee how many cases from the Salesians have been brought before the various Towards Healing processes or indeed other actions?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. As far as we know, there have been 14 accused offenders in Victoria.

The CHAIR — Fourteen accused offenders. How many cases? How many complaints?

Fr CHAMBERS — How many complaints? There have been 49 complaints.

The CHAIR — Forty-nine complaints?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you. And in relation to the records and files of those complaints, have they been kept within the order?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes, they certainly have, and in fact in late January this year all files concerning the claimants and the accused were handed over to the Victorian parliamentary inquiry.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. Can you just confirm to the committee when those files were first opened or kept or how far back they extend to?

Fr CHAMBERS — The first known cases came to our attention in 1986 and have proceeded since then. We have kept all files of those cases from that time at our province centre, first of all at Oakleigh and now at Ascot Vale, and those files have in fact remained here in our province in Australia.

The CHAIR — Are you saying that that is the first time the Salesians understood there to be any complaints of abuse, in 1986?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes, it was a documented case in 1986 that came to the attention of the then provincial, Father Frank Bertagnoli. He fully investigated this particular case. He visited the claimant and his family, and did everything possible to get to the bottom of that. That is why we know that that is the first case, and there have been many, many cases since then.

The CHAIR — I understand that, but my question really was: was that the first time that it was known within the order?

Fr CHAMBERS — It was the first time, and it came as a huge shock to us all.

Mr McGUIRE — Thank you very much for being here and testifying before this committee. I want to go to the issue of leadership, scrutiny and accountability. I just want to ask you: have the Salesians ever conducted their own internal investigation into the extent of abuse in the organisation — so not one that you have been forced to as a consequence of a complaint, but under your own motion?

Fr CHAMBERS — I would have to say that we have not conducted our own particular inquiry. However, we have assiduously followed up on each and every claim that has come to our attention either through Towards Healing or with the involvement of the police, involvement of the lawyers or involvement of the courts. And whilst we have not conducted our own internal study, we have been assiduous in following up all claims and trying to bring perpetrators to justice and to give proper compensation in every respect to the victims.

Mr McGUIRE — What prevented you taking this up of your own volition?

Fr CHAMBERS — As I said, the first case came to light in 1986, and other cases arose in the early 1990s. I guess at that time we were still becoming aware of the incidence of sexual abuse within our order and coming to terms with that, and it has since come to light that a number of those early cases have mushroomed into many, many other cases involving a large number of claimants.

Mr McGUIRE — Did the Salesians regard it as crime from the outset, or was it seen as sin?

Fr CHAMBERS — In the religious context it was probably seen as a sinful offence. I think only as time progressed did it become a crime against the individual, a crime against society, a crime before the nation of Australia, so it was a growing awareness — —

Mr McGUIRE — Just on that, were you here for the previous hearings when I went through this issue?

Fr CHAMBERS — No, I was not.

Mr McGUIRE — I will inform you then. It is from the Vatican, from Pope John XXIII, on 16 March 1962, and the proposition is called *crimen pessimum*, and the term refers to the foulest crime:

The term *crimen pessimum* ... is here understood to mean any external obscene act, gravely sinful, perpetrated or attempted by a cleric in any way whatsoever with a person of his own sex.

So this is the church classifying this as child sexual abuse, as the foulest crime. There has also been, on the statute book in Victoria, what was referred to as 'the heinous crime of buggery of a child under 14' that used to be a capital offence, has always carried a term of either 15 years jail or 10 years jail consequently, and that is why I want you to actually go to this issue of how could you remain in denial about this being a crime?

Fr CHAMBERS — I am not saying we remained in denial for any great length of time. When it first came to light in a Catholic religious context it was first of all seen in the context of sin, even mortal sin. Then we came to a fairly quick awareness that it was also a heinous crime before the individual and society.

Mr McGUIRE — Did you take this immediately to the police when these incidents occurred?

Fr CHAMBERS — Very soon. In that first instance I was referring to, it was handled as best he could by the provincial of the day, according to the practices at the time. But it was only in the early 1990s that certain well-known cases came to the public courts and resulted in prosecutions, conviction and imprisonment. It was in the early 1990s that these Salesians and their crimes became manifest in the public. It was not long after the original crimes came to mind that we certainly did acknowledge them in public.

Mr McGUIRE — Just so that we get the figures on the record, how many members of the order did you have in Victoria since the Salesians have been operating in this state?

Fr CHAMBERS — I can give you that statistic. Of the 394 members that the Salesians have had in Australia since 1923, 258 have worked in Victoria at some point.

Mr McGUIRE — What do you make then of the number of people you had working as Salesians, and then the number of offences that were committed? How do you weigh that up? Do you regard that as being totally out of kilter with any other section of the community? How do you judge it?

Fr CHAMBERS — In terms of a relatively small number of Salesians at any one time — I think we have only had about 125 in our province in any one year — it strikes me as a small proportion, but a significant proportion, of our men who seem to be involved in the abuse of minors at any one time. For this I really need to express sorrow and apology to victims for that. A small but significant group of Salesians do seem to have been involved in abuse of minors in Victoria.

Mr McGUIRE — I am just asking you the systemic question. You did not conduct your own inquiry into it. Why did that not happen; and why did you not, as soon as the alarm bells were ringing and complaints were made, actually do something at that level because it does seem that it was endemic if not systemic in your organisation?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. I guess we relied upon a systemic approach ourselves. We relied upon the Catholic Church's Towards Healing processes, we relied upon the Catholic Church's rulings and deliberations, we relied upon the practices and protocols of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, and in our schools we relied upon the rules and procedures of the Catholic Education Office of Melbourne. I am not saying that is an excuse for not conducting our own inquiry, but we conducted all our activities under the auspices of these wider organisations to which we, as a Catholic religious order, belong.

Mr McGUIRE — Given the results, did that system fail?

Fr CHAMBERS — I think our system of monitoring and supervision, and bringing people to justice, was very slow in taking effect and could be conceived as failing to some extent, yes.

Mrs COOTE — Thank you, Father Papworth and Father Chambers, for being here and for the substantial information that you have given us. As the Chair has said, it is difficult for us to get our heads across the information you have just given us as you were walking in here.

Fr CHAMBERS — I understand.

Mrs COOTE — However, it does point to some interesting things I would like to ask you about. We have heard from hundreds of people in this inquiry through written submissions and also in face-to-face hearings, and they have been poignant and particularly brave. Most of those incidents, it would be fair to say, have occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. What is different with the Salesians is that they are still very current. It would seem that,

unlike it being all those years ago, there are still issues that are current and relevant today with the Salesians in particular. I was therefore particularly interested in looking at paragraph 3 headed 'The allegations of the Salesians failures of 'Rupertswood'', which was in the document we were handed just before we came in here today, where you say:

Many changes have occurred at 'Rupertswood' since the early 1990s to ensure that it moves forward as a vibrant and modern Catholic secondary college in the Salesian tradition.

And it says that there are six elements: phasing out the boarding section; converting of dormitories; changing Rupertswood from an all-boys to co-ed; leasing out the mansion to private entrepreneurship for independent accommodation; introducing a formal policy for the protection of staff and students; and appointing the first lay principal. The last two would probably constitute an issue of understanding what sexual abuse had happened and transpired at Rupertswood, but surely the first four are all economic decisions that the Salesians must have taken instead of being an issue of child abuse?

Fr CHAMBERS — Certainly, you are right. Phasing out the boarding, converting boarding facilities into educational facilities, changing from an all-boys to a co-educational school and leasing out the Rupertswood mansion were primarily done for good sound educational reasons. But all the same, as a natural by-product of those, they ensured or at least helped ensure that these sexual abuse crimes and problems associated with Rupertswood would not occur again in the future.

Mrs COOTE — But I think that is slightly misleading in this document to suggest that that was one of the major reasons that there is not this issue here at the moment, when that it is actually based on economics.

Fr CHAMBERS — I went to considerable pains to try to show in my document that we did not introduce these changes as a reaction to the abuse problem, but the problem is educational, pastoral and therefore I guess financial reasons. But a considerable and happy by-product and consequence of these changes, particularly the phasing out of boarding and the phasing out of an all-boys college, produced an effect in modern days that severely minimises and possibly does away with the problem of sexual abuse at that school in the future.

Mrs COOTE — Can you give us any other examples of current day practices that might do that?

Fr CHAMBERS — At Rupertswood or elsewhere?

Mrs COOTE — With the Salesians.

Fr CHAMBERS — Okay. In my submission to the parliamentary inquiry I pointed out that we have endeavoured to address the needs of victims as closely as possible. Previous provincials and I have tried to follow up these cases as best we could and to meet with victims to make sure that they were treated respectfully. The consequence was that they were well cared for, pastorally looked after and in many cases compensated with financial payouts, counselling and other strategies.

I would also like to point out that the Australian Salesians Missions Overseas Aid Fund, which is very strong in Australia and the local area of the Pacific and East Asia-Oceania, has developed its own child protection policy under ACFID since February 2011. At its recent provincial chapter held on 1 to 5 April this year the Salesian province firmly resolved that the provincial and his council will develop a child protection policy for the province and all its communities, works and activities. We have also continued our policy of trying to prevent future abuse so that our national and international formation guidelines can include an emphasis on a comprehensive approach to human development — —

Mrs COOTE — We have that here in front of us. If that is the document you are referring to, we will take note of that.

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes.

Mrs COOTE — Going back to my point, I am interested that you brought up your involvement in Australasia.

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes.

Mrs COOTE — My point was about the current situation — not the 1980s or the 1990s, but in fact as recently as 2009. I have a letter from the provincial, Francis J. Moloney, to a Father Jack Ayers in Samoa. You said that you have protocols in place, but the issue is that these priests were not supposed to be with children in any shape or form. This letter starts in a very chatty way:

Many thanks for your note that arrived today, with the excellent photograph of you waiting for your 81st birthday!

...

... you have asked that I publish the photograph in *The Salesian Bulletin*. Regretfully, I am unable to do that. The province is currently under investigation, and I have to answer the question:

Did any past office-holders (i.e. provincials) allow men who have been accused of child sexual abuse, and whom it might reasonably be expected the Victorian police would want to interview, to return to Australia without informing the Victorian police?

The letter goes on to say:

Anyway, there is no way I can publish a photo of you and young people in *The Salesian Bulletin* while the question is being handled legally. I am sure you understand.

How do the Salesians then justify the fact that this man who had been accused was actually photographed with young people?

Fr CHAMBERS — As you know, allegations have been made against the Salesians about their sending three priests into the Pacific to avoid prosecution. Because two of them are under current investigation, Father Ayers is the only one I can really comment on. But I would like to point out that Father Ayers was in fact sent to Samoa in 1992 to teach English and to help out with the Salesian work there. That was 10 years before any allegation was made against him in 2002. I think that is important to note.

Mrs COOTE — This letter is 2009.

Fr CHAMBERS — Right. I do not know of that letter, but I can point out to you that Father Moloney, my predecessor, was very keen to bring Father Ayers back to Australia to answer allegations against him and he fully cooperated with the Victoria Police in doing this. It was the Victoria Police that arranged for the federal police and their nominated doctor to visit him in an aged-care facility in Samoa to decide whether they should bring him back or not. Ultimately the police decided that he should not return because of their concerns about his serious illness and old age. So it was the Victoria Police that ultimately decided they would not bring him back.

Mrs COOTE — Excuse me, Father Chambers, we have the document that you are reading from, so I do not think there is any need to tell us that.

Fr CHAMBERS — Okay.

Mrs COOTE — But it would be a fair enough assumption to say it is still continuing. I think he is now about 85 and is still able to associate with young children under the Salesians order.

Fr CHAMBERS — That is not right. He died in Samoa on 4 April 2012.

Mrs COOTE — I beg your pardon; thank you. There was only one other issue that you brought up, and that was in regard to money. You said that one of the ways you assisted victims was with money. Could you tell me how much money the Salesians have paid out, whether through Towards Healing or through civil processes?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes, I can give you that figure. On behalf of the Salesians, Catholic Church Insurances has settled approximately 37 claims, with payments of \$1 333 854. The Salesians have paid out a further \$732 294 to victims. That is a total of \$2 066 148 paid to victims of abuse in our province.

Mrs COOTE — And how much have you paid for legal expenses of people such as Fr Ayers?

Fr CHAMBERS — I simply have not got that figure available.

Mrs COOTE — Would you be able to get that information about how much Salesians have paid out in legal fees for all of the people?

Fr CHAMBERS — I will certainly endeavour to get that for you.

Mrs COOTE — I would be very pleased; thank you so much.

Fr CHAMBERS — No trouble.

Ms HALFPENNY — Just quickly, before I go on to my questions, I think when you were answering Frank McGuire's questions, you talked about having followed all the procedures of Towards Healing and what the church had laid down. We have heard arguments that the Salesians have not followed all the procedures in the Towards Healing processes. There was an alternative view to that. In terms of the legal stuff, I am not sure whether we can continue to talk about that or not, but my understanding is that there is also a position that the Salesians have not followed the Towards Healing processes.

Fr CHAMBERS — I know there have been a number of allegations about the Salesians not fully following the procedures of Towards Healing; I believe they have done. I think they have not only cooperated with Towards Healing and professional standards, but certainly with the Victorian parliamentary inquiry and the royal commission in its early days. We have tried to cooperate fully with Victoria Police, and recent events have proved the validity of that cooperation.

Ms HALFPENNY — That is true. We understand that you have been very cooperative in providing all of the documents that have been asked, and thanks for that. The other questions I had were around the work that the Salesians of Don Bosco do. There are a number of schools. Are they primary and secondary schools in Victoria?

Fr CHAMBERS — Of the four schools in Victoria, there would be two all-boys schools and two co-educational colleges. They are all secondary; none of them are primary.

Ms HALFPENNY — You also have the youth centre in Brunswick.

Fr CHAMBERS — The Don Bosco Youth Centre and Hostel is in Brunswick.

Ms HALFPENNY — As I understand it, the hostel is for students from rural areas to live in Melbourne while they study.

Fr CHAMBERS — And international.

Ms HALFPENNY — International students as well?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes.

Ms HALFPENNY — Is that hostel run by the Salesians themselves?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes, it is.

Ms HALFPENNY — Has there been a review or an investigation to look at all these various areas of work? Because of what has happened at one particular place, has there been an investigation to ensure there have not been other incidences or allegations that have not been brought to light in some of those other places?

Fr CHAMBERS — I guess because of what has happened at Salesian college in Sunbury, all of those colleges have been placed on high alert in terms of getting their policies, procedures and practices right up-to-date when it comes to the protection of students in all those centres. As I have said before, they are very much under the — —

Ms HALFPENNY — Are you saying they were not up-to-date before, or they are being developed now, or are you talking about legal requirements?

Fr CHAMBERS — In cases like the protection of staff and students policy, just as a case in point, that policy started under myself when I was principal in 2005. I provided the inquiry with an appendix up to the

present day. It was last ratified on 3 May 2012. It is to be reviewed in 2013, and the next approval after that is 2015. This represents the growth and maturity of the document I set in place in 2005, and it is a much fuller, better and more comprehensive document now. I think the same could be said for all documents in Salesian and Catholic schools — that they have been developed by those schools under the Catholic Education Office over many years now — and I think you will find that all of those educational policies and practices are now very thorough and comprehensive across all schools and institutions within the Catholic Education Office of Victoria and the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Ms HALFPENNY — Is that in response to mandatory reporting requirements?

Fr CHAMBERS — Excuse me?

Ms HALFPENNY — So these policies were in response to mandatory reporting requirements you have in schools?

Fr CHAMBERS — Partly in response to the mandatory reporting procedures, but also as a response to the grave ills and wrongs that had gone on at Salesian college in Sunbury, which we do not attempt to deny at all. In response to that, we had to ensure the safety of students, staff, families, parents — anyone under the jurisdiction of Salesian College Rupertswood — for the future. The same would be true of all of our other colleges and institutions.

Ms HALFPENNY — Does it include clergy, or is it for teachers at the school?

Fr CHAMBERS — It includes all clerical and lay staff.

Ms HALFPENNY — Who work at the school?

Fr CHAMBERS — Exactly, and that it is reinforced by the need for teacher registration under the normal procedures, or working-with-children checks for all Salesians and staff in our schools and institutions.

Ms HALFPENNY — You are saying that when victims come to you, you try to treat them with respect and negotiate settlements. What state are those people in? We have heard a lot of evidence in terms of the terrible damage caused to people as a result of abuse. It is difficult to have a job and that leads to all sorts of poverty. There is disability, debilitating illnesses, drug and alcohol abuse — all that sort of stuff. Is that your experience of those people that have been abused as children?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes, that would be our experience very much. In dealing with victims, respecting them and hearing their cases, I think the scenario that you have mentioned would be true of very many of those. Once again, I apologise on behalf of the Salesian order for any abuse to those young people, and we have seriously tried to give them restitution and reparation for the wrongs that have been done against them.

Ms HALFPENNY — That is something that has not always been the view of those people who are the victims. Why I want to ask that is that I want to understand if you are of the same view or you accept what Father Moloney, who I think was the previous provincial, said in correspondence that he sent to the co-persons of the National Committee for Professional Standards. He said that while it is understood that the Salesians must do all they can to address the mistakes of the past and anyone injured by them, the most injured parties, of course, are the 120 Salesians that still work for the poor and abandoned people in Australia and the Pacific. Do you think the attitude within the hierarchy of the Salesians has changed from that attitude, which was only a couple of years ago?

Fr CHAMBERS — Definitely, because I think that statement shows that Father Moloney is putting the welfare of the Salesian priests and brothers before the welfare of the victims. I would have that completely the other way around, truly. The welfare, both in the present and the future, of victims comes first. Certainly the welfare of our own men is important, but nowhere near as important as that of the victims. Those Salesians who have perpetrated these wrongs should not be protected or covered up or defended in any way but should be brought to the full justice of the law and the courts. We have already respected that and I know our religious superiors in Rome fully support that stance.

Mr O'BRIEN — Just to follow on from Ms Halfpenny's questioning, you have indicated in your submission to us that you intend to demonstrate full honesty, transparency and integrity and that you are endeavouring to do anything you can. That is certainly not the view of Professor Parkinson, is it?

Fr CHAMBERS — It would be true to say that he has his own thoughts on this matter, yes.

Mr O'BRIEN — That is an inquiry that was undertaken in relation to the National Committee for Professional Standards. You have not, as I understand it, when you submitted to us agreed to the publication of that report. Is that still your position?

Fr CHAMBERS — We fully support the publication of that report. I would maintain that, despite what people have said in public, we have always supported the publication of that report. What Father Moloney and others have tried to do is to set the record straight in that document, to clarify certain facts and to correct certain anomalies in that document. Far from wanting to suppress it in the past or present, we have always maintained our right to at least contest the accuracy of certain statements and facts that Professor Parkinson has put forward.

Mr O'BRIEN — I can accept that latter part about it if you need to contest accuracy, but are you saying that you have always maintained the position that that report should be published?

Fr CHAMBERS — Indeed we have, but only if it could be considered that certain facts and claims made in the report be fixed up and reported for their full accuracy and truth. That is all we have tried to do: to set the record straight in that whole long saga.

Mr O'BRIEN — Because Professor Parkinson in his submission to this committee also identifies another report conducted in relation to the Salesian order by Richard Sipe, and he said on page 15:

It is the third largest religious society in the Roman Catholic Church. It rivals the Jesuits for power within the church and has a large number of cardinals ...

I will read on to the relevant bits:

I say this on the basis of reviewing scores of documents in the cases of sexual abuse by members of the society in California where 21 or 22 [Salesian] priests and brothers have been identified as sexual predators ... Seasoned clinicians and lawyers who have worked with the society have said that it is 'the most unrepentant and defiant' religious group they have ever experienced in regard to sexual abuse within its ranks. My experience has been similar.

Do you accept that assessment? That was an assessment of the American and the Roman leadership of your order.

Fr CHAMBERS — I have heard that quotation many, many times — and I am sure we have read it many, many times in the media. I would like to point out that that original case is in California in the United States and that statement was made in a United States context about that particular case. I would question whether that really applies to Australia and the Salesian province in this country, truly.

Mr O'BRIEN — Is that your defence?

Fr CHAMBERS — Not necessarily a defence, but it is a point of order, I think.

Mr O'BRIEN — Because the point that Professor Parkinson seeks to make to us is that in relation to the orders, it is the international aspects, particularly relationships with Rome and the common features that have occurred across, that in a sense we need to understand from a cultural point of view. Given the time, could I just put it to you this way: you have identified in your opening, in response to the Chair, that the thing is that the victims wish to be heard, have their cases seriously and perpetrators brought to justice. Could I suggest to you that there is one other aspect that they commonly say when they appear before us — namely, that they wish to see and ensure that these abuses never occur again? Would you accept that?

Fr CHAMBERS — Absolutely. I would fully support that desire. That is also our desire: to ensure that these events and incidents of abuse of young people never occur again. I am completely in agreement with that.

Mr O'BRIEN — Because the concerns that obviously the Victorian community has is if perpetrators are still in a sense within the ranks potentially and if the cultural reasons for this abuse have not been investigated

and understood by the organisation itself, let alone the wider community, what hope is there to provide those victims with that assurance that this will not occur again.

Fr CHAMBERS — I can tell you right now that the Salesians are fully committed to care and respect for victims of abuse. We sincerely apologise to them for the wrongs brought upon them by members of our order and we are absolutely committed to cleaning up the act of the Salesians in this province and ensuring that these abuses and betrayals of what we stand for and our ideals and principles do never occur again. We are fully committed to that — and make no mistake about it.

Mr O'BRIEN — To be fair to you and the order, I wanted to point out to you that Parkinson says, 'Any complete account of the work the Salesians have done over the years would no doubt provide many stories of that sacrificial care of the poor and the vulnerable' but unfortunately for your order and for the community, when you have this problem it not only taints the good work you do, but your reputation as a good body can in fact provide a cover for perpetrators to hide and continue abuse because of the shame.

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes.

Mr O'BRIEN — Do you accept that problem?

Fr CHAMBERS — There is always that possibility of people joining our order, I guess, because of the attraction of working with young people, and I suppose that is true of lay people working with young people as well.

Mr O'BRIEN — I put it to you that that is why you need to undertake a shameless and in a sense open investigation into all the cultural aspects including the issues that have been identified by Parkinson and others around the world to start to understand what has happened in the past. Do you accept that?

Fr CHAMBERS — Again I agree completely with you because, as you have stated, for a religious order that primarily works with young people and poor and abandoned young people and ones who are in need of support and an education, for those young people to have inflicted upon them any form of abuse is a betrayal of what St John Bosco founded us to do: to care for, respect and love the young and not exploit and take advantage of them. In a sense, in many cases we have betrayed what we had been founded to do.

Mr WAKELING — Thank you, fathers, for your attendance today. Father Chambers, if I may start: would you agree that the care of children that are in your care, whether they were in boarding school or within schools, was of paramount importance for your order?

Fr CHAMBERS — Definitely.

Mr WAKELING — Okay. Given that view, you have indicated that there have been 49 recorded complaints of abuse since 1986. Of those matters how many did you refer to the police?

Fr CHAMBERS — Just bear with me. I can get a breakdown of those 49 cases: 16 of them went through Towards Healing, 16 went through a combination of Towards Healing and legal processes, 17 went through law enforcement, civil or criminal procedures, 2 were dealt with by an interstate office of Towards Healing, one went through an internal process and one is currently the subject of police investigation only. That is a breakdown of the 49.

Mr WAKELING — And I thank you for that, Father, but out of that number how many did your order actually refer to the police yourself, of your own action?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes, I understand the question. Of the 14 known accused offenders that I spoke about before, the breakdown goes like this — can I give you the breakdown of response? Five were convicted; of these, three were expelled from the Salesians and two left the congregation. Two others left the congregation, one was laicised, four are deceased and two remain in our congregation and province.

Mr WAKELING — If I may, at the time in which the allegations were made what action did the order take in terms of internally investigating those matters and dealing directly with the alleged perpetrator?

Fr CHAMBERS — As time went on, admittedly after a slow start, the Salesians ensured that anyone who had a claim against them was withdrawn from public — priestly, ministry — withdrawn from all contact with children and placed in a community that had no contact with young people. We fully cooperated with Towards Healing or the courts or the police or with whatever agencies commenced dealing with those particular cases. We have also always tried to be open and transparent with the police and the courts in regard to these 14 accused.

Mr WAKELING — The concerns that people have been raising about your order is the fact that you have not referred matters directly to the police and that alleged perpetrators have remained engaged directly with children. What is your response to that?

Fr CHAMBERS — As I said just then, of those 14 only 2 remain in our province and congregation. Just to give you a bit of a description of each without breaking confidentiality: one of those is of an advanced age, fully retired and confined to domestic duties and, as I said, with no public ministry or contact with children, whilst the other is middle aged and confined to internal and domestic duties with no contact with young people, under constant monitoring and supervision by the religious superior in each of those places and by myself as provincial. I can vouch for the fact that neither of these two is involved with any contact with young people.

Mr WAKELING — Finally, if I may, Father, do you believe that the Salesians have any responsibility for the actions of the alleged perpetrators or do you believe the responsibility lies purely with those perpetrators?

Fr CHAMBERS — I think I would have to say that in large part it is the responsibility of the perpetrators but as their governing body, as their order, we indeed must accept some responsibility for their activities.

Mr WAKELING — So, if I may, if you are going to accept some responsibility, do you believe that was a failure in the culture of your organisation that allowed that to occur?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. I have often thought about this myself. I think it is a really good question. I think in the cases I am referring to there may have been several failures, if you just bear with me — I think possibly a failure at the admission process, where in the older days, in the 50s and 60s, people were accepted on the face value of their spiritual or devotional suitability, often with a reference from their parish priest or spiritual director. Very little psychological testing was done there or engaging of emotional or affective maturity. I think as time went on there were probably failures in their training, where they probably were not properly trained for the work they were doing in the education and care of young people. That could have been much more thorough and relevant to the Australian society. I think as time went on in their various places of work there may well have been a failure in supervision by their older religious superiors, who did not thoroughly enough monitor their growth and development and step in and assist them in the huge amount of work those young fellows had to do at certain places like Rupertswood. Often they were left to carry the can in terms of teaching, supervision of boarders — 24 hours a day, practically, with no respite or care. I think ultimately our religious society must have some responsibility for those failures in admission, training and supervision.

The CHAIR — Mr McGuire, just in relation to that follow-up issue.

Mr McGuire — What vetting process has the order actually introduced to try to prevent paedophile priests or paedophile brothers becoming involved? You have now admitted that there was a failure in the admission process and a systemic failure under Towards Healing and the Melbourne Response. Then you are saying you have not actually conducted your own investigation.

Fr CHAMBERS — No.

Mr McGuire — So what have you done?

Fr CHAMBERS — In certain documents we have addressed — when I talk about admissions, training and supervision — —

Mr McGuire — What about vetting?

Fr CHAMBERS — Certainly vetting. All our young people who join the order, both in Australia and in the Pacific, undergo professional psychological testing by experts in the field.

Mr McGUIRE — When did you introduce that?

Fr CHAMBERS — That had been introduced, I would say, back in the 90s and 80s. John?

Fr PAPWORTH — Yes. That was introduced earlier on in its form when the seminary in Melbourne was undertaking the process of introducing psychological testing. We took up what was offered through the Melbourne practice, and then that grew to be more demanding in terms of the form of the psychological testing, and — —

Mr McGUIRE — Is that because the first one let people through — or let paedophiles through?

Fr PAPWORTH — I am not sure of why that was — I think it was a learning curve that both the church and ourselves were on in the process of welcoming young people into the training program.

Mr McGUIRE — So how many people from the Salesian orders have been vetted in this way now?

Fr CHAMBERS — Look, I would say that since the early 1990s everyone has undergone psychological testing, affective testing and maturity testing, both in Australia and in the Pacific, as I pointed out. Our young men of the Pacific regional seminary — we only have the one novitiate for the whole of Australia. That is the first year of training. All our Australian candidates go there. There is a strong and well catered for program in human sexuality; sexuality, maturity and responsibility; and the management of addictive behaviour for all of our new entrants at the Pacific regional seminary in Suva.

Mr McGUIRE — So is this independently audited or assessed? Is there somebody that looks at this independently?

Fr CHAMBERS — That is a really good question. I suppose it has been between ourselves and the various seminaries, but certainly the records in relation to psychological testing would y be available.

The CHAIR — Father Chambers, how many have been excluded through that process?

Fr CHAMBERS — Sorry?

Mr McGUIRE — How many have you vetted out?

The CHAIR — How many have been excluded through that process? Have any?

Fr CHAMBERS — I cannot give you exact figures, but I would say certainly a number of candidates have been excluded through that process, definitely.

Mr McGUIRE — Estimate?

Fr CHAMBERS — I simply cannot give you an estimate on that. I have not — —

The CHAIR — Father Papworth, would you have a rough indication?

Fr PAPWORTH — No, I do not have any numbers to be able to respond to that one with, because the process was increased in its intensity as we went along.

The CHAIR — From when did it increase in its intensity?

Fr PAPWORTH — Once we became aware of any form of abuse which indicated, then, a psychological need for much more careful consideration, that process has been increased. That also sort of discourages young people as they are moving towards entering into the society as well.

The CHAIR — I am just wondering if that was in the 1990s or 2000s.

Fr CHAMBERS — From the 1990s. Can I just point out too that there is also ongoing vetting for our students applying for the priesthood as they come to the various orders, like lector or acolyte, as they come to the diaconate or priesthood? They have to apply for each of those orders and actually be approved by their own house councils and then by myself and the provincial council. I can tell you that I have been on provincial

councils that have accepted the application of a number of young men for these advanced orders, including the priesthood, but I have also been there when certain candidates have not been approved and have left the order before they have been ordained to diaconate or priesthood. So I can speak from personal experience of the vetting process not only being very stark through psychological testing but of ongoing monitoring. In fact each of these candidates has got to be approved and voted for by the provincial and his council before they can be admitted to the orders of diaconate and ordination and, believe me, not all of them get through.

The CHAIR — But your reforms have really only commenced since 2005. Is that correct?

Fr CHAMBERS — Excuse me?

The CHAIR — Your reforms have only really commenced since 2005, yet you are saying there have been issues raised through your vetting process and your experience since the early 1990s, so I am wondering why it has taken you so long for you to undertake those reforms in terms of mandatory reporting or other aspects relating to who you allow in and out of the order.

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. I would say those vetting procedures with the psychological testing have been going on since 1990, but those vetting procedures of provincial council, house council have been going on since the Salesians entered this country in 1923. The voting and admission to vows — perpetual and temporary — and to the orders each time has to undergo this rigid process of approval or non-approval, and that is sacred to the Salesian constitutions and regulations instituted by Don Bosco himself from the 1850s onwards. Believe me, there is — —

Mr McGUIRE — But we are talking vetting on child sexual abuse; we are not talking about whether your vocation is religious or not. We are talking about: is this the issue?

Fr CHAMBERS — Very much so but, believe me, this vetting — both at the beginning and ongoing — would pick up now these aberrations and pick up these flaws and weaknesses in people's characters.

Mr McGUIRE — How do you explain the endemic nature of what happened within your order?

Fr CHAMBERS — As I have said before, there were failures in admissions and in training and in supervision as we went along.

Mr McGUIRE — And in vetting?

Fr CHAMBERS — And possibly in vetting, because that has to do also with admissions.

Mr McGUIRE — Was there collusion between paedophiles in your order?

Fr CHAMBERS — I do not believe so.

Mr McGUIRE — Do you think they were individually acting as individuals?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. I know exactly what you are saying. Can I answer that in two ways? I have always believed that there was no collusion or communication between abusers within our province, including at Salesian College, Sunbury.

Mr McGUIRE — How was it covered up then? How come it was ongoing to the level it was, to the extent that it was —

Fr CHAMBERS — That is right.

Mr McGUIRE — and to the detrimental impact that it had?

Fr CHAMBERS — Can I just finish answering that other question? I have got to admit that, as I have been following certain current cases that have come to court and reading the testimony of various people, I have come to an awareness that there has been or could be some possible communication between certain individuals. It had not occurred to me before until recent times, but having looked at the testimony of people, there does seem to be some form of communication between individuals that had never come to my awareness before.

Mr McGUIRE — That is between offenders?

Fr CHAMBERS — Between offenders.

Mr McGUIRE — So that is a conspiracy.

Fr CHAMBERS — I would not have called it — —

Mr McGUIRE — That is the definition of a conspiracy.

Fr CHAMBERS — That is your word. I am talking about some form of communication.

Mr McGUIRE — How many are you talking about?

Fr CHAMBERS — I am talking about the possibility of three individuals.

Mr McGUIRE — How severe were the crimes that they perpetrated?

Fr CHAMBERS — I really cannot comment upon that because they are the content of present court cases, believe me.

Mr McGUIRE — Okay. We are not going there, but just for the record now you are saying that you now have an understanding — you have come to the conclusion — that there was collusion between three priests within your order?

Fr CHAMBERS — No. I have come to a growing awareness that there may have been some communication between those individuals. They are my words; they are your words.

Mr McGUIRE — Given the sensitivity of this issue before the courts, we will leave it there. Thank you.

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. Fair enough. Thanks very much for the question.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Father Chambers. Father Papworth, would you like to add anything before we go to your statement that you would like to make to the committee?

Fr PAPWORTH — Just a brief opportunity, thank you. It really has been ticking over in my mind the point that was raised about the culture and what have we done to address the culture within the order. I can speak specifically in relation to what has been addressed at Sunbury. I understand the references that were made to the timing of that and how that could be interpreted as economical, but whether that is so or not is not the point I would like to make.

The point I would like to make is that while those developments were taking place there was enormous effort and investment with the staff to change the culture and to address the establishment of what is reported in Father Greg's statement — a school with a whole new possibility, and a school that enjoys a great deal of respect in its current status and in its current community. There was an enormous investment in addressing the cultural need during that period of time, aware of what had occurred just previously.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Father Chambers, some concluding remarks before we finish the public hearing?

Fr CHAMBERS — Would you like me to read my closing statement?

The CHAIR — If you would like to; thank you.

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. In terms of time, what time availability have I got?

The CHAIR — The secretariat would have given you a time frame of around 5 minutes.

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes. I will endeavour to do that.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Fr CHAMBERS — This is my formal closing statement to the Victorian parliamentary inquiry.

First and foremost I wish to take this opportunity to express my most sincere apology to all those victims who have suffered any form of abuse at the hands of members of the Salesian congregation in our province. On behalf of all my fellow Salesians, I offer these victims my most profound and heartfelt sympathy and regret for what has taken place.

Let me assure you the Salesian Province of Australia-Pacific finds the abuse of young people in any form to be abhorrent and against all that we stand for. As a religious congregation founded by St John Bosco to care for and support poor and abandoned youth, we Salesians firmly believe that any abuse or exploitation of the young is totally repugnant and absolutely contrary to all our ideals and principles. Because of this fundamental belief, the Salesians are determined to give the parliamentary inquiry and royal commission our full support and cooperation, demonstrate honesty, transparency and integrity in all of our responses and dealings, and show deep respect, understanding and compassion to all those victims of abuse who come forward.

Since the Salesians arrived in Australia in 1923 we have worked at the cutting edge and margins of society with boys and young men in boys homes, schools, farms, youth centres, hostels and camps and generally cared for and educated the children of working-class families who often struggled to make ends meet.

Today these works have evolved in highly respected institutions including Salesian College, Chadstone; Salesian College, Sunbury; St Joseph's College, Ferntree Gully; the Don Bosco youth centre and hostel at Brunswick; and the Don Bosco camp at Dromana.

The Salesians' first permanent foundation was at Rupertswood, Sunbury in 1927. The abuse cases which occurred at that school in the 1970s and 1980s have attracted much criticism. Since the early 1990s many changes have been made at Rupertswood to ensure that it moves forward as a vibrant and modern Catholic secondary college where families can have the highest confidence in the welfare of their children. Today it is a thriving Catholic coeducational secondary school with an enrolment of over 1100 boys and girls, a staff of over 100 and state-of-the-art educational facilities. It also has a wonderful reputation in the local area and widespread support from the local Sunbury community.

The work of the Australia-Pacific Province, and my role as provincial, extends beyond Victoria to include schools, parishes, youth centres, camps and hostels in Australia, Samoa, New Zealand and Fiji. In the course of their ministry all of our members are involved in Salesian works at a variety of locations in the province, often including overseas.

Our response and prevention strategies — —

The CHAIR — Father Chambers, you are reading from the document that you have given to us?

Fr CHAMBERS — Or a version of that.

The CHAIR — A version of that?

Fr CHAMBERS — Yes, a shorter version of that.

The CHAIR — Thank you, because I note there are quite a number of pages to that document, which we have on record. But please continue.

Fr CHAMBERS — The first complaint of abuse of children of which we are aware emerged in 1986. As Towards Healing had not yet been established, there were no formal procedures for responding to such a complaint. The then provincial, Father Frank Bertagnolli, personally investigated the claim and met with families who may have been affected. Since then a range of strategies have been developed and actioned to ensure that the wrongs of the past are not repeated in the future, including full implementation of the Towards Healing policy and procedures when they came into effect in 1997.

I wish to publicly acknowledge the efforts of those Salesian provincials who have preceded me, especially from the late 1980s to 2011, to support victims, respond to and eradicate the abuse of minors, and bring perpetrators to justice. In particular, I note the contribution of Father Ian Murdoch, who was provincial from 2000 to 2005. He went to an early death in 2009 at the age of 60 largely because of the stresses arising from his efforts to

address the issue of sexual abuse within our province, and to respond compassionately and effectively to victims.

Under my leadership and that of Father Frank Moloney and my predecessors, the Salesians have cooperated fully with law enforcement and legal authorities in bringing accused members to justice. The number of Salesians who have been publicly arrested, tried, convicted and imprisoned clearly attests to this. We have also given the Victorian parliamentary inquiry our full support and cooperation and have done everything that the inquiry has asked of us. Of course, we will adopt the same honest and transparent engagement with the national royal commission.

The Salesian family has a clear commitment to formal child protection policies to guide all of its activities. In February 2011, the Australian Salesian Mission Overseas Aid Fund established a formal child protection policy for all of its participants and recipients. At its recent provincial chapter, the Salesian province unanimously resolved that the:

... provincial and his council develop a child protection policy for the province and all of its communities, works and activities.

As part of the commitments in Towards Healing to develop and implement strategies to prevent future abuse, our international formation guidelines include an emphasis on a comprehensive approach to human development, including healthy celibate living, respect for all, and the appropriate exercise of power. Here in Australia psychological testing is a consistent part of the admission process. The Salesian province is continually reviewing and enhancing the ongoing education and formation of its members in the proper care of young people and the avoidance of any form of abuse of minors in the future. In this regard, it has again addressed the issue of emotional and affective maturity with its young priests in 2012. Additionally, its novices and young seminarians based in Fiji continue to study a comprehensive program dealing with human sexuality, sexual maturity and responsibility, and the management of addictive behaviour at the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva.

An indication of the fact that victims continue to be our first priority is our prompt and positive response to a request to change the title of our news website from Salesian News Australia Pacific — SNAP to avoid confusion with the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, which has the same acronym.

The CHAIR — Father Chambers, I am afraid I am going to have to stop you there.

Fr CHAMBERS — Can I just go straight to my short conclusion?

The CHAIR — I have given you that opportunity.

Fr CHAMBERS — It is just a short one at the end.

The CHAIR — Just very quickly, thank you.

Fr CHAMBERS — Finally, in a few sentences. The sexual abuse of children is and always will be diametrically opposed to the very reason for our existence as a Catholic religious congregation founded by St John Bosco to care for poor and abandoned youth. We deeply regret and sincerely apologise for the harm and injury that has been done to the young people who have been placed under our care and protection. We will continue to support victims and to work with authorities to ensure that the abusers in our ranks are brought to justice. We will also continue to explore and implement measures to ensure that the abuse of minors in any of our institutions or activities never occurs again.

We thank you all for the opportunity to speak with you today.

The CHAIR — Thank you. On behalf of the committee we thank you both very much for your attendance in this part of the public hearing. We will now move to an in camera session due to current court proceedings. I ask members of the public gallery to leave the room.

Fr CHAMBERS — Thanks very much.