

# TRANSCRIPT

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 25 March 2013

#### Members

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#### Witness

Ms S. Clark.

**The CHAIR** — On behalf of the committee I welcome Ms Sandra Clark. Thank you for your willingness to appear before this hearing. I would like to explain that 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; however, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. If your evidence contains adverse comments or allegations about any individuals, I request that you do not refer to the name or names of any individuals. If you do make an adverse reflection about a person and name them, I will suppress that evidence.

This hearing today is being recorded, and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript. Following your presentation committee members will ask questions relating to the evidence you are going to provide to us this afternoon. Please commence when you are ready.

**Ms CLARK** — Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to speak about this, to my mind, tragic topic. I have put my documents in point form, because otherwise I may get off the track and then I think I will have lost the point. Please ask me any questions you would like to. I have supporting documentation that may be helpful, and I have put it forward, so you will all get some documents. Where do I start? If I get a little bit upset, just bear with me. Take no notice.

**The CHAIR** — You take your time, Sandra. It is quite all right.

**Ms CLARK** — My son — I only have one son. I did not want to make a fool of myself. I rehearsed this so well, and now look what has happened. I am terribly sorry. Please accept my apologies.

**The CHAIR** — Just take a minute.

**Ms CLARK** — All right. I will come good in a minute. Do not worry. My son started at Yea Primary School. I realise we are not to use names. My son was a little bit different, and I did not understand that some children were different. In that respect, Stuart was terribly bullied — he had a terrible time — so it was decided that he would go to Sacred Heart Parish Primary School at Yea. I made inquiries, and they were happy to have my son there.

He was to start on the Monday, and we had a phone call to say that we were invited to a function on the Saturday prior to our child starting at the school. We went up there — it was being held at the Sacred Heart primary school — and the school principal said that our son would be the type of child who they would like to be there, and that was pretty good. I must make sure. I had never met this priest and never seen him, but I had occasionally heard a couple of things about him, and it was always very glowing. We were standing there, and then this man made a grand entrance. People started talking about this man, who turned out to be the priest. He came over to the school principal and said hello — I can use my name, can't I? — and then the school principal said, 'These are the parents of the boy who's going to start on Monday'.

To this moment, I truly do not know what happened. I just looked at that man, and it just fell out of my mouth. I could not stop. I said to him, 'You're not to come near my child, you're to have nothing to do with my child and my child is never to be near you by himself'. This man absolutely threw the most shocking tantrum that you have ever seen, and of course we were asked to leave. We went out to the ute, and my husband turned to me and said, 'Why have you said this?' I said, 'I don't know'. I said, 'It's just fallen out of my mouth'. He turned to our child and said, 'Well, you won't be going there'. I turned to my child and said, 'Don't worry; we'll sort something out'.

We went home, and that evening at about 7.30 there was a phone call from the school principal, who said, 'We still want the boy to come on Monday'. They were pretty desperate for students too. She just said in passing, 'We've never seen this priest behave like this. We're shocked at what's happened'. Up until that moment apparently he had been very squeaky clean, very pleasant and a leading light. Anyway, off went our child to the school, and I just had a gut feeling. I do not know, but people have this feeling at times about something.

I tried to get to the school as much as possible, not that I was welcomed, but I can be persistent, especially where your offspring is concerned. One day I was asked to take the children to the Yea library, and they all ran amok, except one little boy. He walked beside me and started talking to me about books, and I have a great love of books myself. I adore books. I realised this little boy was talking about very interesting books for a child to have read and understood the context. When I went back to the school I said, 'Look, I couldn't take the children

again. They ran amok'. I then said, 'There was one little boy who is really clever and really smart, and he loves books'. The school principal said to me, 'No, he's backward' — there is a reason I am saying this; you will see what happened to these children — and I said, 'No, I beg to disagree on that point'. Anyway, I let it slide. It was just small talk.

I always cultivated that we must always speak clearly and speak about what takes place in our lives, which I am glad I did. A few weeks later my child said to me, 'That little boy who you really liked' — obviously I had spoken about him because of the common thread of the books — 'is not at the school anymore'. I said, 'Really? What's happened?', and he said, 'I don't know'.

I had another feeling. First off I got out the school photo, which I have here, because I did not know the boy's name. I looked at the photo for the child to get the name, and the boy was there. I looked in the phone book and there was a family by that name over at Kinglake. I rang up the number and said, 'My name's Sandra Clark, and I'm interested in why your boy isn't at school anymore. My son has told me, and please ask that he knows my son'. One has to give some sort of reference because anyone can make a phone call. I did not hear anything back.

This person has put in a written submission, which I have given to you today. She has done that, but she does not feel capable of coming here. Quite a few days later, the phone rang and a voice said her name and said, 'Is that you, Sandra?', and I said yes. She said, 'Would you come down to the Yea hospital?' I cannot tell you — she would probably remember — but it was either 5.00 or 5.30, and she said, 'The side door of the hospital will be open, and just come straight in', and I said yes. I wanted to know what was going on.

I went down there, and the side door was open, and I went in. This was 5.30 in the morning, not in the evening. It turned out that she worked night shift as a nursing sister. I went in and said hello, and this woman started to cry. I said, 'My goodness, what's going on here?' It was so odd. She said, 'I'm very upset', and I said, 'I can see that'. I said, 'What's happened to your little boy?', and she said, 'He's gone'. I said, 'He's gone?'. Also please remember that the school principal said this little boy was backward, not very clever, right? She did not really know what had happened, but something to do with this priest, right? So this just sort of reinforced a bit. In the Yea district, it is a very, very close, narrow-minded place. It truly is. That was all right, so I said, 'Oh, well, we'll sort something out'. I asked my husband, who was brought up Roman Catholic. Because when I was getting up to the school all the time, the priest was perpetually — and as you will see in the school photo, he is actually down as a class teacher, and he is not. And these are just parents that they bring in to make it look hunky-dory. He is down there, which you can witness, as 'Teacher'. He is a blasted priest.

I said to my husband, 'Is it normal?', because he was brought up in the Catholic religious education system. I said, 'Is it normal for the priest to be in the schoolyard and in the classroom all the time?', and he said, 'No. Then I said to my husband, 'Would you go into' — I found out where the administration of the Roman Catholic organisation was; it was behind St Patrick's Cathedral, but I do not know if they still are there. He went there, and what happened was he came back and he said that the chap he saw said, 'Oh, we've put him up at Yea because we know no-one will question his behaviour'. We are referring to the priest. And I go, 'Really?'. So this has really got me going a little bit now.

Then I started poking around a bit, and I rang Assumption College, because that is just over at Kilmore. I got the headmaster. I was just making a little bit of small talk, you know, because once you make these statements you have got to be able to carry them out and substantiate them. Anyway, we were talking away a little bit, and then he said to me, 'What school does he go to?'. I said, 'He is attending Sacred Heart at Yea' and the chap said to me, 'Remove him immediately'. I said, 'All right'. I went down in the ute, said to Stuart, to my child, 'Gather up your things, you are coming home'.

And that is what I did. So we go home. Then I really started to get into — a fair bit of problems started happening then because by now I am very suspicious? I started talking around and I rang up the scouting organisation, because I found out he was a chaplain for them, and I said, 'That person is a very unsuitable person to be a scouting chaplain', and the chap was sort of amazed to get this phone call. But I do have to say to their credit, when all of this came to the fore and everything started to come to the surface, out of everyone who I contacted — and I contacted a lot of people trying to find out information about this person — the scouting organisation was the only organisation that rang me up and said, 'Mrs Clark, thank you for what you did'. I said, 'It must have been very strange to have some woman ring up', and the chap said, 'Yes, it was', but he said,

'but we did listen to what you said', and I said, 'Well, I meant what I said'. So they did acknowledge me, and I was glad of that.

So I am trying to get all this information, and then I started getting great problems with the Yea police — terrible problems. I come from a highly respected family; actually three members of my family have sat in Parliament and represented the state. One goes back a long way. He was actually the person — I am mad on Australian history — who represented the men in the Eureka Stockade court case, and he got them off. Then a great uncle sat in Parliament here, and then my grandfather sat in Parliament here as well. I am only saying that because you have to understand my background, and how we were brought up. Because what happened was I had the most dreadful, dreadful slurs, and the most dreadful things, said about me. Every person except one person in Yea and surrounding districts absolutely cannot stand me to this moment. To this moment they sincerely believe I am that most terrible woman who got the priest in jail and it is all my fault and there is a major, major miscarriage of justice that has taken place against the priest, and that she is just the terrible troublemaker.

The person in charge at the Yea police station — and still could, if he could — caused so much and made so much terrible assertions against me, had me on charges, because all they were trying to do, and I must explain this, the charges were dismissed but it cost a great deal of money. My husband became quite, quite unwell from all of this, and still has never really recovered from this episode. He sort of does not really forgive me for what took place, because I think he would have taken the line, at least, you know of, 'Just let it run across'. I am not that type of person. I come from where injustices — you must stand up, because if you do not we have anarchy, and it is appalling. We live in a civilised situation, hopefully. But getting back to what I am saying about the Yea policemen, one in particular, is that these men manipulate themselves and are cunning and devious. I am talking about the priest, and I can only speak about this one person. They have manipulated themselves into positions of high respectability, if that sounds the right terminology, so that if anyone questions them — we will say, how can I say this in a nice way? — the people who are not in that section of the community, if they dare speak out, are certainly discredited. They underestimated me or underestimated my background, because I still was capable and understood that I could speak out, even though terrible slurs and terrible things were done to me. Because all they want to do is keep quiet, and anyone who has the slightest opposition, because at that time when I said to him, 'Don't go near my child', that Saturday afternoon, he was so guilty. But we did not know; we did not know. All he had to say was 'Oh, Mrs Clark, I respect your wishes. I would not dream of it'. But because he was so guilty and I hit a raw nerve, he behaved that way and that just brought it all out in the open. If I am getting off the subject, please bear with me.

This is what happened with Yea police. Stuart, my son, is no longer attending Sacred Heart. We are sitting on the veranda at home one morning; it was pretty early. You have to remember this has all happened quite a while ago. The lay of the land means you can see what is happening. I see this small convoy of cars coming down. This was probably at 7 o'clock or half past 7 in the morning. I was not even dressed; we were just sitting in the sunshine on the veranda. I said to my son, 'Go inside and do not come out. It doesn't matter what happens; do not come out'.

I think there were two police cars. Unfortunately I cannot find the business card from the government welfare department; I have put it somewhere for safekeeping. That is the same with the priest's business card, but I have got a copy. I am not off the subject; please bear with me. This priest turned out to be the police chaplain for Victoria. This is what happened to me. I was told by two other women — around my district there are quite poor people because the government has a policy to put them out in these places — that the priest went to them, they were dead opposite to me, and said, 'Look, I'm police chaplain, trust me. Give me your child. Your child is safe with me'. Then I was standing in the schoolyard and he came up to me, showed me that card and said, 'I can do anything to you'. At that stage I did not understand what that meant. I just laughed and walked away because, I mean, who cares? Down the track I realised how dreadful and insidious that all became.

That morning, when we were there, people came in those came. They said they had come to collect Stuart, my son, because I am an unfit mother. They had to find anything to discredit me. Then I would not be worthy of speaking out or being taken notice of. I said, 'No'. And they said, 'We've come to see all these holes in the walls'. I will never forget that. To tell you the truth I actually have quite a nice home. I was being accused of having all these holes in the walls and everything and told, 'We've come to inspect this'. I said, 'No'. I had enough sense because when something is terribly important it appears on the outside that I become quite cold and unfeeling. I said, 'You're not to come onto the veranda; you're to stay on the ground'. Then I said, 'I'm

going to seek legal advice'. I have a barrister. I had enough sense to think, 'What am I going to do about this?' They said they were coming to take him. It turned out that the priest actually wanted my child; they were going to put my child into the care of the priest.

I am poking around trying to find things out. People are telling me things and saying, 'But don't quote me; don't say a word'. They were all nervy and everything. This is being done to me. I went in to the phone. It is the only time in my life when I have wanted curtains on my house; I do not have curtains on my windows at all. I rang up the barrister and I said, 'Look, it's me, Sandra, here. I've got these people here and they want to take my son'. The barrister knew my husband and son and he said, 'What's going on?'. I said, 'The Yea police are here. What am I going to do?'. I am whispering into the phone because they are so close to where the phone is. He said, 'Just tell them to go back to the Yea police station and I will ring them there and I'll ring you back'.

I went out and I said, 'My legal advice is that you are to go back to the Yea police station and wait for a call'. I am now a little bit more on steady ground. And they did that; they turned around and got in their cars. As they were going I called out to the people from the government and I said, 'I'd like a business card from you', and one of them flicked a card onto the veranda. Anyway I wait for the call. The call comes and the barrister said to me, 'What's happening? The arrangement is, Sandra, that your son is to be put into the care of the barrister for 10 days. There's going to be a court case and it will be decided who has the care of your child'. I said 'Truly?'. He said, 'Yes, but I have the authority to look after your child now so I am giving him back to you'. I said, 'Thank you very much. That's very good of you. I'm glad'.

We then have to rush around and get this court case on the go to prove that I am not an unfit mother and that I am responsible. I spoke to so many people. Just as an example of how they try to work themselves into positions of acceptance by other people, here is a card from the Murrindindi Shire Council and its mayor at the time. I spoke to him about the priest and I said, 'It's appalling'. He would not listen. He protected the priest. Do not just think I rocked into the shire offices and just grabbed a few council cards. No. Look, it is signed; he signed it for me. Here I am; I have spoken to him. With my compliments, you will have copies of all of that — —

**The CHAIR** — Sandra, sorry to interrupt you. Have you given the secretariat additional information?

**Ms CLARK** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — I know I have just cut into your train of thought, but I know committee members want to ask you questions. Can you finish that point?

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, I will be quick. I just wanted to talk about when he was given the Australia Day award. All these documents are here. Up to this moment I have agitated and driven them mad trying to get details of the award. I have copies of the criteria for what one has to do to get this award. Here are all the letters. They will not withdraw the award from him.

**The CHAIR** — This is from the mayor?

**Ms CLARK** — The priest.

**The CHAIR** — The priest, I beg your pardon.

**Ms CLARK** — Because again, he is an upstanding citizen who is accepted by what we say is the go. All these documents are here. I have given you all the newspaper articles — —

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Ms CLARK** — And copies of all the appeals. I spoke to \*Peter O'Callaghan so many times about that priest that in the end we were on Christian name terms. I kept wanting to know what they were going to do about him, blah, blah, blah.

The mayor was supposed to be a worthy person. He used to drive the school bus. When I would go to get Stuart, the children would be screaming out of the window. This is how little respect is shown to people because they tried to keep these rumours going. Stuart had to do a drawing of the house, and they tried to say that I interfered with my child. All of this went on. The children on the school bus, with that person driving it — and I may be

going to use an word that is offensive to some, and not to others — used to hang out the windows and out of the door of the bus screaming, ‘You fuck your mother, you fuck your mother’ and carrying on and on, and that man just sat there laughing all the time. Stuart said, ‘The children say that to me in the school ground’. That all has to come from adults. Stuart said, ‘What are they talking about?’, and I had to explain to him what that word meant. He had no comprehension of it. The first thing he said to me was, ‘We don’t do that’, and I said, ‘Of course not, Stuart’. They will try and twist anything to discredit someone who speaks against them.

**The CHAIR** — Sandra, could we perhaps ask some questions?

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, of course. But could I just finish?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Ms CLARK** — When I was poking around trying to get evidence against this man, my husband’s uncle — —

**The CHAIR** — You are referring to Father Terence Pidoto?

**Ms CLARK** — Pardon?

**The CHAIR** — Father Terence Pidoto is the accused priest.

**Ms CLARK** — That is who I am speaking about, yes, indeed. My husband’s uncle was a leading light at the Catholic organisation at Croydon. He knew all about this man, and when my husband asked his uncle to support us or to give us some evidence, anything, because it was horrific what was happening to me and to Stuart, my husband’s uncle sided with the priest. Who cares about whom when it comes down to it?

My child never had a friend. He has never been invited to a birthday party. He has never been swimming. He has never played cricket. He has never played football. Nothing in Yea, because the children would have killed him because of the mother, which is me, who went out because little boys used to come up to me and say — and I was naive in the early days — and the boys, only boys, would come up to me and as individual children say, ‘We have been up to Father Terry’s house’. Sometimes people speak to me; I am not quite sure why, but they do confide in me at times. The boys would say, ‘I have been over to Father Terry’s house, but I’m not allowed to say I’ve been there’. And in my naivety, and I feel so guilty about this but I was naive, I would say, ‘Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t it good that the priest takes an interest in you?’ because we judge on our standards. How else do we judge?

I will not take up any more of your time, but it has been absolutely shocking. As I said, right to this moment I have only one what I would call acquaintance — a little bit better than an acquaintance — because I have been absolutely ostracised in the districts surrounding where I live even now. These men seem to have the hugest it is very hard to explain what over people. I am not sure if I am explaining all this clearly to you. If I am not, please bear with me, because I rehearsed what I was going to say to you all, but it has not quite worked out. I hope I have not made a mug of myself.

**The CHAIR** — You have not at all, Sandra. In fact you have articulated very clearly and — —

**Ms CLARK** — Excuse me, I am sorry for cutting you off — —

**The CHAIR** — No, that is okay.

**Ms CLARK** — But I must speak to you. I never make a statement unless I can support it, because otherwise we can look like fools. But I have all this documentation, everything here to show. I have a card from the school principal, where she says that I had a bit of courage. At one stage they wired her up to try to get me to say something against the priest. She was so nervous, and all I am harping on about is that Stuart should be given books to read. It was the most bizarre of extremes just to totally discredit me, so that this person could keep going. The church is ruthless. I cannot tell you about the ruthlessness that has been displayed. If you waiver, you are gone, and I am not a waverer. I may look like jelly here, but just bear with me. Ask me whatever you want to ask me. I do not know.

**The CHAIR** — Sandra, you have — —

**Ms CLARK** — Please forgive me.

**The CHAIR** — Please do not apologise to us. Thank you very much for coming and telling us your story. You have described not only the effect on your son but also the effect on you — —

**Ms CLARK** — Up to this moment.

**The CHAIR** — I think that is really important.

**Ms CLARK** — Stuart is affected right up to this moment, and so is my husband.

**The CHAIR** — And you have described that very well, so thank you. But I will ask Mrs Coote to ask the first question.

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, sorry about that.

**Mrs COOTE** — Sandra, thank you very much indeed, and congratulations on your fortitude.

**Ms CLARK** — Thank you indeed, but you do waiver sometimes. But that is only in private. In public you put your best foot forward.

**Mrs COOTE** — You have done a fantastic job. It is not easy to come to see us.

**Ms CLARK** — No.

**Mrs COOTE** — But we are very appreciate of you being able to share — —

**Ms CLARK** — Thank you. I am glad that I came now. I was worried.

**Mrs COOTE** — Very much so. Could I just ask a question about the little boy who disappeared who liked to read the books? Did his mother say to you that he had been abused by Pidoto? What did she say?

**Ms CLARK** — It all is rather a mystery, but I have to say what happened was the night before — —

The court case is the most important part. Do you know what happened? All this expense, barrister, you have got no idea. You will see in correspondence from there where Stuart went to Ruyton. I do not know if you know Ruyton down in Kew. Stuart was going there. I know it is only for girls, but he was going there and they were running a program, because my child is a little bit different to others, in that — you do not want to sound boastful or anything — he is clever, let me just put it that way.

Also the other important point I forgot to say was why the school principal was discrediting the other little boy as being backward; he was a smart little boy too. And with Stuart they tried to say that he was backward, and you will see reports about what he was or is, and that.

Back to the court case. Do you know what happened? We geared up. I had the embarrassment of having to ask so many people to come as witnesses to support that I was not anything that I was not, because I prided myself on doing the very best as a mother. They did not turn up to Seymour. But the welfare people turned up; they were ready to take Stuart. And the other side never turned up. Can you imagine something as dreadful as that? We were standing there, and all I said to everyone was, 'We are just going to have the best cups of tea, cakes, we ever could have. Just what a relief'. What else could you do? They did not turn up. Could you imagine anything worse than that? So they made you as nervy as anything, because they had no evidence; they had nothing to support their case — nothing.

But if I had not stood up and done something, my son would have been removed from my care. And you do not know what else happens to other people. That truly is why I am here: because I cannot be the only person that this has happened to. Do you know what I mean? And I do want you, because I feel embarrassed — I cannot explain it — not embarrassed, but 'humiliated' is probably the better word. But people will not even serve me in some shops in Yea. They still think I am that wicked, wicked woman. Isn't it ridiculous? But anyway, sorry about that.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — I was just trying to get it straight in my mind, your son went to Sacred Heart School in 1992?

**Ms CLARK** — No, 1994.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — In 1994.

**Ms CLARK** — Yes.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — So how long — —

**Ms CLARK** — After I removed him — and you will see in the things here anyway — then he went to Seymour East Primary School, because he could not go back there. In the documents you will see where it says that Stuart had very negative things, when you read it. To this moment we really do not know what happened with the priest or what was said or what was done there.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — So just in terms of when he was at the Sacred Heart School and when you were concerned about the priest, I am trying to work out a bit of a chronological order. So you met him the first time and you were concerned about him.

**Ms CLARK** — On that Saturday.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Then in terms of when the principal knew, or when you rang up Assumption College, what is the order of how you tried to report that or complain that you were worried about the priest?

**Ms CLARK** — What happened was that my son was starting there on the Monday, and because of all these flattery, complimentary statements made about the priest, my husband said, ‘You’re just overreacting’, and so you have doubts already put in your mind. So I thought, ‘Maybe I am just being hypersensitive, protective, but what for?’ — because there were no grounds at that stage. But I was always suspicious. Then those little boys would come up and say that they had been over to priest’s house, and then I started thinking, I will make some inquiries’. Then I was thinking, ‘Where can I contact?’.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — So that is when you contacted Assumption College?

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, and then I contacted Assumption College after Stuart, my son, had been there for a while.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Whom did you speak to?

**Ms CLARK** — The headmaster. I spoke to the headmaster at Assumption College, and he said to me, ‘Remove him immediately’. So I just jumped in the ute and went down and said — —

**Ms HALFPENNY** — What did you ask him? Did you just say — —

**Ms CLARK** — I had to be careful what I said. I was making small talk about schooling and how Assumption College has a good reputation and, you know, down the track maybe he could attend that school and that. And then, because we were talking in these general terms and I was always hoping for something, he just said to me, ‘What school does he attend now?’. I said, ‘Sacred Hearts, Yea’, and he said, ‘Remove him immediately’. So I did. Then they started saying that I am an unfit mother and all of that.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — What brought you then to, say, ring up the scout leader? When did that happen?

**Ms CLARK** — Because I found out that he was the scout chaplain and I thought, ‘How can they have someone like that. I don’t know if they know enough’, and I probably didn’t have sufficient knowledge at that time either, but I did, and he did listen to me. As I said, he was the only person who contacted me.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Was that after the priest had been charged, do you mean, that he contacted you?

**Ms CLARK** — No, no, that was before, because the chap said, ‘You know’, and I said, ‘No, no’ and that; and he told me later that they did watch him after my phone call and that, and then things started to move a bit more quickly and that, so that was handy in that respect.



**Mr O'BRIEN** — Thank you, Sandra. I should place on the record that I think we spoke recently about a planning matter; is that correct?.

**Ms CLARK** — Correct, yes.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — On an unrelated matter.

**Ms CLARK** — Yes.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Just relation to Pidoto, it is very valuable that you have come forward and given your evidence, and it is much appreciated in the sense — —

**Ms CLARK** — I hope I have not wasted your time.

**The CHAIR** — Not at all.

**Ms CLARK** — I truly, and truly hope, and I truly I have not got off the subject — I truly hope that.

**The CHAIR** — It has been good.

**Ms CLARK** — Thank you indeed. Thank you for being kind.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — But what I am wanting to get to is —

**Ms CLARK** — Sorry.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — the reason it is extremely valuable for us in terms of the utility of your evidence is that he was actually convicted, so we are able to proceed on the basis of that conviction.

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, he was. I was determined that was going to happen if it killed me, really.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Yes. That conviction, according to Broken Rites, was on 18 July 2007, when he was found guilty by a jury on 11 charges involving four boys. What I wanted to ask you is: since that time, to your knowledge, has the local parish or the church made any steps to you to attempt to repair your reputation in the community?

**Ms CLARK** — Not one bit. You should not have asked me; it is a bit close to home.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Sorry, Sandra.

**Ms CLARK** — No, that is okay. Do not worry. I feel a mug. It is just so shocking, because I really did a fair bit, to tell you the truth. I am not skiting, but I did a fair bit to try to protect the children, and to have this displayed to me, to have this displayed to Stuart, who ended up with no childhood. He never got a friend until he was in year 9. He rang me up one night and said he had a friend when he started at Melbourne high. I said, 'I am so glad you got a friend', because every year Stuart used to say to me that all he wanted in life was one friend — just one friend. To be a child and not have a friend or a social life is shocking. Anyway he fired on at Melbourne high; they really liked him and he did a lot for the school as well. They were really happy to have him. He is in their books. And I used to say, 'One day, Stuart, you will be appreciated for what you are'. I used to cross my fingers, because I was thinking, 'Please, let it be'. It all turned out to be, and he has a very responsible position, which he would be very modest about, where he can help people — you would not believe it; he ends up being able to help people. It is unbelievable. I am so proud of him. He ends up being able to help people who are just unable to stand up and speak for themselves. Isn't that marvellous?

**The CHAIR** — It is.

**Ms CLARK** — I am so pleased! Here are all the articles, which I have given you copies of, about what happened with the priests and all that sort of stuff.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — I am sorry to have asked you that. I was just going to ask, what has happened to Pidoto's reputation in the community? Has the church published any — —

**Ms CLARK** — Sterling. I am glad you have asked me that question. The *Age* and the *Herald Sun* and all of these newspapers were doing articles all the time — every time something happened. I rang and spoke to the proprietor of the *Yea Chronicle* and the *Alexandra Standard*, and again there was this protection, this ring of absolute — I cannot tell you what it is. He has refused bluntly, right to this moment, to ever publish anything, and the people who live in my districts cannot afford in most cases to buy metropolitan newspapers or anything. So they take whatever is in the local papers as gospel. That man, that proprietor, refused point blank. He said, ‘I am not putting a thing in about him, because he is a good priest’ — ‘Father Terry this’, ‘Father Terry that’. I said, ‘I am hanging up. I cannot listen to you’.

**Mr O’BRIEN** — Just to clarify — was the police chaplain the same priest?

**Ms CLARK** — Yes.

**Mr O’BRIEN** — Pidoto was the police chaplain?

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, here it is.

**Mr O’BRIEN** — Could you show us that card?

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, indeed.

**The CHAIR** — Could you give that to us?

**Mr O’BRIEN** — That might raise a few questions that might need to be answered in themselves.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Sandra, for providing that to us.

**Mr O’BRIEN** — Police chaplain Father Terry Pidoto.

**Ms CLARK** — Yes, Sacred Heart’s.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Ms CLARK** — I have given you all copies.

**The CHAIR** — I know it has been difficult for you, but we very much appreciate you coming before us, telling your story and sharing those insights. It has been very important, and your evidence has been most helpful. Thank you again on behalf of the committee.

**Ms CLARK** — I would just like to say thank you very much, because it took a long time to come to this point, and it is outstanding to think that this has been offered to us. I know that many people, even if they cannot come and thank you, in their hearts they would be very grateful.

**The CHAIR** — We appreciate your time very much indeed.

**Witness withdrew.**