

**Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse  
Issues Paper 11 – Released 5 May 2016 - Catholic Church Final Hearing**

**Response by Paul Tobias, Principal, St Joseph's College Geelong  
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My name is Paul Francis Tobias and I have worked in the area of Catholic Education for the past forty years. Over that time I have worked as a teacher at Christian Brothers College St Kilda, 1978 -1984; Deputy Principal at St Joseph's Christian Brothers College Warrnambool, 1985 to 1990; Deputy Principal Emmanuel College Warrnambool, 1991 – 1994; Deputy Principal at St Joseph's College Geelong, 1995 – 1999 and Principal at St Joseph's College Geelong, 2000 – 2016.

I will retire at the conclusion of the 2016 school year. My career has been based in Catholic Secondary Colleges, but I served for several years as the Board Chair of Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School in East Warrnambool. My observations outlined below relate to structure, governance, culture, power and authority in the Catholic Church. I have no doubt that these systemic institutional factors have impacted on the occurrence of abuse, as well as the Church's capacity to respond appropriately. Many of the observations I am about to make in relation to the culture in our church, may have contributed to the current crisis.

In the year 2000, my first as Principal, I made a public apology for the abuse which had taken place at St Joseph's College Geelong in the preceding decades. I did so in the hope that some of the victims would have an opportunity to move forward, with the assistance of appropriate redress procedures. The response from the then Archbishop of Melbourne, Cardinal Pell, could best be described as muted. I think at the time an apology was not considered as an appropriate response. I subsequently met a number of victims and believing that the Church had the best interests of the victims at the forefront, referred many of them to "Towards Healing".

I have been incredibly disappointed to discover that at the same time I was meeting with victims, senior catholic clergy including the Archbishop were meeting with their legal representatives to develop strategies such as the Ellis defence which were designed to exhaust the financial and emotional resources of the victims. This fact alone provides an interesting insight into the structure, governance and culture of our church.

The Catholic Church operates on a hierarchical structure, which means that incredible power and authority resides with the clergy, Priests, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals and ultimately, the Pope.

During my time as Principal, Cardinal Pell has been an extraordinarily powerful and influential leader within the Australian Catholic Church. Even from Rome, he exerts in my opinion, significant authority and power over the direction of the Catholic Church in Australia, to the extent of maintaining the existing culture here. At the heart of our culture is too much power residing with too few people and not enough input from the laity (non- clerics) into key

decision making. I would also make the point that there are not enough females in genuine positions of power in our church.

Few genuine forums exist whereby people can express dissent or different points of view. Those who do express their views can expect to be penalised, isolated and have their careers impacted. The prevailing culture was adequately highlighted for me in Cardinal Pell's attack on former NSW Premier Christine Kenneally when she expressed a contrary view, reported in the Sunday Telegraph 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2011. "You're either one of us or you're not." That has been the prevailing culture which has been applied consistently over the past decades. The prevailing understanding therefore, is that the clerics in our church have the wisdom and the expectation of the rest of us, including those such as primary and secondary school principals, is to follow them rather than think for ourselves and provide authentic leadership.

The Catholic Church persists with antiquated governance models which are no longer appropriate, rather than distribute power appropriately. The governance of many Catholic primary and secondary schools needs urgent review. In the case of primary schools, the local Catholic Priest is often the Canonical Administrator. This is a role unsuited to many Parish Priests, due to their other work commitments, lack of interest or expertise in education, lack of understanding in relation to modern work place practices etc. It can also mean that Principals are pressured into positions and situations which they know to be inappropriate, but since they are often relying on this Canonical Administrator for their current and potentially future employment, they are hopelessly compromised.

This is less likely to be a problem in Catholic secondary schools, but we still have a situation whereby the pastoral care of students can be compromised because of a position taken by Catholic Bishops. The current lack of clear guidelines and curriculum to negate the impact of homophobic bullying in the Archdiocesan schools of Melbourne is a clear case in point. As principals, we are frequently told that we are important components of the leadership of the Catholic Church. However, secondary principals quickly come to realise that their future careers, like those of their primary colleagues, rest with appropriate recommendations from clergy and often ultimately, the approval of the Archbishop.

I would describe the relationship between Catholic secondary principals and the clerical hierarchy, at best, as immature. The Archbishop of Melbourne will, for instance, determine who is and is not an appropriate speaker for our annual Principals' conference. That lack of maturity of relationship makes it very difficult to conduct genuine dialogue around pastoral and curriculum initiatives impacting on our students and their families. The only effective link

between the schools and the Bishops is the Catholic Education Offices, primarily through their respective Directors.

The right of the Bishop to appoint whoever he wishes to the position of the Director of Catholic Education, is apparently enshrined in Canon law. It has certainly been the case that in some instances, this appointment has been made without advertisement or interview. This practice does not represent sound governance principles. The cultural implications of such an appointment are obvious. The lack of transparency can provide impetus for that director to make further appointments into senior positions, with a similar lack of process, and establishes a mutual relationship between the director and the Bishop, which is more likely to breed secrecy than transparency.

I suspect also that Bishops appoint those who, for the most part, tell them what they want to hear, rather than challenge them, especially around matters such as sexual abuse. The end result is that issues are glossed over rather than dealt with, in an honest and transparent manner. Directors in turn can, in the allocation of resources, promote certain causes and largely ignore others. I commenced writing to the Director of Catholic Education in the Melbourne Archdiocese in 2004 in relation to the lack of any sanctioned program to deal with homophobic bullying in Catholic Secondary Schools. This issue has consistently been ignored over the years. Principals like myself, who express a view in relation to the pastoral needs of young people in their care, risk suffering the cultural consequences implicit in the statement "you are either one of us or you are not."

There are many aspects of the relationships between Catholic school Principals and the Catholic Church hierarchy which need to develop and change. The current power imbalance is unsustainable and inappropriate. The evidence before the commission would indicate that Catholic primary and secondary schools have been prolific providers of the victims of clerical sexual abuse. It is interesting to note that, as a group, Catholic primary and secondary principals, who are responsible for the pastoral care of all children in their schools, have been largely silent throughout this entire crisis. This silence does not indicate a lack of conviction but to me indicates a culture whereby those who are outspoken can expect the consequences.

It is not my intention to lay blame with any particular individual in relation to any of the observations I have made. I have worked in the sector for the last forty years and have loved the work I have undertaken and the interactions I have had with those in my respective schools. To some extent, we are all part of the culture and in hindsight, I would act and react in different ways, given what we now know. Each of us who work in the sector, both cleric and lay, need to be reflective about what has been uncovered and what role we might have

played in promoting and maintaining a culture where this level of abuse and cover up was possible.

I am not in a position to draw conclusions around the impact of celibacy in relation to the extent of clerical child sexual abuse. I would, however, make the observation that the fact that clergy are not permitted to marry and to father children, to some extent explains why many of them have been found to be so lacking in empathy and compassion in their dealings with the victims of sexual abuse and their families.

My greatest fear, in terms of the work of the Royal Commission, is that some Bishops may have already concluded that because of the widespread nature of abuse, across a variety of religious groups and other entities, the Catholic Church does not need to review its structure, governance and culture. If as a Church, we fail to embrace the opportunity presented, we will risk repeating the mistakes of the past.