

## **Submission to the investigation by the Royal Commission into the Response of the Catholic Church to allegations and instances of Child Sexual Abuse – 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2016**

This submission to the Royal Commission focusses on one issue raised in the Commission's recently released Issues Paper 11 and that is the question of the extent to which factors operating in society as a whole have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and to the Church's institutional response to this abuse.

Clearly organizations providing care for children are responsible for the nature of their care. The sexual abuse of children whilst they were in care under the auspices of the Catholic Church ought never to have occurred. It is an abomination and a disgrace that lasting and irreparable damage has been caused to many innocent children and young people, and that this has had a shattering impact on the lives of many victims. It is also appalling that the Church's practices, e.g. in dealing with rumours and complaints about the alleged criminal conduct of priests or religious, served to protect offenders from police investigation of sexual assault and allowed perpetrators to continue their activities with devastating effects.

The failings of individuals who committed crimes against children and the failings and dereliction of responsible individuals within the authority structures of the Church must be acknowledged, however, information provided to the Royal Commission would suggest that these failings are not unique to the Catholic Church. Similar systemic issues have emerged within Scouts Australia, the Hunter Aboriginal Children's Service, the YMCA, Anglican Dioceses, the Salvation Army, the Parramatta Training School for Girls, the Institution for Girls in Hay, the Retta Dixon Home in the Northern Territory and Swimming Australia. These systemic issues suggest that our focus as a community ought to be on offenders and on the features of the various institutional bodies that have enabled or failed to prevent offences occurring.

As a publication of the Australian Institute of Criminology indicates, there are a number of varied offending profiles that characterise child sex offenders.<sup>1</sup> Richards notes that gaining an understanding of the nuances of the offender population is critical if children are to be protected from sexual abuse. Other research suggests that the role of opportunity in child sexual abuse should be given serious attention, including offending that occurs within church settings.<sup>2</sup> However, the relationship between opportunity and offending sexually against children is a complex one. For example, it is clear that although women have far more opportunities than men to abuse children, it is in fact men who sexually abuse children far more frequently than do women.<sup>3</sup> Some child sex offenders go to great lengths to gain access to numbers of children to abuse and in some cases, even choose their employment based on this.<sup>4</sup> Sullivan and Beech's

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<sup>1</sup> Richards, K. 2011. "Misperceptions about child sex offenders: Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice", No.429; ISSN 1836-2206, The Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, ACT. Accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2016. <http://aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/421-440/tandi429.html>

<sup>2</sup> Wortley R & Smallbone S 2006. Applying situational principles to sexual offenses against children, in Wortley R & Smallbone S (eds.), *Situational prevention of child sexual abuse*. Crime Prevention Series 19. Monsey: Criminal Justice Press: 7–35; Parkinson P. 2000. The problem of child sexual abuse in church communities, in Queensland Crime Commission and Queensland Police Service (eds.) *Project AXIS: Child sexual abuse in Queensland: Selected research papers*. Brisbane: Queensland Crime Commission. <http://www.cmc.qld.gov.au/data/portal/00000005/content/95548001141363318459.pdf>: 61–74

<sup>3</sup> Abel G & Harlow N 2001. *The stop child molestation book: What ordinary people can do in their everyday lives to save three million children*. Bloomington: Xlibris

<sup>4</sup> Sullivan J & Beech A 2004. A comparative study of demographic data relating to intra- and extra-familial child sexual abusers and professional perpetrators. *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 10(1): 39–50

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2004 study of 41 professional perpetrators (those who ‘use the institutions or organizations within which they work to target and abuse children’) found that 15% chose their occupation (e.g. in the clergy, teaching, or child care) exclusively so they could sexually abuse children and a further 41.5% admitted that this was part of their motivation.<sup>5</sup>

My point in drawing attention to the nature of the offender population is to emphasize that, while institutions such as the Church, the Scouts, and the Salvation Army have provided contexts within which opportunities arise for those motivated to offend against children, this problem is not unique to the Catholic Church. Indeed, online environments are increasingly providing just such opportunities. More specifically in relation to the Church, my point is that there is no *causal* link between the moral praxis and normative beliefs of the Church and the fact that a significant number of priests have been child abusers. Consequently, our focus ought to be on the ways in which institutions such as the Church, put risk prevention strategies in place to enable them to be more likely to identify potential offenders. The pervasiveness of this kind of offending demands that resources continue to be devoted to identifying offender profiles and focusing on providing support for victims so as to reduce the potential for victimization; for example by empowering children to identify and act upon feelings of discomfort and ensuring that children have reliable support available. At the same time institutions must militate against the employment of prospective offenders and foil opportunities that potential offenders may have for interaction with children and young people.

The scourge of institutional sexual abuse within the Church has undermined the Church’s good work, its capacity to constructively challenge societal values and practices, and its ability to contribute to the fabric of social life. While hostile reactions to the Church and revulsion at the sexual vice and criminal activity of Catholic priests and religious are understandable and expected and the effects of this activity will no doubt be present for generations, the question of the Church’s broader role in communities and in the world ought not be ignored. This reflection applies equally to the value of the work of other institutions who have discovered offenders among their employees or affiliates. I am among those observers who would wish that the Royal Commission, in addition to fulfilling its obligations toward victims, also remembers that the Church, as the form of Christ’s presence in the world, has done much in relation to its call to the service of others, in education, in healthcare, in the context of social justice programs and in its liturgical and pastoral ministry.

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<sup>5</sup> Sullivan J & Beech, *ibid.*, p. 39.