

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD ABUSE

## ISSUES PAPER 11 - CATHOLIC CHURCH FINAL HEARING RESPONSE FROM PRACTICING CATHOLIC PARENTS

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“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Aristotle

### **Introduction**

We make this submission as two practising Catholic mothers, one with 6 and the other with 7 children. Socially we are part of a greater group of 25 Catholic families, mostly based in Sydney, who have been meeting every Wednesday and on weekends for the past 10 years. As a group we are all active practising Catholics, each family on their first marriage, with an average of 5 children per family. It is our faith that binds us.

Though the institution of the Church in its human frailty may fail, our faith will prevail: The supernatural aspect of our faith surpasses all human error.

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A minority of individuals within the Church have failed many, but, by this very fact many individuals within the Church have not. Many of us have come through a lifetime in the Catholic Church without having been individually confronted by this issue.

We condemn the heinous crimes presented at the Royal Commission and the betrayal of trust exercised by these nefarious priests and bishops. We sympathise with the victims, their parents and families and can't imagine the horror they have had to endure.

But we haven't abandoned our faith based on the failure of these dysfunctional and maladjusted individuals.

Some teachers and doctors are guilty of the same crimes against children. But we still believe in good teachers and doctors. Likewise, we believe in good Catholic clergy and *know* good priests and bishops within the Catholic Church in Australia and good young men who are still hearing the supernatural call, embarking on the priestly journey, with their eyes wide open.

We believe in our Church.

Below, we individually address those issues, relevant to our status in the Church, which contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions or affected the institutional response to this abuse:

### **1. b. The Catholic Church's structure and governance, including the role of the Vatican**

We have confidence in the structure of the Church's hierarchy. We know that if our priest is in error we can appeal to his bishop and if that bishop does not listen we can take the matter further up the chain of command, all the way to the Vatican, for consideration and action.

Things have changed within the Church since these crimes have come to light. The Pope has expressed Zero tolerance for "members of the Church who sexually violate children." (<http://time.com/116989/pope-zero-tolerance-sex-abuse-policy/>; accessed 11 July 2016)

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Unlike other faiths, the Catholic Church has one principal overseer of the Church, the Pope, providing unity of faith, consistency in doctrine and dogma and the interpretation of sacred texts; providing two thousand years of unchanging objective truth.

### **f. Mandatory celibacy**

As Catholics, all of us, unless married, are called to celibacy, not just the Catholic clergy.

Our Catholic priests know that celibacy is part of the priestly vocation. Religious sisters choose the same path. If they do not feel that they are able to cope with celibacy, then clearly they are not called to the priestly vocation. Many have left the priesthood and pursued the vocation of marriage.

We understand that the Church has now imposed a rigorous process for the discernment of candidates for this role, including employing top psychologists trained in identifying the signs of potential disordered behaviour.

### **I. Factors operating in society as a whole**

Our society is oversaturated with sexual imagery - our freedoms as parents are compromised. The beginning of this saturation dates back to the Sexual Revolution in the 1960's, which brought about the perceived new found, freedoms of the sexual, cultural revolution . This has removed the conjugal act from being between one man and woman, freely bound in the unifying bond of marriage, resulting in the reproduction of children and the continuation of the human species to now include the non life giving, recreational, sexual activity devoid of any responsibility for the harm it may bring to individuals, especially children and the wider society.

We are confronted by sexualised images everywhere we go: shopping centre windows, backs of buses as we drive, billboards, magazines in the supermarket and petrol stations, junk mail delivered direct to our letterbox - women and men in various states of undress, nudity and sexualised poses. Consequently we are constantly seeking to protect the eyes and the ears of our innocent children wherever we go. In our role as parents we are

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anxious and guarded and extremely cautious about where we take our children, who we leave our children with and under what circumstances.

The need for parental vigilance is not a problem unique to the Catholic Church.

However, we feel immensely unsupported by most authorities within Australia. When we seek to have this proliferation of sexualised material in the public domain addressed we are constantly ignored. Our appeals to the Advertising Standards Board fall on deaf ears. Our pleas to individual politicians and Ministers go unanswered.

The most confronting recent development is the introduction of the Safe Schools Program by the Federal and State Education Ministers into Australian schools without the knowledge or consent of parents.

<sup>i</sup> Alarming details of this include the revelation by George Christensen, Federal MP for Dawson, that Professor Gary Dowsett, from La Trobe University was involved in overseeing the development of the Safe Schools campaign. It is reported that Professor Dowsett is a "longtime advocate of intergenerational sex, otherwise known as paedophilia". (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-16/george-christensen-links-safe-schools-program-to-paedophilia/7252476>; accessed 11 July 2016)

To our knowledge, this revelation which has been presented many times in various media, has not been addressed or rebutted. Because of issues like this, it is difficult to believe that the government is serious about the protection of our children.

## **The execution of the Royal Commission**

One question that has arisen from the Royal Commission is why George Pell was pursued so relentlessly when others who held similar office at that time were not? We refer you to this article written by Andrew Bolt, referring to Gerard Henderson's consideration of the evidence presented at the Royal Commission:

[http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/comments/why\\_is\\_bongiorno\\_not\\_vilified\\_as\\_was\\_pell\\_why\\_is\\_pell\\_the\\_scapegoat/](http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/comments/why_is_bongiorno_not_vilified_as_was_pell_why_is_pell_the_scapegoat/) (accessed 11 July 2016)

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We support Cardinal Pell in his open and honest and cooperative response to the Royal Commission. It is a difficult issue: A horrendous situation. We respect George Pell for the way he has responded to and dealt with victims of such heinous crimes and their perpetrators.

## **In conclusion**

As parents our first responsibility is the care of our children. We cannot relinquish that obligation. We understand we must exercise excessive caution, remain well informed, always be alert. "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance."

Everyone is confronted by temptation. And we all have to make good choices.

We rely on the Church to give solid guidance and moral formation to their priests. We understand that as individuals priests will make choices that no leader or organisation can control. We believe the Catholic Church in Australia is deeply humbled by this experience and will enforce zero tolerance on this behaviour.

As we are very busy mothers of large families, we are unable to give our full consideration to more of the points raised in issue paper #11. However as practicing Catholics who are aware of the factors working against our children, we know society must be returned to a state where children's innocence and full protection from predatory behaviour is adhered to at all levels of society. Children are the most precious gift we give to the world.

What we want to see now is a greater responsibility taken by all Australian authorities to change the public landscape to make it a more child-friendly environment. We call on our politicians and judiciary and institutional leaders to collectively work towards the protection and innocence of all Australian children.

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