

Submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
Issues Paper 11 - Catholic Church Final Hearing

To the Commissioners:

I am a survivor of sexual abuse by a Catholic priest. I attended a private session with Commissioner Atkinson in late 2013. I would like my private session to be included as a confidential submission to this issues paper as well as the following comments. As well as a survivor of sexual abuse, I am also a counsellor for one of the Royal Commission Community Based Support Services. I am currently completing a Psychology Internship and will be a fully registered psychologist in 8 months' time. This has not been as easy road but I am proud of my journey from victim to survivor to counsellor and advocate for other survivors and I believe my personal experience allows me to connect with and understand clients on a deeper level than would otherwise be the case. The following comments have come from my personal experience as well as my professional work with clients but in no way do I claim to be an expert on theology, doctrine or the organisational practices of the Catholic Church. My responses to the following questions are in bold font.

1. To what extent have any of the following issues contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions or affected the institutional response to this abuse? The Royal Commission has identified these issues through case studies, submissions, private sessions, and a review of literature regarding child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions.
 - a. Catholic theology and doctrine insofar as it is relevant to the institutional response to child sexual abuse

I believe the old theology of God as an all-powerful figure to be obeyed and who judges and punishes people to be part of the issue, particularly then as the church doctrine states that the priest is God's representative on earth. I believe this implies that priests are also 'all powerful' and infallible and have the right to do what they like which then opens up individual priests to abuses of power.

- b. the Catholic Church's structure and governance, including the role of the Vatican

I believe the Catholic Church's structure is a patriarchal hierarchy disconnected from reality and social accountability and this is perhaps is a contributing factor as to why sexual abuse has occurred on such a large scale.

- c. issues related to the individual leadership of Catholic institutions
 - d. canon law
 - e. clericalism
 - f. mandatory celibacy

I think mandatory celibacy attracts sexually repressed males and then insulates them from normal healthy human relationships with partners and children and that this impacts their mental health and functioning.

- g. selection, screening, training and ongoing formation of candidates for the priesthood and religious life
 - h. support for and supervision of working priests and religious
 - i. the operation of the sacrament of confession

My sexual abuse occurred in during confession when I was 9 years old. I believe priests should not be allowed to have contact with children when there are no other adults to witness the interactions – glass doors or a window for children's confession are suggestions to alleviate this

issue. Confessions made by a perpetrator to another priest should be reported. Priests need to be legally bound by mandatory reporting requirements to prevent perpetrators from repeatedly abusing children.

- j. the use of secrecy, including the practice of mental reservation
 - k. individual psycho-sexual factors
 - l. factors operating in society as a whole.
2. To what extent has the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions been a result of the failings of the individuals who committed the abuse? To what extent have systemic institutional factors including structure, governance and culture contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions?
 3. To what extent have any inadequacies in the institutional response to child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions been a result of the failings of responsible individuals? To what extent have systemic institutional factors including structure, governance and culture affected the institutional response to child sexual abuse by Catholic Church authorities?
 4. To what extent are any factors that have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions, or affected the institutional response to this abuse, unique to the Catholic Church? To what extent are any such factors common to other faith-based institutions or organisations providing services to children more broadly?

I think the factors listed above particularly mandatory celibacy and priests having absolute power have contributed to the unique character of the Catholic Church's high rate of sexual abuse. I also believe the exclusion of women from every level of the organisations hierarchy is another contributing factor so that there is no balance for the male dominated/ ego and power driven model that still exists in the Catholic Church. Women and socially minded priests are rarely invited into the upper echelons of the Catholic Church hierarchy.

5. To what extent are there factors specific to particular dioceses or religious congregations which have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse or affected the institutional response to this abuse by those dioceses or congregations?
6. The current and future proposed approaches of Catholic Church authorities to:
 - a. responding to child and adult victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, including secondary victims

The past and current model of response from the Catholic Church to victims of sexual abuse is pathetic and immoral. As a victim of abuse by a priest I approached the Catholic Church in 2005 and went through the Towards Healing process as I wanted healing and I thought this would help. The process was not designed to help people heal but to give people small amounts of money to keep them quiet and to protect the church. I felt the process was an attempt to continue the cover-up of abuse within the church, to keep victims silent and to dismiss or minimise their stories. The woman engaged to take my story for the 'Towards Healing' process told me I should just forgive. At the time this was devastating to me and a major setback in my recovery. The woman was untrained and inexperienced in the impact of trauma and I believe she was also defending the church. During the session with the REDACTED at the professional standards office he said he represented George Pell and that Cardinal Pell 'knew about my complaint'. They waited for me to ask for money which I didn't do as I was wanting support for healing. They had little else to offer. The sums of money available to survivors of church abuse are pathetic and insulting and would barely cover costs of on-going health issues related to child sexual abuse.

What is needed is for the church to be more open about the extent and damage child sexual abuse has had on people. There needs to be genuine apologies from all levels of the church. If survivors are willing, perhaps an opportunity for circle conferencing with remorseful perpetrators if they wish so that healing can occur for victims and their perpetrators. There needs to be appropriate

financial reparation to survivors and I believe most importantly, healing centres and residential retreats run by mental health professionals where victims can go free of charge to heal.

- b. responding to individuals subject to allegations of child sexual abuse
- c. the protection of children and the prevention of child sexual abuse.