

Dear Legislation Committee,

### **SOME OF MY STORY**

I write to you as a 52-year-old male who was sexually abused by eleven different perpetrators from the age of 8 for a further decade. My first and major abuser was a male teacher in my primary school. He groomed me into silence and isolation and stole every aspect of my childhood innocence leaving me with no self-esteem and a perverted outlook on myself, on others and on life in general.

Although a scholar in primary school, by my mid-teens my life was rapidly unravelling. I was in agony. I was regularly self-harming and constantly contemplating suicide.

I was raised to be very wary of the Catholic Church and of Catholic practices.

I won a scholarship to my local Catholic high school at age 13. While there, I learnt that everything shared with the priest remained with him under something called the seal of confession. I also learnt that he could never share contents of any confession with anyone else. This knowledge birthed a long-awaited seed of hope in my heart.

It took a few years to build up courage, but, as a non-Catholic and while still a teenager, I went to confession. The Catholic priest was amazing. He let me talk at my own pace. He of course respected my need for utter privacy. His kindness and empathy not only stopped me from taking my own life but kickstarted my lengthy journey of recovery. My silence and isolation was finally broken.

Some years later, I became the chief witness in the District Court to convict the teacher who I was told was a prolific paedophile as many of my peers, so I learnt from the police, had committed suicide in their late teens and early adulthood.

Without the sacredness of the seal of confession, I am convinced I would never have gone to confession. I would therefore never have begun my journey of recovery, which in turn would have left a prolific child abuser roaming free for many more years to continue molesting children. I only wish my childhood peers had had and understanding of, and access to, the same seal of confession which turned my life around so dramatically.

In short, I can honestly say that the seal of confession literally saved my life.

### **WALKING WITH VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS**

I have been honoured to walk alongside survivors and survivor groups for many years now, both in the United Kingdom where I originate from, and here in Western Australia which for some years now I have called home. I am honoured to have facilitated different groups and gatherings of survivors across our State under the title of *Survivors' Support Network in W.A.* I have also spoken out publicly about my own abusive childhood and the journey of recovery I needed to undertake.

### **PRIVATE RESEARCH**

Although a good chunk of my working life has been in industry, I have also periodically worked within the confines of the Catholic Church. This has permitted me to win the sufficient trust of priests to be able to ask them direct details about their experiences of the confessional concerning child sexual abuse raised within the confessional. I have never, and would never, expect them to divulge any particular details that would ever identify any individual penitent.

In my own meagre private research, I questioned 67 Catholic priests in total on and off over 11 years in both the UK and Australia about their experiences of both perpetrators and survivors in a confessional setting. The outcome of what I regard as "loose research" can be found below. In brief, however, the outcome was as follows:

- Private answers over **11 yr period** (2007-2018)
- **67 Catholic priests** questioned, accumulating a total of **1639 years** of priestly service
- 48 weeks per year of each priest listening to a conservative average of 5 confessions per week = **393,360 confessions**
- 29 out of the 67 priests (**43.3%**) recall **survivors mentioning** their abuse to them (a number of priests said to me words to the effect that "*the identity of the perpetrator/s is rarely if ever mentioned in confession*")
- 1 out of the 67 priests (**0.7%**) recalls 1 **perpetrator alluding** to abuse on one occasion in the 1970s

I feel confident to derive from what I have been told by these 67 ordained men that child abusers do not use the Catholic confessional, but that many tender, fragile and sometimes suicidal victims and survivors do.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

I understand why the Western Australian Government would simply seek to follow other States and Territories and merely demand that, following the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the seal of confession be made party to mandatory reporting. The issue is this: the stories of children who were abused within the confines of confession were at the time wards of the state, with no family, no phone helplines, and no public awareness around child protection and safeguarding. These children also represented only a small fraction of children sexually abused across Australia.

Recommendations as a result of stories heard by the Royal Commission do not fit in with the stories of a multitude of other survivors who were not abused in, or associated with, institutions. In fact, in my experience of dealing with survivors of institutional and familial abuse, those who undergo familial abuse have a radically higher need of a safe place to be able to share their story. Their need for absolute privacy is paramount. (I have quoted a number of these survivors' extraordinary and painful stories in the submission made under the organisational name of *Survivors' Support Network in W.A.*)

I believe wholeheartedly that any form of policing the confessional will qualify as the reabusing of already fragile and often traumatised individuals. I want also to believe that politicians are not deliberately attempting to pervert the only safe, secure and sacred place that can be used by vulnerable children and adults in their time of greatest need. To do so will inevitably cripple victims' journeys of recovery. It will also retraumatise those who, in the future, could well be key witnesses in court cases similar to my own, which would offer better results in lessening cases of future abuse.

Should the Government's present proposed amendment relating to Section 53(b)(i) be passed, I foresee the results being twofold, and neither of them in favour of what the Government desires to achieve to protect children:

- 1 - the very people needed to identify and convict perpetrators of abuse, i.e. the victims and survivors themselves, will just stop going near to the confessional. This will lead to more pressure on the mental health services and will result in victim suicides. Other victims will never sufficiently heal so will not be robust enough internally to be able to endure being a witness inside or outside of a court of law. This would be a lose-lose situation for everyone, and especially the Government.
- 2 - therefore, more perpetrators will remain within the community and more children and vulnerable adults will end up being abused, which is the opposite result of what any Minister for Child Protection would wish to achieve.

I would like to see more consultation take place between Government bodies and survivors, and also with the churches themselves.

## **A DIFFERENT AND PROVEN ROUTE FORWARD**

If my rather limited and casual research is anything to go by, then as a society we may need to be promoting and not policing the confessional as a place where victims of all categories of abuse and crime might wish to visit as an accessible entry point to their healing and recovery.

Aside from the confessional, and my extensive and ongoing work with survivors, I also had the opportunity to read the case notes of many convicted child sex abusers during my time on the Secretariat of the *Independent Review On Child Protection In The Catholic Church In England And Wales* (see <https://bit.ly/32U0T1M>) and have undergone training with ATICSAT (the Australian Training Institute For Child Sexual Abuse Treatment) in Western Australia. I am aware that there are better, more practical ways of achieving better results in the area of child protection, firstly by reaching out to offer support and appropriate clinical treatment to the increasing number of young people who are sexually attracted to minors. If given the chance to address the committee, I would be keen to speak about the *Dunkelfeld Project* which began in Berlin in June 2005 with a large media campaign to contact self-identified paedophiles and hebephiles who wanted help from clinicians to manage their paraphilia (see <https://bit.ly/32RRE5y>). The campaign pledged medically confidential treatment free-of-charge and was hugely successful in preventing thousands of people sexually attracted to children from acting upon their fantasies.

Thank you in advance for the noble service you undergo as a committee to serve the best needs of our State.

Yours faithfully,

James Parker

# OVERVIEW OF STRICTLY PRIVATE RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN BY JAMES PARKER OVER 11 YEARS

## CONFESSION & PERPETRATORS

Date	Diocese	Position	Yrs Ordained	Perpetrators	Survivors	Notes
13/03/2007	Westminster	Asst Priest	7	0	1	
13/03/2007	Westminster	Curia	17	0		<i>Position at time of asking:</i>
13/03/2007	Westminster	Ethnic Chaplain	12	0		2 Agency
13/03/2007	Westminster	Parish Priest	27	0		6 Asst Priests
13/03/2007	Westminster	Parish Priest	25	0		1 Chaplain
13/03/2007	Westminster	Parish Priest	42	0		3 Curia
16/03/2007	Hallam	Asst Priest	9	0		1 Ethnic Chaplain
16/03/2007	Liverpool	Asst Priest	4	0		49 Parish Priests
16/03/2007	Southwark	Parish Priest	17	0		5 Retired Priests
16/03/2007	Hallam	Parish Priest	47	0		
16/03/2007	Liverpool	Parish Priest	35	0	1	Answers given over 11 yr period
16/03/2007	Liverpool	Parish Priest	41	1		1 - Alluded to, not directly, early priesthood
16/03/2007	Liverpool	Parish Priest	14	0		(67 priests with...)
20/03/2007	Liverpool	Agency	22	0	1	1639 years x 48 weeks x 5 confessions = 393,360 confessions
20/03/2007	Liverpool	Chaplain	17	0		
22/03/2007	Westminster	Parish Priest	19	0		
22/03/2007	Southwark	Parish Priest	16	0		
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Curia	17	0	1	1 perpetrator alluded to abuse in confession in 1970s
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	32	0		
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	47	0		
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	13	0	1	
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	26	0	1	
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	16	0		
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	31	0		
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	18	0		
15/09/2009	Brentwood	Parish Priest	23	0	1	
2/03/2011	Birmingham	Parish Priest	16	0	1	
6/03/2011	Wrexham	Parish Priest	34	0	1	
6/03/2011	Arundel & Brighton	Parish Priest	41	0	1	
6/03/2011	Portsmouth	Parish Priest	47	0	1	
29/03/2011	Leeds	Asst Priest	6	0		
29/03/2011	Middlesbrough	Parish Priest	19	0		
29/03/2011	Leeds	Parish Priest	12	0		
29/03/2011	Westminster	Parish Priest	32	0	1	
29/03/2011	Salford	Parish Priest	17	0	1	
29/03/2011	Leeds	Parish Priest	10	0		
29/03/2011	Nottingham	Parish Priest	11	0		
29/03/2011	Nottingham	Parish Priest	29	0	1	
11/02/2013	Brentwood	Asst Priest	4	0	1	
11/02/2013	Brentwood	Parish Priest	33	0		
11/02/2013	East Anglia	Parish Priest	20	0	1	
11/02/2013	Arundel & Brighton	Retired	49	0		
13/02/2013	Birmingham	Parish Priest	19	0	1	
14/02/2013	Birmingham	Curia	43	0	1	
14/02/2013	Liverpool	Parish Priest	32	0		
14/02/2013	Liverpool	Retired	47	0	1	
10/06/2014	Perth	Parish Priest	9	0		
10/06/2014	Perth	Parish Priest	10	0		
19/06/2014	Perth	Parish Priest	32	0	1	
19/06/2014	Perth	Parish Priest	12	0	1	
19/06/2014	Perth	Parish Priest	15	0		
19/06/2014	Perth	Retired	54	0		
25/06/2014	Perth	Agency	8	0	1	
25/06/2014	Perth	Asst Priest	3	0	1	
25/06/2014	Perth	Parish Priest	9	0	1	
25/06/2014	Perth	Parish Priest	30	0	1	
25/06/2014	Perth	Retired	45	0		
13/08/2017	East Anglia	Parish Priest	50	0		
16/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	19	0	1	
18/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	11	0		
18/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	16	0	1	
18/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	41	0		
18/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	36	0	1	
18/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	17	0	1	
20/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	15	0		
28/11/2017	Perth	Parish Priest	32	0		
19/03/2018	Perth	Retired	60	0		
			<b>1639</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>29</b>	

- Private answers gleaned over an 11 year period (2007-2018)
- 67 Catholic priests questioned, accumulating 1639 years of priestly service
- 48 weeks per year listening to average of five confessions per week = 393,360 confessions
- 43.3% of priests (29 of 67 priests) recall survivor<sup>s</sup> mentioning their abuse to them (“the identity of the perpetrator/s is rarely if ever mentioned” by a penitent, so priests have said)
- 0.7% (a mere 1 of 67 priests) recalls 1 perpetrator alluding to abuse on one occasion in the 1970s