

How journalism got Australia the child-abuse royal commission

Joanne McCarthy and the Newcastle Morning Herald's investigation of the Catholic Church's response to the sexual abuse of children by clergy in the Hunter region of New South Wales was a decisive factor in Julia Gillard's decision to appoint the royal commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse. This is the story of how that journalism was done and how it galvanised other institutions, including police and politicians, to create a climate in which the clamour for a royal commission became irresistible. It also shows what is at stake if the current financial crisis afflicting the media cripples investigative reporting.

By DENIS MULLER

In 1995, police in the Hunter region of New South Wales investigated Vincent Gerard Ryan, a Catholic priest, for sex crimes against boys spanning 20 years. Brought to trial in 1996 and 1997, he pleaded guilty to multiple offences including sexual intercourse by anal and oral penetration and was sentenced to 16 years' jail, with a minimum of 11. He ultimately served 14 years.

In October 2016, he was given a further 15-month suspended sentence, having pleaded guilty to attempted homosexual intercourse with a male aged between 10 and 18, indecent assault on a male and gross indecency with a male under 18, in the mid-1980s at East Gresford, near Dungog.

The Maitland-Newcastle diocesan office had become aware of his sexual predations in 1975 but continued to protect and promote him over those 20 years.

The *Newcastle Morning Herald* covered his trials and in 1996 published a statement by Bishop Michael Malone, who had become Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle the previous year, in which he said that despite his conviction, Ryan would not be stripped of his priesthood.

In 1999, a detective in Cessnock, also in the Hunter region, received a complaint by a woman concerning a sexual assault on her by another priest, Father Denis McAlinden. The Church moved him around to various parts of Australia and Papua-New Guinea and it was not until 2005 that the police finally found him in a Church-run aged-care home in Western Australia. He died a month later.

In 2003 the then Detective Sergeant Peter Fox, of the New South Wales Police, charged Father James Patrick Fletcher with multiple counts of anal and oral sexual penetration of an

altar boy named Daniel Feenan. In 2004 Fletcher was convicted and in 2005 he was sentenced to between seven-and-a-half and ten years' jail, where he died.

The sentencing proceedings took place in the District Court at Gosford on the New South Wales Central Coast, south of Newcastle. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* assigned its Central Coast reporter, Joanne McCarthy, to cover the sentencing. She filed a brief routine report and returned to other duties.

However, towards the end of 2007, McCarthy was asked by the *Herald's* features editor to look into why enrolments at Catholic primary schools in the Hunter were dropping. McCarthy, who has a ready grasp of newsroom vernacular, pronounced the idea "as boring as bat shit". However, she made a couple of phone calls, and in the second one the person on the other end said, "It might have something to do with the child sexual abuse stuff".

She reviewed the *Herald's* coverage of the Ryan case and of various civil cases that had been brought against the Church by victims, and found it patchy. "We partly reported on them but I can't say it was followed through in the way that maybe it should have been." However, she also noted that some of the cases were being settled out of court and that therefore there had perhaps not been much material available to report on.

She further observed that a columnist at the *Herald*, Geoff Courbet, had challenged the Church's assertion that Ryan was a lone rogue priest, a challenge that had provoked strong blowback from Bishop Malone.

Still pursuing the falling-enrolments story and the possible link with sexual abuse, McCarthy visited the website of Broken Rites, an advocacy group established in Melbourne to support victims. It also kept a public record of sexual crimes by Catholic clergy. There she saw what she described as a "funny comment" about the death of a Monsignor Patrick Cotter. On the website, Cotter, in his role as Vicar-General of the Maitland-Newcastle diocese during the 1970s, was said to have moved Ryan and McAlinden around, so covering up their crimes.

McCarthy rang Bernard Barrett, who convenes Broken Rites, to explore this further. He referred her to a Newcastle lawyer, Kate Maher, and it was at this point that McCarthy cast off the school-enrolments story like an abandoned chrysalis: she was now in full pursuit of

the allegation that Monsignor Cotter had covered up for Ryan. Cotter had gone to his grave seven or eight weeks earlier, hailed as a holy man.

Kate Maher invited her to inspect the files of the compensation cases she had handled. She told McCarthy that the matters were all settled and that she was sure the clients would be happy for someone to have a look at them. The files included letters that Cotter had written, proving that the diocesan hierarchy had known of the abuse, and this explained why the payouts to these victims had been much higher than would otherwise have been the case: amounts like \$600,000 and in one case more than \$3 million.

And then, from a retired detective, McCarthy obtained a transcript of a police interview conducted with Cotter during an investigation that ended with a recommendation that he be charged. The Director of Public Prosecutions did not proceed, mainly because Cotter was by then aged 82 and near death. "At the bare minimum, one senior churchman with responsibility for handling the thing had known," McCarthy said. She wrote a story that the Herald put on page one quoting another retired policeman, an assistant commissioner who had supervised the investigation, saying that it was justice denied to Ryan's victims that Cotter had not been charged.

This story was a watershed. "Suddenly I was just being inundated with calls that went beyond just Ryan. That was when I got a call from somebody I didn't know and this person said to me, 'You want to look at a priest by the name of McAlinden. You won't need a first name'.

Her informant is now dead. "He was in a senior position in the diocese. And his son was also a victim. It was John Feenan, Daniel Feenan's father. John was doing all the compensation matters in the Ryan case. Even when Daniel disclosed to Pat, his mother, and John, they didn't believe him straight up."

McCarthy believes that John Feenan tipped her off because he was "a decent man" and because his son had been a victim. "I think there was a lot of guilt. I think that was John's way of maybe righting a few wrongs. There was John handling this cold and clinical compensation thing while his own son was falling apart. The fallout for that family has been

extraordinary. They're all still close in a non-normal sort of way. When John died, there was a big funeral and all of the family were there."

And Daniel? "He had many suicide attempts but he is a strong individual. At a certain point he said, 'I want to be named', and then he came out with a very strong piece that was around the World Youth Day in 2008. We ran it on the front page."

World Youth Day and the attendant visit to Sydney of Pope Benedict XVI in July of that year marked a significant shift in the approach to the issue by McCarthy and the Herald. It was the point where, McCarthy says, their coverage broadened from an investigation into a campaign.

By then, McCarthy had followed up John Feenan's tip-off about McAlinden. "He was a completely opportunistic child sex offender: basically little girls between the ages of four and twelve. He went for families. Lots of sisters. There's one family I think it's either four or five daughters, all of them victims. He was a piece of work."

The year 2008 was also significant for the police. It was the year that Strike Force Georgiana, set up at the end of 2007 to pursue paedophile priests, started to gain some traction. The establishment of the strike force marked an overdue change in police attitudes. In late 2007, the sexual crimes squad in Sydney had received a terse phone call from inside the diocesan office of the Catholic Church in Newcastle. The caller was Helen Keevers. She had been appointed by Bishop Malone to clean out the Augean stables bequeathed to him by his predecessor, the late Bishop Leo Clarke, and Monsignor Cotter.

Keevers, though not a Catholic, had been working for the Catholic welfare agency Centacare in Newcastle for the best part of 20 years when Malone appointed her to a new position as child protection officer. She established Zimmerman House, a place where victims could go for support. Although it was located in an old convent, by removing or painting over the religious icons Keevers contrived to create a non-religious atmosphere in which victims felt safe. It was there that she encouraged a victim of the late Father Peter Julian Brock to take his case to the police at Charlestown, who had been handling a lot of these matters.

Having got up the courage to go through with this, the victim returned to tell Keevers the officer to whom he had spoken had shown little interest. The case was 30 years old. It would be difficult to secure a conviction. The usual routine. But as Keevers noted, Brock at that time was still practising as a priest. Thereupon Keevers rang the sex crimes squad in Sydney. Basically she told them that when victims of child sexual abuse showed up, she expected them to be taken seriously. Not long afterwards, Strike Force Georgiana was set up.

Over time, she said, relations between her and police improved. Malone, she said, introduced a level of transparency in dealing with sexual abuse that engendered trust among police. "When a priest was stood down, we made a public statement. When the police wanted to search the archives, Bishop Michael allowed them to do so without a warrant." Documents found in the archives included what she called a "damning" document that showed Monsignor Cotter had known for decades about the predations of Denis McAlinden. Keevers added that those documents would not have reached the outside world had Malone not sanctioned her giving them to a survivor.

Keevers, it became clear, was not to be trifled with. However, after five years, a review of Zimmerman House was undertaken by a member of the Christian Brothers, an interesting choice in all the circumstances. Keevers was criticised for her management style and for being insufficiently supportive of priests. She was dismissed and, she said, given ten minutes to leave the building. Malone was away in Papua-New Guinea, but he had counter-signed her dismissal papers.

Meanwhile, the work of Strike Force Georgiana went on. McCarthy said that its creation had required the combination of an engaged police, an activist media and a bishop who was "not following the Church script".

Malone had certainly not been following the Church script; the police were now engaged, and the "activist media" was supplied by McCarthy and her newspaper.

In 2008, with the World Youth Day and papal visit on the horizon, she rang the Sydney organiser to ask whether its proceedings were going to include an apology from the Pope to the victims of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy. "I said the Pope had just been to America to apologise to the victims there, because the Boston thing had blown up." [This was a

reference to the disclosures by *The Boston Globe* newspaper of widespread sexual abuse of children and adolescents by Catholic priests there.]

“And this sniffy bloke – priest, bishop, whatever -- says the Pope’s coming to Australia for World Youth Day, as if that settled the question.”

So McCarthy rang the Vatican. What she described as a “sniffy Italian voice” advised her to make her approach through the Papal Nuncio in Australia. “The Papal Nuncio – not only was he sniffy, he was a first-class prick: basically how dare I think that I’m going to do something like that. So we had quite a barney over the phone.”

She drafted her questions for the Vatican and showed them to a couple of victims in the Hunter who by that stage had come forward and identified themselves to her. “And then a bunch of them said, ‘We’re going to campaign for the Pope to apologise’. That went into the newspaper and McCarthy followed it up by sending the questions to Bishop Malone.

“What I needed was for a bishop to crack, a bishop to say that there should be a papal apology. Who better than the local bishop? The first question was, did he support a papal apology. Not only did he say he supported a papal apology; he said he had put it to the Australian bishops’ conference in their May meeting.

“The minute he did that, it’s bingo! Front page. That will be picked up everywhere. Which it was.”

On the back of Malone’s statement, McCarthy contacted other bishops whom she had been advised were of liberal outlook, and two of them also stated that they supported a papal apology. This was significant, McCarthy said, in getting other media interested in the story.

Malone, she said, was also selective in the events he attended on World Youth Day, and walked across the Harbour Bridge with victims in their demonstration against the Church’s handling of the issue.

The *Newcastle Morning Herald’s* coverage and the work of Strike Force Georgiana were combining to have a snowball effect. The strike force was starting to charge priests and the

newspaper was then able to cover the resultant court proceedings. As McCarthy described it, “The more reports about court matters, the more people came forward. It’s a kind of tumble. You’ve got one thing generating another.”

It required sustained attention by the newspaper. Strong commitment to the story came from the editor at the time, Rod Quinn, and McCarthy was impressed: “If they want to flog newspapers, they put Andrew Johns’ latest groin injury on the front page and the sales went through the roof. [Johns was a leading Newcastle Rugby League player.] You put child sexual abuse on the front page, sales do not go through the roof.”

When McCarthy had first embarked on the story and had wanted to run a piece based just on what she had found from Broken Rites, Quinn had restrained her. “He said, ‘No. I want you to get the documents. I want to nail these bastards. I don’t want any “allegeds” in here’.

“Just before I left that night, he said to me, ‘This is why you want to be an editor’. I’ve always felt supported there. I’ve never had anything negative from within work. Oh I know there were comments made from time to time about ‘paedophile priest fatigue’ but no one ever said it to my face.”

It is a phrase that resonates with anyone who has worked in a newsroom. Journalists are about “news”, not “olds”. The culture encourages people to move from one story to the next, to keep the novelty coming. It takes strength of character and strength of will on the part of editorial executives to sustain the coverage of a single story over a long period of time.

And then in early 2010, McCarthy got another big break. Victims of Denis McAlinden had approached her, and one of them gave her a sheaf of documents. Among them was a letter to McAlinden dated 19 October 1995 from Bishop Leo Clarke, then bishop of Maitland-Newcastle, saying the Church was going to laicise him, which means using canon law to strip him of his priesthood, to turn him back into laity. It referred to the “grave nature” of McAlinden’s offences. And it added that his good name would be protected by the confidentiality of the process.

In McCarthy's words, "We have the very definition of a cover-up." And as was now clear, it hadn't stopped at the Vicar-General Monsignor Cotter, but went to the top – to Bishop Clarke.

McAlinden was of course never laicised. He was shifted around and then he disappeared until the police ran him to earth on his deathbed in Western Australia 20 years later. They had been tipped off by Keevers, who had in turn been tipped off by someone there who recognised him.

McCarthy read the Bishop Clarke letter to a detective in Strike Force Georgiana. "He just said, 'Oh my God, this is what we have been waiting for'. The significance of those documents was that the Church doesn't laicise its paedophiles. It really doesn't. It's only just starting to do it now."

She also rang the former Detective Sergeant, now Detective Chief Inspector, Fox, because he had been involved in issuing the arrest warrant for McAlinden. When she read him the documents, he had become angry, saying he had interviewed Bishop Clarke about McAlinden in about 2002 and that it was now clear Clarke had lied to him because he had said he knew nothing about any allegations against McAlinden. Clarke died in 2006.

McCarthy put Fox in touch with another woman, also a victim of McAlinden's. At first she had tried to put the woman in touch with Strike Force Georgiana, but her detective contact there had stopped taking her calls, and she had begun getting what she described as "weird feedback" from the police. "Suddenly I'm referred from one command to another and then another. I had the feedback that Georgiana wasn't going to look at it, so I rang Peter and just said, 'This woman wants to speak to police'.

This exchange with Peter Fox was eventually to embroil McCarthy in a Special Commission of Inquiry appointed by the New South Wales Government in 2012 after Fox said on the ABC TV program *Lateline* that he had been asked to stop investigating complaints of paedophilia against Catholic priests, specifically including McAlinden.

The commission of inquiry was conducted by Margaret Cuneen, SC. The terms of reference required her to investigate the circumstances in which Fox had been stood down from the

abuse cases and the extent to which officials of the Catholic Church had co-operated with, hindered or obstructed the investigation.

Cuneen reported in May 2014. She said that police involved in the investigation into whether the Church had tried to conceal paedophiles in the Hunter region were instructed not to communicate with the media. McCarthy was specifically named as someone not to be spoken with. Cuneen found that Fox had subsequently acted inappropriately in providing McCarthy with a witness statement concerning allegations against McAlinden.

Both McCarthy and Fox are adamant that this finding was factually wrong. Both say that the flow of information went the other way – from McCarthy to Fox. McCarthy was called as a witness by Cuneen to give evidence concerning her contact with Fox. Speaking of this, she said she and he had both told the inquiry: “I was giving him information. He wasn’t giving information to me.

“The police kept crapping on about leaks, leaks, leaks. There were none. None. What I described at the Inquiry is internal police alpha male bullshit going on up in the Hunter, with Fox on one side and a pile of other cops on the other.

“He [Fox] was just following lines of inquiry. I didn’t see any problem with that. He said to me genuinely that the police were not just investigating perpetrators now. ‘We’re investigating the system. We are investigating concealment’.”

Fox corroborated her account.

These events were unfolding in 2010, at the end of which Fox went off on stress leave. As they unfolded, however, McCarthy became a kind of broker between some victims and police. They came to her because her coverage had engendered trust and she in turn put them in touch with police whom she trusted.

There is an echo here of the role of Nick Davies, the *Guardian* reporter in London who, at about the same time, was relentlessly pursuing the phone-hacking of citizens’ mobile phones by Rupert Murdoch’s *News of the World*. As victims came to him, Davies put them in

touch with plaintiff lawyers who were suing *News of the World* on behalf of victims and obtaining large settlements.

In addition to this broker role, McCarthy had become a kind of one-person clearing-house for information because she had accumulated documents and knowledge not just from police but from a range of other sources, including victims and their families.

When David Shoebridge entered the New South Wales Upper House as a Greens Member in 2010, he took over the portfolio of Justice, Attorney-General's and Police. "Within six months of coming into office, I had a series of people approach me about child sexual abuse and how the criminal and civil legal systems were failing to give them redress.

A lawyer by profession, Shoebridge began to look into the legal issues and came across the so-called Ellis defence, which he described as "one of the most telling holes in the civil system". In essence, the defence is based on the legal definition of the Church as a non-incorporated association. This means it doesn't exist in the eyes of the law. "[Victims] can't sue the Church because the Church doesn't exist; the priest is often dead or penniless, a man of straw; the bishop is normally dead. There is no legal entity you can name as a defendant." The Church had used it successfully to deny a claim for compensation by a victim called John Ellis.

Thereupon, Shoebridge started a victims' group and more and more of them came to see him in his office in Parliament House. "Invariably they would say, contact Joanne McCarthy. So I did. The depth of her knowledge was quite extraordinary. She made the connections between the priests and the bishops and the victims and the dioceses. It was quite a revelation to sit down and hear her describe the connections and the history.

"I found her an extremely useful source of common sense to check if the direction I was taking in Parliament was well-founded. And there were things I could do in Parliament, using Parliamentary privilege, asking questions, naming people, making clear statements about culpability, including detailed statements on culpability by certain members of the clergy."

That would then feed back into McCarthy's coverage, enabling her to name names and repeat statements about culpability under what is called qualified privilege. This provides

the media with a defence to actions for defamation, so long as their reports of the privileged proceedings are fair and accurate.

Shoebridge was at pains to point out, however, that he and McCarthy did not work as a team. “She retained her position and her independence and brought her own editorial view to all the work she did. But when you get two people with individual roles in society addressing the same issue, it amplifies the work of both of them.” On the question of independence, Shoebridge noted that at one point during its pursuit of the sexual abuse issue, the newspaper was edited by Roger Brock, the brother of Father Peter Julian Brock. Shoebridge made a point of acknowledging Roger Brock’s ethical integrity in allowing the coverage to continue unimpeded.

One story McCarthy was working on, and which she regarded as strategically important in creating the public climate for a royal commission, concerned the suicide of John Pirona, the victim of a paedophile priest named John Sidney Denham. Denham was convicted of a range of sexual abuse charges in 2000, 2010 and 2015. In 2010 he was jailed for 19 years and 10 months, with a minimum of 13 years and 10 months. In 2015, after further convictions, the minimum was increased to 19 years and five months.

In July 2012 John Pirona went missing. McCarthy said that as soon as she heard this, she knew instinctively what had happened. And she recognised this tragedy as providing a powerful way to put pressure on governments to appoint a royal commission.

She had had several prior contacts with the Pirona family, and the day after John went missing she visited his wife, Tracey. “I went up and saw her and said to her, ‘If you were to call for a royal commission now, that will be very significant’. She agreed. She showed me his final letter, and when you looked at it, it was obvious. They just had to find the body. He was a New South Wales fireman, but he’d had drug and alcohol issues. He’d been to every kind of treatment you could possibly imagine. His father is a prominent lawyer in the Hunter. A beautiful family. Just awful.”

On the last page of his letter, John had written the words “too much pain”. This became the headline on the front page of the next day’s *Herald*.

It was an ethically hazardous story for McCarthy. She said she knew that all of Denham's victims had attempted suicide and there had already been 10. "I was terrified about the possibility of suicides. I rang as many of the Denham victims as I could, saying we were going to run this. They all knew John was missing. I just explained the circumstances, that it was going to be on the front page, big photo of John. And I wrote the piece really carefully with the intro about Tracey and the last contact they had had with each other, which was very positive."

Tracey was reported as calling for a royal commission based on the family's experience and on the totality of what was emerging about paedophilia and the Catholic Church's response. "Tracey saw the copy before it went in and was fine with it."

The momentum for a royal commission was starting to build, and it was now that the *Newcastle Morning Herald* began to use the campaigning banner "Shine the Light", the introduction of which was accompanied by an editorial calling for a royal commission.

In September 2012 the newspaper and Shoebridge gave the campaign what turned out to be a critical push. They convened a public forum in the Newcastle Workers Club to pose the question: Do we need a royal commission into the Catholic Church?

The forum was held on the morning on Sunday 16 September 2012. Shoebridge and McCarthy tell a similar story: they put out 200 chairs and then another 200 and by the time the forum started at 11am, people were standing all around the walls. The keynote speaker was Peter FitzSimons, author, *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist and former Wallaby Rugby Union international. McCarthy said he had spoken out strongly on the issue, and with his high profile she thought he would be a drawcard.

His message was that good people cannot remain silent when things are ill-done.

Peter Fox turned up. Towards the end of the meeting he appeared on stage and whispered to McCarthy that he would like to speak. Even though they had had contact over several years, they had never met, and she said she only recognised who he was when she heard his voice.

He directly addressed the question the forum had been convened to answer: do we need a royal commission? To which he answered, “Bloody oath we do.” In early November Fox went on the ABC TV program *Lateline* and argued the case again for a royal commission.

According to Shoebridge, the pressure was then on the New South Wales and Federal Governments. “That did blow up as a big national story.”

On 9 November 2012, after strenuously resisting calls for a state royal commission, the Premier of New South Wales, Barry O’Farrell, announced that there would be a special commission of inquiry.

This announcement had a profound effect on McCarthy. Overwrought, she was stricken with writer’s block. She could write only one word – “Finally”. This became the intro to her page-one lead. “I just rang up [the newsroom] and I said ‘I’m a shot duck. I’m really sorry’.”

She carried on in a kind of daze. “I’d been getting stuff down, but I’m just thinking, I don’t know what the hell I’m saying here.” The editor, Chad Watson, who had succeeded Rod Quinn and Roger Brock, crafted her copy into a coherent story. “I must have written enough, because it is definitely my stuff, but there was nothing going on here,” she said, tapping her head. “And I said then, ‘We’ll get a royal commission now, and it’ll be a federal one’. I said it on that day. And I said it because now two Australian governments had cracked.” [Victoria had already begun an inquiry in April that year].

That was on the Friday. On the following Monday, 11 November 2012, McCarthy and Chad Watson were in his office when an ABC *Lateline* producer texted her to get to a television set immediately.

“We turned the TV on, ABC, and all of a sudden the TV crosses to Julia Gillard, and then with the first words she said, she was announcing a royal commission. Well I just fell apart. Just lost it. Absolutely lost it. I didn’t hear one word that she said. And Chad cried. Suddenly Chad’s room was just filled up with crying people. It was quite extraordinary.”

Acknowledgement of her role and that of the newspaper in creating the political atmosphere and pressure for the royal commission was later to come from Gillard herself.

The day after the royal commission had been announced, McCarthy wrote a personal letter to Gillard, sharing an email she had received from an aunt of John Pirona, whose death by suicide had been such a powerful catalyst for shifting the Government of New South Wales into action.

“I said, ‘You’ll never know the significance of what you’ve done, but if you do nothing else as a prime minister, you’ve done that’.”

Then on the evening of 26 June 2013, the day she lost the prime ministership to Kevin Rudd, Gillard wrote McCarthy a hand-written reply. McCarthy recounted its contents: “It started off by saying, this was her final few minutes as prime minister, or something. Quite extraordinary. It was an amazing letter. Australia’s first woman prime minister had just been booted out. The grace and the generosity and the humanity of the woman, to think about writing a letter to a bloody journalist at that point.

“And it was a personal response. It wasn’t for posterity or anything, it was definitely to me personally.”

The testimony of a prime minister is powerful in telling the impact of McCarthy’s journalism on national life, but the testimony of victims is equally powerful in telling its impact on individual citizens.

One such is Graham Rundle. His leathery lined face has the look of a life hard lived. As a boy he was sexually abused by a male staff member at a Salvation Army boys’ home at Mt Barker in South Australia. But he is a survivor. As an adult, he went back to the home and stared at the exact spot under the stairs where the violation took place. It was a confronting experience but one he felt he had to put himself through in order to come to terms with what happened.

He wrote a book. Against the legal odds, he won a six-figure settlement from the Salvation Army in a case that he said became a precedent for 30 others. He now lives on the New South Wales Central Coast and his story was told by Joanne McCarthy.

The effect, he said, was to give him a voice, to empower others to come forward, and to exert accountability on the Salvation Army. “I’ve had the biggest boss from the Salvos now emailing me. He has read my book. He is so devastated. This is all forced on them because the journos kept up the story. If the journos hadn’t kept up the story, he wouldn’t have given a bugger about me.

“When the journos started picking it up, the story spread and then other people started coming forward.”

Asked what it was that McCarthy’s journalism had done for victims, he replied: “Well, for starters giving victims a voice that they never had before. If you take away the journalism, we wouldn’t have had that. Two, the truth is important to know and without the journos this wouldn’t happen. She uncovered the hidden truth behind the Catholic Church that we wouldn’t have had.”

For 89-year-old Audrey Nash, the work of the *Newcastle Morning Herald* had a different impact. It helped her to make sense of why her younger son Andrew had taken his own life at the age of 13. Sitting in the front room of her weatherboard cottage in Newcastle, she laid out a large collection of documents and newspaper articles concerning sexual abuse by Catholic clergy. The sun bounced hard off the floor, lighting up a sideboard on which stood a framed black-and-white photo of a smiling boy in school uniform.

On the night Andrew’s body was found, a group of brothers from the school came round to the Nash household. A Brother Romuald was among them. He wanted to know whether Andrew had left a note.

In February 2013, McCarthy wrote a front-page article headed “What did they do to my boy?” It was Audrey Nash’s story and it was illustrated with the framed photo from the sideboard. It was a story about the sexual crimes committed by Francis William Cable who, as Brother Romuald, was a teacher at the Marist Brother’s school in Hamilton, Newcastle where Andrew was a student. Cable sexually assaulted him in 1974, and a few months later Andrew was dead.

In June 2015, aged 83, Cable was convicted of abusing 19 boys at the school and sentenced to 16 years' jail. According to Audrey Nash, there were four paedophile brothers at that school and there have been more than 20 suicides among the boys.

A lifelong Catholic, Audrey Nash was active in her parish, helping to tend the church and participating in parish life. She is active still, but as an advocate for victims of clerical sexual abuse. It has not endeared her to the current Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle, William Wright. He wrote a pastoral letter for *Aurora*, a Catholic Church lift-out published monthly in – of all places – the *Newcastle Morning Herald*. In it he complained that the Church wasn't getting a fair go from the media, and ended by saying that he supposed "the usual suspects" would be talking to the media.

The "usual suspects" identified themselves as a group of four activists – Audrey Nash and three others. The four then had t-shirts printed with "Usual Suspect" in bold black letters across the front and had themselves photographed. They framed it and gave it to the bishop.

Wright spent a fair chunk of his pastoral letter in the next month's *Aurora* backpedalling: "I intended that phrase to allude to the journalistic practice of finding reliable commentators to suit a certain purpose. I regret using the term . . . I apologise to those who think I might have had them in mind and intended to disparage them. I did not."

Audrey Nash was not impressed. "They always treat us like we were down there and they were up there."

But like Graham Rundle, she is a survivor, and a citizen to whom McCarthy's journalism gave a voice against the power of the Catholic Church and the indifference of government.

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On 14 April 2016, the following questions were emailed to Bishop Michael Malone, through the Maitland-Newcastle diocesan office. The diocesan communications officer said she would pass the questions on to the bishop but could give no assurances that he would reply. By November 2016 he had not replied.

1. Why did he not laicise Vincent Gerard Ryan after he had been convicted in 1996?
2. What was his purpose in appointing a child protection officer (Helen Keevers)?
3. What is his assessment of how that initiative worked?
4. Why did he endorse her dismissal?
5. According to Helen Keevers, Bishop Malone brought a much more open and transparent approach to the issue, and was directly instrumental in ensuring the release of documents that finally led the police to Denis McAlinden. What was his overall approach to the issue of sexual abuse by clergy and to the issue of Church co-operation with law-enforcement authorities?
6. According to Joanne McCarthy, Bishop Malone told her he supported a papal apology to victims at the time of World Youth Day, and that he had argued for this at a meeting of the Australian bishops. Is this true, and why did he take that stand at that time?
7. According to Joanne McCarthy, Bishop Malone joined in the march across the Harbour Bridge in support of victims. Is this true and why did he do it?
8. Is there anything else he would like to say about the whole issue?

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