

The Secretary,
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
Canberra. ACT. 2600.

Date: 29.07.03.

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you to record that during my childhood and teenage years, I spent time in church run institutions (Catholic Nuns Novitiate and Convents).

My experience of institutional life has left me with health and wellbeing problems. I was recruited as a child straight from school into a lifestyle of harsh living conditions, sexual repression, social isolation from my family and friends and constant humiliating practices aimed at breaking my will and destroying my self esteem. This Church "sanctification" process caused me much pain and disillusionment until I left the Order penniless, homeless and disorientated.

I believe some answers to the abuse of children in Church care may come from the harsh, repressive religious formation of the nun, brother and priest carers, teachers, pastors and novice mistresses themselves – a cycle of harshness and abuse.

After much thought I submit my story as a gateway for many more children and minors in my situation to tell their stories and receive a hearing. These children including my late father – recruited among hundreds by the Brothers at 14 years of age and other colleagues who began priesthood training at 12 years of age. (References "Cassocks in the Wilderness" and "The Priest Factory" by Chris Geraghty. Spectrum Books, Richmond, Vic. "Through the Narrow Gate" by Karen Armstrong).

I am in contact with others who were in Catholic institutions, many of whom are left scarred by this experience and are now over fifty and suffering poor mental and physical health, unemployment, insecure housing and social isolation etc. A significant number prior to leaving were treated in Catholic psychiatric hospitals with shock treatment, lobotomies and drug therapy. Others took their own lives or died younger than average from stress related disorders. Their birth families, husbands, wives and children suffered also and need to be heard.

The Catholic Church has never publicly researched the wellbeing of those it recruited, used for unpaid labour and allowed to leave without support.

Yours faithfully,