

“Betrayed or Supported?”



Clergy Abuse Survivors’ Experiences of the Catholic Church’s Response to Clergy Sexual Abuse

Survey conducted for **Cumberlege Commission**
by **MACSAS**
2006

We are a gentle angry people
And we are singing, singing for our lives
We are a gentle angry people
And we are singing for our lives.

We are the weavers of new patterns
And we are weaving, weaving for our lives
We are the weavers of new patterns
And we are weaving for our lives.

We are the builders of new visions
And we are building, building for our lives
We are the builders of new visions
And we are building, building for our lives.

We are the few who speak for many
And we are speaking, speaking for our lives
We are the few who speak for many
And we are speaking, speaking for our lives.

We are a gentle angry people
And we are singing, singing for our lives
We are a gentle angry people
And we are singing for our lives.

Holly Near

Introduction

What this survey reveals is an overview of the experiences and feelings of a number of people who have suffered abuse by Catholic Clergy or Religious. What is overriding throughout all the responses are that these people remain very wounded. The pain expressed in the survey is quite difficult to read but must be heard.

Sixteen people responded to the MACSAS survey questionnaire, (N=16), eight men and eight women. (8m, 8f)

- 6 speak of sexual and emotional abuse by secular priests. (sp)
- 8 speak of sexual and emotional abuse by religious order priests. (rop)
- 1 speaks of sadistic and emotional abuse by a religious order nun. (ron)
- 1 does not specify whom the abuse was by.

Dioceses represented by the survey include:

Birmingham (3), Nottingham (1), Southwark (1), Westminster (2), Arundel and Brighton (3), Middlesbrough (4), Hexham & Newcastle (1). One not given.

Reporting: Pre- Nolan or Post-Nolan

For the purpose of this survey the results will be noted as Pre-Nolan (pre n) or Post-Nolan (Post N). **This only relates to the time of reporting.**

It seems most abuse is spoken as happening before the Nolan Review.

However it seems most people had reported their accounts of abuse when the Catholic Church's first announced policies related to Child Protection in 1994.

Date of reporting

- 3 reported before 1994 (1976, 1977/8 and 1993)
- 3 reported between 1994 and Nolan (pre n)
- 5 reported after Nolan (Post N)
- 5 did not make this information known to the survey



Person reported to

- 5 to their Bishop
- 3 to the Church's Child Protection officer
- 2 to the religious order's superior
- 1 reported to a priest that was known to them
- 1 to their social worker
- 1 was contacted by the police
- 1 wrote directly to the Vatican
- 1 to the Cardinal

This replicates what survivors tell us. They usually report to their Bishop as this is the person they are likely to know by name. Usually survivors write to the Vatican or the Cardinal Archbishop only if they have not received satisfaction from local Bishops or Clergy Abuse workers in the Church.

Survivors are not always aware that an Archbishop cannot intercede for them if he is not ‘their’ Archbishop, i.e. if they report to the Cardinal in Westminster and they perhaps live in Birmingham.

Most people do not see nor understand the separate delineations within the Church. They recognise simply “The Catholic Church” as one body and have been confused, perplexed and put off when having to navigate ‘where and to whom’ they ‘should’ report their stories.

Should it be the task of the person who has been abused to also have to navigate to whom they ought report? Surely it is part of the work of the Church and COPCA to ensure that to whomever a report is made it will be treated seriously and sensitively.

That people will not be directed to one person after another and expected to tell and re-tell their account over and over again.

As we know the ‘telling’ is in itself traumatic and to have to tell one stranger after another can prove extremely traumatic and off-putting for those who have been wounded by abuse.

Responses

Q4 “Did the priest or person in charge of child abuse tell the Bishop?”

Yes	No	Don’t know	Other
3	1	7	“the Bishop already knew about the priest!”

Post-N (n=5) respondents stated –

3 did not know if Bishop was informed

1 said no

1 said ‘Bishop already knew’

What is of concern is that respondents did not appear to be informed of what happened to their disclosures.

Q5 “Did the Child protection officer/Bishop/Religious Order superior contact the police”?

Yes	No	Don’t know	Other
2	9	2	

This raises huge concerns as all cases of abuse or allegations of sexual assault/exploitation should be reported to the police. (We are aware that this is now COPCA policy although in our experience this has not been acted upon with immediacy by some religious orders or dioceses without pressure.)

Post-N (n=5)

3 No

2 Yes

1 respondent who stated, No, added, “Already convicted on another case”.

Again this non action to inform authorities, even if the person is already convicted, is of concern. From the information gathered it seemed that in only one case had the priest been placed on administrative leave.

Making contact with and meetings with Church Authorities.

6 sent a letter
2 telephoned
10 arranged face-to-face meetings, although in 2 cases these meetings never occurred.

“Arranged a meeting with Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor but when I arrived he had gone on holiday”.

1 was able to meet a church person, face-to-face, within days
3 within weeks
1 within 3 months
1 between 3-6 months
2 did not want to meet Church personnel.



Thus:

4 were able to meet someone quickly (days to weeks).
Whilst 2 others had to wait between 3-6 months.

When you have finally garnered the courage and have taken the steps to disclose, this seems an unacceptably long time to wait.

Letters were not always replied to speedily.

1 person wrote and *“never got a reply”*, whilst another said, *“wrote three letters only got one reply”*.

Those who never got replies to letters were felt ignored with no understandable reason or plan to move forward.

When meeting with Church authorities:

6 spoke of attending alone.
2 took friends with them.

It seems that there may be difficulties finding a close person to accompany to such a meeting, as people who have been abused are often ashamed of the experience and reluctant to share with friends or family.

A person’s understandable feelings of anxiety, shame, distress and even fear needs to be taken account of with regard to such meetings. Many are unprepared for the complexity and potential triggers that such meetings stir. Advice and preparation should be offered so that the meetings can be sensitively and safely conducted.

In the responses given no one relates if the meetings were sensitively handled, however there was evidence of dissatisfaction and a feeling of not being heard.

Of the Post-N respondents certainly it was related that meetings were not always helpful. Of those who said they were not happy at all, comments were made:

“Over time, it was clear their concern was only for themselves. The Child Protection officer was great (but soon got moved on!) The priests were only worried about the PR of the Church and even tried to manipulate information about my meetings with the police out of me. I felt badly let down”.

“I was unhappy with the response of the Church. Even after the Priest responded to the allegation and admitted it. They did not behave adequately”.

“The Child Protection officer produced ‘so called’ transcripts of the meeting. There was no transcripts [transcriber?] at the meeting. I was refused a request to see the transcripts, which were nothing but lies, my witness testified to this. [Witness was high ranking legally trained person].”

1 respondent felt the Church’s Child Protection officer breached confidentiality and was instrumental in them losing their job.

Others have told MACSAS of pressure to reveal information, which is then used to defend the Church rather than support the victim.

Perhaps the presence of a truly independent, experienced professional to facilitate the before, during and after processes of these meetings would ease some of these issues? Professionally sought guidance as well as feedback from those who have already attended such meetings might surely lessen some of the difficulties already encountered.

Getting help for themselves via a support group

7 respondents said that they knew how to get help for themselves
6 did not

Of the Post-N group (n=5)

3 knew how to get help
2 did not



It would seem that since the Nolan Review there has been little change in the dissemination of information.

Asked if the ‘Church helped in this regard’:

7 responded No
1 said that they themselves ‘did not ask’ (it was not offered?)
2 said they didn’t want the Church to help
2 said that the Church helped with information

Of the Post- N (n=5), when asked if the Church put them in touch with a support group

3 responded No
1 ‘did not ask’ church for help
1 did not answer question.

Although the Church knows of the existence of MACSAS, not one respondent stated that the Church referred them.

As the only clergy sexual abuse survivors group in the UK this is discouraging. If we are to believe the Church in its aims to support those affected by abuse, particularly those who have been abused by clergy or religious, then the existence of MACSAS and other support groups and information related to them should be actively encouraged, perhaps with leaflets and also on the websites of the dioceses.

Church/religious order assistance to locating appropriate therapy or counselling

3 responded Yes, however 1 added, “took 5 years to get help”.
3 did not ask (were not offered?)
3 did not want therapy/counselling.

Of the Post-N group (n=5)

1 responded Yes
1 ‘did not ask’
1 did not answer
2 responded No



If the Church offered help

2 said it was ‘some’
2 said it was ‘not enough’

Of all respondents 9 arranged their own therapy.

Of all respondents 4 said the Church paid for counselling

Whether the survivors were pre-n or Post-N, in both cases this is a very low percentage of the Church offering, locating or paying for counselling/therapy for survivors.

Comments:

pre-nolan

- 1. I was offered no help. This left me unaided with feelings of inadequacy. (Reported 1993)*
- 2. I met with protection officer several times. Discussed the incident and advised me to report to police. Told me what the priest was doing at the time. Working with old people. He asked me what the Church could do for me? I didn't know? (reported 1997, Protection officer did not inform police)*
- 3. My mother was dismissed as being a hysterical woman and no action taken. (the ‘mother’ had first reported in 1973)*
- 4. I had no support and was never reassured. (Not reported to child protection officer, however religious order were informed, pre-n 1994)*

5. *MACSAS contacted me – otherwise left completely on my own in a different country (the Priest in this case had been convicted & jailed – 1998)*

Post-Nolan

6. *[Offered] six sessions of therapy – not near what I needed. I organised help for myself the Church did their best to avoid paying (2001)*
7. *I felt relieved when [the person I met] said, “I put my hands up, we admit that the abuse took place”. No one would ever listen to me before or believe me. (post-N)*
8. *Six sessions paid for – On the initial meeting the vicar general was responsive and very apologetic, making promises of pastoral support etc. I had this in writing eventually....but once the abuse was reported (on legal advice) to the police...all doors closed firmly in my face! (2002)*
9. *No help – more destructive than constructive (2002)*
10. *It came as no surprise [not to receive help] but struck me as a great shame. When I first approached the Church my anger was directed towards the individual who abused me. The non-response of the Church has encouraged me to pursue another incidence of abuse through the criminal courts. If the Church had behaved more decisively at first I may not have taken that decision (2005)*
11. *No support at all from [religious order]. I briefly recall [order] offering to pay for counselling – only until I got it on the NHS. In the end the NHS counselling came first.*

It is important to note from these comments that ‘to ask’ survivors ‘what the Church can do’ without offering some possibilities of what support might be offered and available is unhelpful for many people who have been abused.

What might be helpful to any individual is complex and sensitive work. Helping those who are often confused, frightened, angry and in pain is delicate work to negotiate.

The Church needs first to be clear about the range of what it is able to offer (take professional and experienced advice, perhaps look to see what has worked in other countries and similar organisations) and then to offer tentatively.

It is imperative that people are then given time to take the information in (which would also be helpful if this information was in written form) Also to assure that an offer is open ended i.e. once given or once declined is not the end of story.

Of the counselling being paid for only 6-12 sessions are offered.

With regard to issues related to abuse this is an inadequate amount. Such very private, very intimate, very shaming, very painful, very traumatic thoughts, feelings and experiences are difficult to share and need above all to value the pace of the individual. Much has often been kept buried for many years and is not easily shared in a rushed way. Also there are often understandable issues connected to trust, which has been severely damaged if abuse has occurred from clergy or religious. Thus time to ‘trust’ a therapist is also a variable to take into account.

An offer of short-term counselling may seem a hollow and non-understanding offer.
(see our report on [compensation/counselling](#))

To no longer offer support to a person who either reports their abuse to the police or decides to follow a legal path is also not acceptable. MACSAS knows of other agencies (Church of England 'Childrens Society', Barnados) that absolutely continue to support those who have been abused even though criminal or civil actions are also being brought.

For the Church no longer to offer or continue support may be perceived as 'taking sides' or as a 'conditional offer', which 'keeps the abuse quiet' or is about protecting the Church.

Trial Process of Person Alleged of Abuse

In most cases respondents did not receive any support throughout the trial period from the Church.

Comments by survivors about trial period:

Pre-nolan

- 1. No aftercare [when priest convicted] in any way. No phone call regarding sentence – friend rang to tell me. (1998)*
- 2. I assumed that they did not want to prejudice trial (1976)*
- 3. None. I didn't want to talk to them in any case. Just another hypocritical 'firm'. They still deny responsibility, just like a business. It's a business. I am ignored because they deny responsibility, yet the priest was in their employ! (1996)*

Post –Nolan

- 1. So far I have been ignored. I feel the Church is more concerned with its own people than parishioners. They are protecting themselves. I have been angered and dismayed by the response. The only saving grace – a supportive Diocesan individual – a priest, who I approached on a recommendation from Margaret Kennedy [Chair of MACSAS](2005)*
- 2. They threatened that if I took the case further that they would dig dirt. (2003)*
- 3. Let down again. As soon as the police were involved the Church ignored me. When it was about to go to trial a deal was done which involved my case being "left on file". (2001)*
- 4. [Felt] worthless [when ignored by Church] (2002)*

Following conviction

Pre-nolan cases:



4 cases were identified as not knowing if there had been a conviction

1 case the priest was convicted of sexual assault of four women and jailed for 6 years.
(laicised)

1 priest convicted and jailed for 18 months (3 concurrent sentences) (continued on release
in active ministry)

1 priest convicted and jailed for three years (further ministry unknown)

1 priest convicted and jailed for 30 months. (respondent assumed laicised)

1 priest arrested/released on bail due to age/illness (the priest moved location)

Many respondents remain uninformed to the actions taken either by the Church or the authorities with regard to those they have made allegations against.

This is at least unsettling and uncaring, at worst respondents are left to speculate on the Church colluding, supporting those accused and concerned that this person can do harm to others. (We know this has been the case in the past).

It should **not** be the responsibility of the person disclosing to check on the procedures and outcomes of their allegations. This becomes the responsibility of both the Church and the authorities.

Pre-nolan cases: Experience of Survivors

[Religious order] wanted to bury their head in the sands. Were told two years earlier [than trial] and did nothing” (Priest jailed for 6 years –expelled from order)

I still don’t trust them [Church] even after 43 years. (Priest jailed for three years)

I don’t want the support of the Church. (Priest jailed for 18 months)

[I] feel dirty, guilty – nothing happened priest.

[priest] has been moved to another diocese (abuse of adult woman)

Post-Nolan Cases:

1 (priest) no action

1 (priest) jailed for 4 years

1 (priest) case pending criminal trial

1 (priest) civil action in progress

1 (priest) jailed for 6 years. (laicised – respondent stated now lives with religious order)

Comments:

“Correspondence [with Church] was brief and lacked any sort of truth or compassion. Procrastination was huge weapon by church. Now in hands of solicitor.”

“Church still helps and houses him, haven’t helped me. Feel used and let down and violated.” (Convicted priest – 4 years, now lives with order)

Multiple choice questions

The Church has kept me well informed about progress in my case.

	Agree	Do not agree	Other
Pre-nolan (n=11)	1	8	Not answered
Post-Nolan (n=5)	nil	5	

- It seems that respondents on the whole do not feel that they are kept well informed with regard to the process of their case.
- Being kept informed has not improved since the Nolan Review.

The Catholic Church has kept me deliberately in the dark about my case

	Agree	Do not agree	Other
pre-nolan (n=11)	5	1	Do not know – 1 Not answered - 1
Post-Nolan (n=5)	4	nil	Do not know - 1

- It would seem that sadly respondents believe that they are deliberately kept in the dark.

The Catholic Church understands my needs as a survivor of clergy sexual abuse

	Agree	Do not agree	Other
pre-nolan (n=11)	2	4	Do not know – 1 Not answered - 4
Post-Nolan (n=5)	nil	5	Do not know - nil

- From this sample it would appear that the pre-nolan group feels more understood than the Post-Nolan group, although neither group seems particularly satisfied.

The Church co-operated fully with the police in my case

	Agree	Do not agree	Other
pre-nolan (n=11)	1	3	Do not know – 4 Not answered - 3
Post-Nolan (n=5)	1	4	Nil



- It seems that neither group is able to state that it feels confident that the Church co-operated fully with the police.
- This could be because the Church does not or that because neither group describes being kept fully informed that they know.

The Catholic Church co-operated fully with my solicitor.

	Agree	Do not agree	Other
pre-nolan	nil	3	Do not know -1

(n=11)			Not answered- 5
Post-Nolan (n=5)	nil	3	Do not know- 1 Not answered- 1

Other comments from this group:

“They deny responsibility”,

“I think so”

Compensation (see additional report from MACSAS where this is further discussed)

Pre-nolan - the compensation offered to respondents:

1 x £15,000
1 x £5,000 (comments: *“for my life”*)
1 x £6,000



4 did not answer this section.

2 cases were in ongoing discussion with solicitors.

6 respondents ticked a box which read: ‘I had to go to a solicitor to take legal action for compensation.’

Comments:

“My life was ruined by a man who abused his position in the church, the church values my life at £5,000”(m)

“They deny responsibility” (the priest was convicted and received a three year jail sentence)

3 people independently stated *‘the church/religious order has fought legal action all the way’*. (in one case the priest was jailed for 18 months, three concurrent sentences)

“Years later the abuse experienced by the priest took its toll. I had suppressed it in the early ‘90’s. In 2002 I contacted the [religious order named] for compensation. Two years later received money for counselling. Wanted compensation, told me to go to a solicitor.”

(f sexually abused as an adult by religious order priest)

Post- Nolan

1 respondent received £5,500 from Criminal Injuries Compensation. The person adds, “the Church are still only offering £2,000”. (The priest was convicted and received a 4 year sentence.)

Another respondent received £30,000 (priest convicted and received 6 year jail sentence).

In both these cases the respondents believe they are not allowed talk about their abuse/abuser. This is a wrong assumption, but arrived at because the Church stipulates that the amount of

compensation should be kept 'secret' and the respondents were made to sign agreements to this effect.

Thus they now believe they cannot talk about the abuse.

This is erroneous and indeed a highly damaging state of affairs, as survivors need to be able to talk about what happened if they want.

MACSAS would ask the Church to ban 'gag' orders.

In comparison to compensation figures offered for abuse committed by doctors, therapists, teachers, scout/guide leaders, care workers these figures are much lower.

Given the grave nature of sexual and/or emotional violation and exploitation by a priest or religious, in comparison to a trusted lay person, the Church has much to do in its understanding of damage to the person and finance in the 21st century.

As more of these cases are put before the courts, which seems inevitable, perhaps if the Church were more realistic in the first place, the potential additional pain and harm caused to people by having to go through the legal system, might be lessened.

Support from friends and community

Pre-nolan comments:

I never discuss my abuse with my family

Have no family (first reported in 1978)

My family were more embarrassed. Didn't know what to say or think. I would have really benefited from talking to other victims or groups whilst making my mind up whether to attend trial and the trauma in front of me. (reported 1998)

No support given by family in 1963 and no RC contact given when I first made them aware via police. I think RC support means to them, admission of guilt possibly (reported 1996)

Felt that my friends and husband found it really difficult to understand just what I suffered at the hands of a priest and how it really affected me.

My children know about my childhood, but there is nothing they can do, although they understand why I feel angry.

Not supportive family. They thought it was 'not very nice'. Preferred not to know about it. Didn't discuss it with friends. (Reported 1997)

Of the 11 pre-Nolan cases, 6 did not use tick boxes where a range of possible responses were given.

2 ticked the box, which stated; 'Some thought I should leave the past in the past'. They did not tick any other box.

1 said some of his family wanted him to 'keep quiet about the abuse', and some of his family were angry he was taking action. However both his wife and friends were supportive.

1 said his *'family and wife were very supportive'*.

1 stated her family wanted her to *'keep quiet about abuse'*, and some thought she should *'leave the past in the past'*. However she found her partner and friends supportive. She said her family *'did not know how to support'* her.

Post-Nolan cases:

It was a huge step to take to speak out...I hid it for so long....the fear I lived with was desperate. My daughter left home because of "him" and recovering is hard! Even now, after moving home, job etc. I know there will be some Catholics who will respond by attacking me. Priest on a pedestal syndrome!

I have very few friends left. T.S. Elliot said 'The mind cannot accept too much truth'. They could not believe a so-called 'Holy Man' could be so evil and that the Church supported him. (Reported 2003)

I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, which was very helpful and supportive. Lot of debt at the time as I didn't work etc. and am still struggling financially. (Reported 2001)

My parents do not realise what I went through although my brothers and sisters did. They knew because they were targeted by the same priest but have not done anything about it. (Reported 2002)

My partner, my friends and others (including Margaret Kennedy) were very helpful. My mother was less keen on me pursuing criminal charges against my abuser, although she does support me. The reaction in the parish has been one of disbelief. (Reported 2005)

1 respondent found his family were supportive (*'in time'*), his partner very supportive, friends supportive but friends of his mother felt *'I should leave the past in the past'*.

1 respondent ticked only one box, *'my friends did not know how to support me'*.

2 respondents said family were supportive, with one also adding husband as supportive.

1 stated *'some'* of her family were supportive, with friends very supportive.

- It would appear from both pre-nolan and Post-Nolan groups that Birth families struggle to understand and be supportive.
- In both groups more support is found through friends and spouses

Perhaps more education and reflection in Church (both publicly and privately) of the possible traumatic effects and ways of managing such abuse would help understanding amongst families and communities and this in turn might support those who have suffered abuse.

Support from Parish

Pre-nolan-

4 did not answer this section.

2 said 'does not apply'.

1 stated "I got no support from anyone in the parish".

5 made written comment:

I felt that most publicity is around priest abuse with boys. I have tried many times to raise the issue of girls that have been badly abused by the nuns. We got regular beatings and other forms of sadistic abuse by them. My thinking was that many of the nuns, got sexual gratification through some of their physical forms of abuse. My thinking is that they were sexually depraved.

In 1963 you said absolutely nothing otherwise one would be "for it". Brave was the one to say otherwise.

Don't have much to do with the church anymore. Don't trust too well but do attend mass occasionally.

I used to read regularly in Mass, was a Eucharistic Minister. Very involved in the Church. Never spoke to my parish priest about what happened. Don't go to Church at all any more. Tremendous pain there – huge loss of my faith, which at times was my security.

People – followers of Father (name) angry at trial. (this person was 'attacked' by parishioners of this priest, for going to court)



Post-Nolan –

2 ticked box, which said; "I got very little support from my parish"

2 men sexually abused as children talk about support.

2 women sexually assaulted as adults (one priest jailed) speak of 'attack' and pressure by the Church.

I don't attend a Church. But I have spoken to two priests about this – both have been very supportive and encouraged me to report to authorities. They have also discussed church procedures (re: abuse) and matters of faith with me. (Trial pending)

The parish priest near my mum was helpful as the only one who acts with any integrity.

I left the parish and subsequent parishes as I was hounded and told I was damaging the Church. I am now at (Church named) and am beginning to be pressured. Bishop aware that I know he has a girlfriend.

Told no-one....three parishioners/friends guessed when they saw bruising etc and I broke down and cried it all out. I have since moved and have not joined a church by

choice. Drifting a bit but am supported by prayer; trusting God for mercy and justice. (person physically & sexually attacked by priest)

Again more education and reflection in Parishes of the possible traumatic effects on those who have been abused might help understanding amongst parishioners and communities. To begin to speak sensitively and empathically about such issues would hopefully support all those who have been affected and touched by abuse.

Therapeutic Help/post abuse

When asked which statement they agreed with, the following answers were given

Statement	Pre-nolan (n=11)	Post-Nolan (n=5)
My life was ruined by priest	4 (one clarified 'nun')	2
I refuse to let him ruin my life	2	2
I have largely recovered	4	1
I am in therapy	2	3
I had therapy but not in therapy now	4	1
I did not need therapy	1	0
I no longer believe in God	0	1
I no longer believe in the Catholic Church	5	4

The following feelings were expressed:

Feelings	Pre-nolan (n=11)	Post-Nolan (n=5)
I am angry	5	3
Sad	3	4
Depressed	2	3
Still ashamed	2	2
Cynical	1	

- It would seem that some people have found therapy helpful.
- That people are left with such distressing feelings should motivate the Church to want to help with their healing.
- That peoples' faith in the Catholic Church has been destroyed should surely be a part of the Church's mission to rectify.

Say something about how abuse affected you:

Pre-nolan comments:

The abuse continues to have an affect on me. It has had a detrimental effect on my home, family and working life.

When it first happened I was absolutely stunned. Something exploded inside of me. It changed our whole relationship. He – the priest has been into therapy repeatedly. I have kept what has happened to myself – I am married with a family. How could I hurt them? When the priest ended our relationship – by going into therapy again and disappearing I grieved for years. I am calmer now but it will always be with me. He chose to ‘counsel’ me – picked me up for something I said in confession. I thought we were friends. I discovered how selfish priests actually are. I was grossly sexually abused all my teenage years. Then this priest...I know I need therapy but don’t want the equilibrium with my dear husband.

[I] Deliberately contracted HIV to end my life.

Angry over how I was treated at the time of the trial – unimportant, isolated. Left to find my way after being on the stand. No-one to talk to “let it out”. Press treated me dreadful – printed what they liked: felt guilty as abuser had large ‘cult’ support. I was left in a room. He was allowed to parade around the courts: he had the freedom. I had to be taken everywhere. (priest jailed for 6 years)

I experienced severe sexual abuse as a child. I went to a priest for help as a young adult. He betrayed me in a way no one else could. Whilst dealing with pain of priest abuse became bulimic – loss of faith and much more.

Still needs addressing.

I felt very dirty as a teenager. The bastard hurt me physically. I will never forget it. It affected my first marriage psychologically. It ended quickly in divorce.

Panic attacks, low self-esteem. Felt black and evil. Drank to excess, treated for alcoholism. 13 years in recovery. Still lack trust especially in Catholic Church and suspect all clergy. Still suffer low self-esteem/lack of confidence. Panic disorders, nightmares, and problems in relationships. (priest jailed)

Unlike some abuse cases mine was done without violence or graphic abuse. The abuse was psychologically harmful. My sexual persona was arrested by the modus operandi of the abuse.

Post – Nolan comments:

Completely took my self-belief away and destroyed my relationships with my wife – divorced now. My life was turned upside down and completely opposite to how I was living. (Reported in 2002)

I find trust hard. I still feel guilty and ashamed after sex. I feel intimacy is very difficult for me. I feel like a failure in life. I am angry at the arrogance of the Church. (Reported 2001)


A breakdown and I wanted to end my life at times. My spiritual director (now laicised) helped and supported me. I lost my job, reputation, and confidence. I am still angry at times that this priest remains in the same town.

Where do I begin! The prolonged abuse has left me diagnosed by independent witness (psych) as suffering from Severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I can no longer

teach and am fighting for survival just now. I receive benefits but running up huge debts for therapy; this priest has put me back so much in my recovery of severe child abuse. The abusive priest replaced a paedophile priest...he came to help us...but not me. I have been classed as a vulnerable adult by the (psych) expert witness.

General views about the Catholic Church & Abuse.

The pre-nolan group & Post-Nolan group will not be separated as these views apply to how the survivors feel now.

The Nolan Review made things better in the Catholic Church 		
Agree: 1	Don't agree: 3	Don't know: 10

The COPCA Office is doing a good Job		
Agree: 0	Don't agree: 2	Don't know: 13

The Catholic Church is better in dealing with clergy sexual abuse issues since the Nolan Review		
Agree: 3	Don't agree: 7	Don't know: 5

The Catholic Church has covered up abuse in the past		
Agree: 15	Don't agree: 0	Don't Know: 0

The Catholic Church still covers up abuse:		
Agree: 13	Don't agree: 0	Don't know: 2

The Catholic Church has the best interest of the victim in mind		
Agree: 1	Don't agree: 9 (One said 'utter rubbish')	Don't know: 5

The Catholic Church puts the needs of the alleged clergy abuser before the victims.		
Agree: 11	Don't agree: 1	Don't know: 2

The Catholic Church puts the needs of the institution first		
Agree: 11	Don't agree: 0	Don't know: 2

The Catholic Church is truthful about sexual abuse in the past		
Agree: 0	Don't agree: 12	Don't know: 2

The Catholic Church is truthful about sexual abuse by priests today		
Agree: 1	Don't agree: 9	Don't know: 4 (one said 'probably')

The Catholic Church keeps me well informed about child abuse issues		
Agree: 0	Don't agree: 10	Don't know: 2



Is there anything more you want to say?

I long for this dreadful case to be over; when it is I would like to contribute more. (Case pending).

I had actually put all this behind me but I cannot put it to rest knowing that the same thing could happen to others. (Person sexually abused by priest as an adult).

I find it almost impossible to watch Murphy O'Conner on television – feel like he is a hypocrite and only concerned with his career. I feel as abused by the church in the way they have dealt with it. (Adult abused as 12 year old).

What happened to me ruined my life. It made me bitter as I shall never recover. It is still with me. I can't talk about it, it is still with me.

I really don't know how the Catholic Church deals with it now. For me I was let down by the order and very bitter about that. They could have helped heal my pain, instead they added more pain and trauma to it. (Person abused by religious order priest).

It is more than 13 years since I reported my personal abuse to the church. Not one person from within the Church has ever contacted me or offered any comfort whatsoever. The priest that abused me never admitted abuse of anyone. 8 years ago the Bishop appointed by Bishop [name] interviewed me at my insistence. He promised to speak to

the priest concerned and then speak to me again. I have never heard from him since. Inside the archdiocese it is known that in spite of my abuser's denials he was a predatory child abuser. Regardless no-one from the Church has contacted me leaving me with a complex in respect of my validity. (Person abused when 11 years old).

Final statement

The actual comments from those who have been abused speak volumes about how people feel they have been further let down by the Church.

How the way they have (not) been met, (not) listened to, (not) believed, (not) supported has (not) helped towards their healing.

How they feel (not) supported or understood by the Church and their parish communities.

How people are left with huge emotional scars and do not have the comfort of their Church (which many other survivors of abuse often find a great comfort and support system).

We can ALL learn SO much from people who have lived these lives, it is the only way to further improve and be able to put in place that which might be helpful and healing.

As with survivors of domestic violence (adults and children) the harmful effects and our (general population) understanding has only come about by listening to survivors and their accounts.

This has assisted in prevention, further harm and ways to support healing.

We must take this road if we wish to support those who have been abused and those who have been affected by abuse- we must listen to them- if not we betray those who have the courage to come forward and more so the faith that we say we have.

Once again MACSAS wish to state that they would more than happy to offer its services to further educate the Church and COPCA in its aims to better support those adults who have been abused. This work is connected to but inherently different from Child Protection.



Summary of Findings

(16 Survivors, 15 Clergy Sexual Abuse survivors, one physically abused by nuns)

7 did not know whether the person they reported to told the Bishop.

9 said their abuse was not reported to police.

Favoured route of contact with Church was by letter

Letters were not answered or answered after long period, leaving survivors in an anxious place waiting for response.

Survivors met officials face to face, often with no support person.

Some survivors were not happy with outcome of meetings believing the church was defending itself.

Seven survivors knew how to access support groups but 6 did not.

The Church did not put survivors in touch with support groups.

Only three of the whole sample said the Church helped them find counselling.

Only one of the 5 post-Nolan cases got help with counselling.

The church offers minimal responsibility for paying for counselling often offering only 6-12 paid sessions.

During trials of clergy abuser the survivor/victim receives no support from the Church or religious order. Often willing to support up to the report to police but after this Church/Religious order abandons victim.

“As soon as the police were involved the church abandoned me”

After conviction of clergy survivors were not told of what happened priest.

13 of the 16 survivors (both pre-Nolan and post-Nolan) felt the Church did not keep them well informed of the progress of their case.

Nine survivors felt they were deliberately kept in the dark about their case.

All of the Post-Nolan group said the church did not understand their needs whilst pre-Nolan survivors gave range of answers.

Only two survivors stated the Church co-operated fully with police handling their case.

No survivors stated the Church co-operated fully with solicitors handling their case

Compensation paid ranged from £5,000 – £30,000. One survivor said; *“£5,000 – for my life”*.

Levels of Compensation are abysmal according to this small survey.

Most had to go to solicitors before any compensation considered. This will frighten and put off many survivors. Perhaps this is the Church’s intention.

Immediate birth families find supporting victims difficult but often victims supported by spouses and friends.

Some try to protect families from their pain.

One female survivor was upset by the Church's exclusive focus on sexually abused boys. She wanted more focus on girls who were abused.

The same woman felt the Church had not addressed sufficiently abuse by nuns.

Very few felt supported by the parish, indeed some said they had left the Church.

10 of the 16 had had therapy or were having therapy. A testament to the ongoing pain they had endured and harm done.

Proportionally more Post-Nolan survivors were distressed.

Harm described in detail (see text) but many described feelings of abandonment and 'let down' by the church.

Most (n=10) did not know whether Nolan made a difference though 3 did not agree. Only one said it made a difference.

Whether COPCA is doing a good job; 13 did not know, 2 did not agree. None agreed.

Only 3 believed the Church was doing a better job, 7 said they did not agree church was doing better, 5 did not know.

All agreed Church covered up in past.

13 said still covers up, 2 don't know.

Only one said Church had best interest of victim in mind, whilst 9 did not agree, one saying: "utter rubbish". 5 did not know.

11 felt the abuser's needs was put before the survivor, one did not agree and 2 did not know.

11 agreed the institution of Church put before the survivor. Two did not know.

Whether the Church was truthful about abuse in the past, 12 said did not agree, 2 didn't know.

One agreed Church truthful today, 9 did not agree, 4 did not know.

10 felt the Church did not keep them informed about child abuse issues, 2 did not know.

