

LEARNING
RESOURCE

SURVIVOR
STORIES



In solidarity with survivors:
Telling the stories that need to be told

root &
branch



TELLING THE STORIES

THAT NEED TO BE TOLD

These stories must be told.

If we don't know what to do, if in doubt, then tell the truth.

And if the organisation that stands for the way, the truth and the life is spending money and energy trying to hide the way, the truth and the life, then let us as a non-compliant laity get out there with our clerical and religious allies and **be** the way the truth and the life.

Every victim and survivor has their unique story to tell. It is impossible to do justice to them all, so we offer here a number of different stories some of which have been bravely shared directly with us. Others are available to read online or have been given as witness testimonies to various inquiries.

We value them as precious and painful gifts to us all and we hope that you will be encouraged to seek out more stories to develop your understanding of the range and complexity of abuse.

Where they have been purposefully shared with Root & Branch, the author has given written permission for their story to be included in the Learning Resource. All names, except where explicitly stated and with permission, are fictitious.

'In the Catholic Church we no longer refer to past abuse as 'historical' because this can often appear to minimise the impact. The term 'non-recent' offers to a survivor a recognition that the long-term impact of abuse suffered as a child or young adult brings a lifelong burden.'

Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service

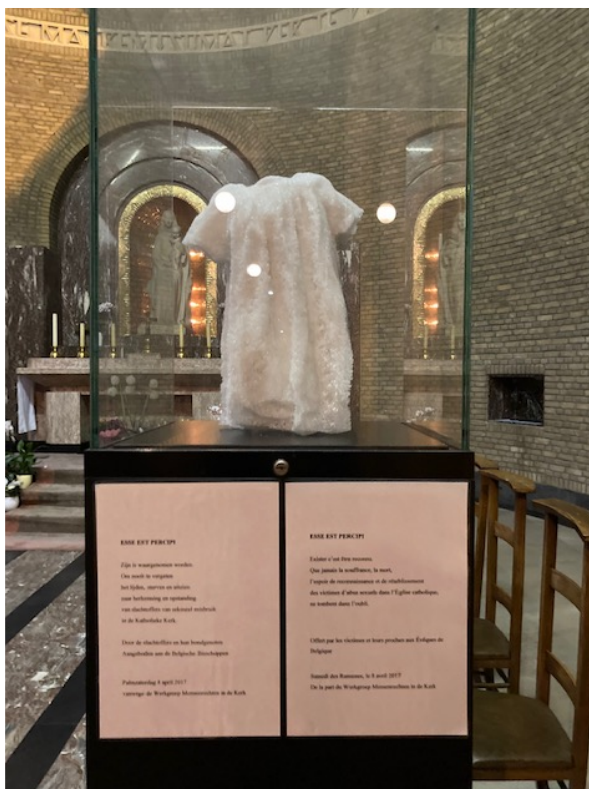
<https://www.scsafeguarding.org.uk/Survivors>

Matthias Katsch, a German survivor

'The church I experience is still fighting against survivors with its power and money. My vision is of sitting in St Peter's Square with survivors from all over the world and the church and the pope and the bishops listening to us'

ESSE EST PERCIPI

“Esse est Percipi” (To exist is to be recognized), dedicated to the memory of all victims of sexual abuse committed within the Church. More than 150 people took part in this inauguration, among them many representatives of the Church.



The statue of a child's dress, donated by the victims and their relatives, was unveiled in the middle of the ceremony. Like the ones in Antwerp and Bruges, this work symbolizes the wounded childhood and its fragility.

**Basilica of Koekelberg.
Belgian National Basilica to the
Sacred Heart.**

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THE IMPACT OF ABUSE ON SURVIVORS

Jenny's story, shared with Root & Branch

'As part of the global synodal consultation process I heard one of the key figures charged with explaining the process in England and Wales, a priest, tell a diocesan meeting "We're not saying bad things haven't happened, they have, but ..." and swiftly moved his focus on to 'evangelisation'.

As someone with the experience I've had, I hear comments like that and think "they STILL don't get it" - so many demonstrate from what they say and the way they say it that they haven't a clue about the ongoing effects on people's lives of abusive behaviour in the Church. The effects of the abuse are minimised, and the approach seems to be that "it's time to move on". I am incredibly grateful that Root & Branch has listened, is trying to work with survivors, to understand and ask how to help.

Part of the difficulty for survivors is, not just a feeling of being cut off and abandoned by the Church hierarchy - but feeling that it's fellow parishioners who have also "not wanted to know" - because they can't face listening to survivors - or really thinking about what changes are needed to change a culture where abuse may be more likely to happen.

On quite a number of occasions I've had to get up and get out of Mass, if my legs haven't got too shaky to carry me. Because of past experiences it's difficult to know exactly what's triggering such a strong visceral reaction. I'm glad I'm now in a position where I will get up and go out of Mass if I suddenly need to - unless my legs have gotten so shaky, I'm just sat there paralysed.'

Francis's story of growing up in 'care' as told to the Scottish sexual abuse inquiry

'Another home - Nazareth House, Lasswade or Bonnyrigg I have a memory of driving up towards gates. The big gates opened up and there was a little gate house. I don't know where this is. I don't even have a memory or picture in my mind of the home. This is where it gets dark in my mind as I'm going up this road. When I say it goes dark, I see fire and darkness. There is fear, and something in my mind is saying that I am not going in there because something bad happened. It goes satanic. It means that I saw or heard something at that point. It doesn't necessarily mean something happened to me although it could have. It is complete darkness. This may well be the start of my abuse, but I can't know this until I get some clarification.

My thoughts tell me I was abused in this place. I think this because the picture of NH is clear in my mind, and I know that I am not at St Ninians yet. There are phases of darkness at St Ninians, but I remember things from there. I have no picture in my mind of this place. I don't know how long I was there for. I see flashbacks of it, and it has big walls that you can't see over.'

‘Jack’ a survivor of sexual abuse at a boarding school

As described in Case Study 7, Scottish Child Abuse enquiry

<https://www.childabuseinquiry.scot/>

On leaving school his life spiralled out of control. A life that was dominated by drink and drugs and culminated in him living on the streets of London for about two years. He managed to transform his life, including obtaining a degree in politics. He became involved with the army cadets, where he eventually achieved a leadership role. This role provided him with the opportunity to promote the children that he supervised in a way that allowed them to flourish. He was able to draw upon his own negative experiences as a child to ensure that the children he had contact with had positive experiences. In his evidence he stressed the importance of child protection.

He concluded with these words: ‘Can I just say one thing? One thing that I would say is that the real problem where a lot of this kind of abuse stuff in the past has been individuals, and this includes the Catholic Church, for whatever level, and in my time in the cadets as well as anywhere else, that people have been more likely to protect the organisation than they were to protect the child...in recent years when people were reporting stuff to the church, the biggest problem they had is people were brushing things under the carpet to protect the organisation. The Catholic Church was more important, the cadets were more important, whatever. It was obviously wrong. The purpose is to protect the child. You need to look beyond the situation and protect the child. Regardless of who falls, the child must be protected’.



REFLECTING ON THE ROLE OF 'THE LAITY'

Patrick Mills, who's shared his story with Root & Branch and doesn't want to be anonymous

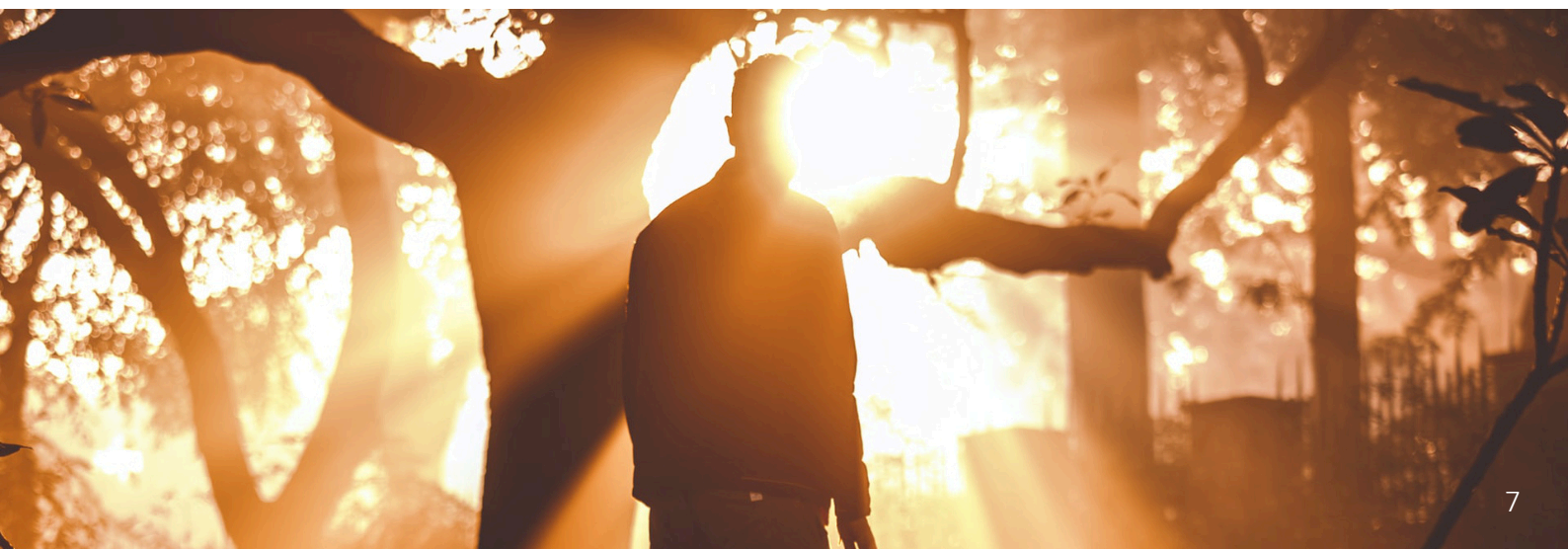
'As a child, I was unofficially indentured into a sexually abusive Catholic world of clergy, religious orders and laity until I escaped at age sixteen. The impact it's had on me was to turn lead into gold as a successful commercial writer, drawing on Catholic abuse for inspiration.

Maybe that's why it didn't scar me with drugs or alcohol, but it certainly scarred me in all the other obvious ways - PTSD, sleep issues and so forth. But in recent years that alchemy has been a double-edged sword because it's made me increasingly militant on exposing a number of issues which are usually ignored - such as the evils of Canon Law.

In fact, there are two areas where I think no one in the UK, at least, is pursuing, even though it's been proven elsewhere in the world. Namely, the sexually abusive role of the Catholic laity who currently are presented as shocked and innocent bystanders. And the existence of Catholic clergy and laity paedophile rings - organised systemic sexual abuse. I've presented evidence on to Safeguarding who have passed it to the police.

But the downside and the impact to me is the distraction from the rest of my life which is otherwise excellent. Thus, I was recently instrumental in the current suspension of the head of a Catholic religious order, which was cathartic, but it's all an enormous time suck and I have so much better and nicer things to do with my time than pursue these monsters. My soul disagrees with me and so I have to continue with my website acting on behalf of other survivors as well as myself. It's a positive impact, but I could still do without it!

None of this is confidential and I don't care about being anonymous. As a survivor, I see going public is like coming out of the closet. We have to do it, to emphasise that it's the abusers who need to feel shame, not us. Anything else you'd like to know, very happy to help. After a childhood of secrecy and abuse, I believe in full transparency.'



'DAY TO DAY' MISUSES OF POWER AND MICRO AGGRESSIONS - IN A CULTURE OF DEFERENCE AND HIERARCHICAL AUTHORITY

Christine – a white British woman, shared with Root & Branch

'I'm a strong and confident woman who must challenge and manage conflict in my working life. I ask myself, why do I often feel powerless and censored in relation to my church? We had several priests over a few years and with the arrival of each one, the rules changed without explanation and consultation. Power was wielded without self-reflection. The priests had different personalities and came from different faith traditions but each one expected to be obeyed unquestioningly, even when it was delivered with a smile. This experience is so at odds with the rest of my life, and it hurts. I asked could we have a Healing Mass when the clerical child abuse scandal forcefully hit us - no we could not.'

Sister Sushila – living with the poorest of the poor in rural villages in India

See <https://voicesoffaith.org/>

'In my experience in ministry in villages we had one free day taken up with the distribution of communion. All the priests were in their rooms watching TV. One said to me "there was one time that women weren't allowed to touch the sacred species, and now you are complaining." I said in a service that I was inspired by Mary as a strong woman, strong in her suffering. The bishop called me in and told me that I was theologically incorrect.

The bishop visited and met girls at the hostel, 3 years ago. He wanted to meet the girls from a hostel, aged 9- 12 years. He held out his hand as they filed past him, and they shook his hand. He told the sister in charge that you have to teach your children that when they meet a bishop, they should kiss his ring.

If we don't toe the line, the threat of withdrawing the Mass is made by the priest - blackmail. We drive alone to take patients to hospital in the night and everything. The priest didn't join this work.... Being dependent on an outside agency for the sacraments puts us in a very vulnerable situation. Homily abuse, using the sacred space to criticise us, control us, look down on us, it hijacks the homily.

Seminarians are introduced very early to clerical culture; they see nuns in positions of servitude. How can we expect that they will treat us with respect?'

Monica – a white American woman, shared with Root & Branch

‘Both Ann and Brian were so courageous. I wasn’t sexually abused by a priest, but I was abused. He physically threatened me because I refused to destroy an innocent deaf man that Father wanted out of the way in being ordained a Deacon because Father could not have another term as head of Priest Personnel and was afraid he would need to be pastor of two churches.

The damage I experienced from him and then the process of binding arbitration was significant. The damage attacks your soul because this is “The Church” lying, threatening, and deceiving YOU. Like St. Michael and Joan of Arc you are standing in the fray confronting the evil that is destroying our Church because of the arrogance of men who will do anything to hang on to power. They are afraid which makes them dangerous.’

SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE AND CRIMES OF VIOLENCE

Kaylin’s story, as given to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (England) 2016 - ongoing

Kaylin grew up in a large family. Her parents originally came from Ireland and were devout Catholics. She and other members of her family were sexually abused over decades by two priests. Kaylin has pieced together the story of what happened to her family through the accounts of relatives and church records. She discovered that one of the abusers, Father Alwen, was sent from Ireland to England to a diocese that had a reputation for accepting priests who had ‘issues’. His connection with her family went back for many years. She says ‘Mum hated Father Alwen and made her feelings very clear when speaking of him in her last few years’.

Kaylin was sexually abused by the priest, and she thinks three of her siblings were too. She describes being in his office when she was about five years old and him putting her on his knee and pretending to play ‘horses’. She recalls ‘it doesn’t feel like a good game. I can feel the heat of the fire and I can smell the smoke and whiskey’. She was penetrated in her anus; she is not sure what with, but she remembers the pain. She also has recollections that Father Alwen and someone else ‘would rub their penis between my legs’. She remembers she was told to be still and not cry. Kaylin says her father was sometimes present when the priest abused her. She adds ‘I also called to mind a phrase my father said, more than once, and I remember clearly, “Children don’t remember”’.

Kaylin was sexually abused by a second priest, Father Augustine, from the age of six to 11. He touched her on car journeys, and she says she experienced sexual arousal sometimes because of what he did to her. This abuse has caused painful psychological issues with her sexuality that has

badly affected her marriage. She says, 'I suffered profound anxiety and guilt' and describes how hard she tried to avoid hurting her husband's feelings. Kaylin has also suffered from anxiety, depression, flashbacks, and nightmares. She has self-harmed and attempted suicide.

She gives a powerful description of other impacts her experiences have had on her in a journal she wrote previously: 'Being a victim of sexual abuse by a priest means having a panic attack when I walk into a church ... hearing a child scream in the middle of the night and waking up only to discover it was me ... praying that there is no heaven when I die because if God forgives my abuser he might be there too.'

Leonard's story, as given to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (England) 2016 - ongoing

Leonard's family were devout Christians and he and his two siblings were sent to church schools. He and one of his siblings were sexually abused by priests but at the time did not confide in each other or their parents.

Leonard had wanted to study for the priesthood and he and his family were invited to visit a missionary college. Here, Father David asked to speak to Leonard and his sibling individually. Leonard described his upbringing as sheltered and protective, and his memories of this encounter are extremely unpleasant. Father David spoke about sexual issues with him and then spent time with Leonard's sibling, who was much younger than Leonard. Afterwards, Leonard's sibling refused to talk about the meeting with the priest, which puzzled Leonard.

Leonard entered the missionary college, which was a boarding school run by priests for boys up to the age of 16 years. His parents visited regularly, and he went home for the holidays. One of the teachers, Father Brown, began to request that Leonard visit him in his office and his bedroom. These visits turned out to be pretexts for the priest to touch Leonard's private parts. Leonard says he was bewildered and found the experience extremely unpleasant, but he believes that observers would not have noticed any changes in his behaviour. He feels his education was not affected by the abuse and he has other complaints about how he was treated at the college.

However, he describes how torturing it was at night when he lay awake wondering what was going on. He felt guilty but did not feel that he could tell anyone and was distressed because his parents were so cruelly deceived by people they respected and trusted.

The abuse stopped when Father Brown was suddenly moved from the school. Leonard now suspects this was a result of an allegation of sexual abuse. After he completed his education, he heard that Father Brown had been transferred to an educational facility abroad. Leonard suspects this was a result of further allegations of sexual abuse.

Leonard never discussed his sexual abuse until some years later when his sibling telephoned him and told him that they had been sexually abused by Father David at the early meeting at the missionary college. Leonard's sibling had sought legal representation and made a complaint and wanted to know if Leonard had been similarly abused. Leonard told his sibling that he remembered the unpleasant interaction with Father David. An internet search revealed that

Father David had been the subject of many allegations of abuse over subsequent years but frailty and later his death had prevented any judicial action.

By this time Leonard decided that he needed to address the issues of the past. He was appalled and distraught that his parents had been so cruelly deceived and that a priest had opportunistically abused his sibling while the family waited in a reception room. Brown would welcome Leonard's parents to the college when they visited, laughing and joking with them while all the time he was abusing their son. They would leave the college, reassured that he was well looked after. Leonard sees this as a cruel betrayal of his parents by both priests.

To try and achieve closure, Leonard felt he could not remain silent any longer and made contact with the religious order that Father Brown had belonged to. At first the order stated that there had never been any concerns about Father Brown's conduct. Leonard engaged a solicitor and discovered from some documents that Father Brown was considered unfit for duty and had been moved to other institutions and then abroad. Leonard submitted a significant amount of supporting material to the religious order to challenge their actions.

Leonard emphasises that he wants to achieve more than simply venting his frustrations. He is keen to make a positive contribution to the Inquiry and wants to raise awareness of potential risks in religious orders where the protection of reputation is considered the highest priority.

He also wants the Inquiry to be aware of the hurdles that institutions deploy to obstruct attempts to get to the truth and of the 'in-house strategies' used by religious orders to manage personnel about whom there are major safety concerns.

Leonard recommends that any investigations of allegations of sexual abuse by children in schools should be conducted by the police, and that there should be statutory standards for all safeguarding policies in educational facilities. He adds that there should be mandatory reporting to the police.



Freya's story of probable sexual abuse in confession, shared with Root & Branch

'As an 18-year-old, I had a distressing experience in Freshers' Week and mentally I think was somewhere between blaming myself, being the very naive little Catholic who'd never been in social situations - (middle of a disco another student just grinding his erection into me in the middle of a dance floor - me just being frozen) — and just desperate to ask someone trusted for advice.

In confession, the Priest kept on asking question after question about exactly what had happened - what I'd been wearing — and started breathing in a way that I later understood to have been him masturbating. At the time I just remember very hot breath coming through the grill and me feeling a burning shame and not knowing what was happening but just not going to confession ever since and, ridiculously, for a long, long time feeling guilty about receiving communion.

I can't definitively know that the priest at confession was masturbating and asking the intrusive questions to assist arousal - because I didn't see it, but it is the way I understand what happened and why I react now the way I do to the sight of priests. The report in the last week about Pope Benedict, including that he had decided that a priest was not guilty of abuse when he had masturbated in front of pre-pubescent girls - was one of those that really 'got' me.

I've not considered myself a victim/survivor of abuse in the Church or spoken to other people about that incident in confession for a lot of complicated reasons. One of them being a need to 'shut down' that experience to retain an experience of being able to continue to practise as a Mass-going Catholic.

Through connecting with Root & Branch I've, for the first time, found the possibility of being able to talk to other people. Because of the other experiences I've had, of much clearer, much more obviously serious, direct physical assault, I find it hard to process this one. It's bizarre thinking I don't know that priest's name - and don't want to. I've begun to regret that I wasn't able to tell anyone else though - I should have been able to report that experience and it does bother me about whether anyone else experienced the same, or more, because I didn't report. I have a childhood friend who attends the same church now - and haven't been able to tell her what happened.

I can't bear to look at the confession box in our parish church - I don't like its physical presence and I'm glad it's tucked well away at the side. There's a bit of my head and body that 'freeze' when I see a priest - particularly in vestments.

Trying to tentatively talk to people in a parish setting has been upsetting — it's felt a lot safer in the Root & Branch environment where people have either had experience of abuse themselves or are sensitive enough to have worked very hard to make a safe environment for people to listen and speak. I've heard too many people in a church environment, particularly priests, make grossly ignorant, insensitive comments on the subject of abuse.'

SENIOR CLERICS AND RELIGIOUS GRIEVOUSLY ABUSE THEIR POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY AND TRUST

**Brian Devlin's story (Activity One, Part I video)
as told on camera is an example of this abuse of power**

Sister Mary

'Superiors act as spiritual advisors, sisters must go frequently to the same priest at the prescribed time, sisters do not receive theological training.

Superiors use permission for profession as a control tool delaying profession without explanation. When sisters are ill, they do not receive adequate medical treatment, sisters have to beg for shampoo, or coffee in the afternoon.

Sisters who were sexually abused are ashamed and silenced by their superiors and community. Sisters have a lack of knowledge of their rights.'

WOMEN RELIGIOUS REPORT BEING RAPED OR SEXUALLY ASSAULTED BY PRIESTS AND BISHOPS

Dora

A devout Catholic from Germany, Dora Wagner was 24 years old, living and working at a religious community just outside the Vatican.

'Well, I joined the convent in 2003, and I was raped in 2008. He came into the room, closed the door behind him, was sitting on my right hand on the sofa. And he just started to undress me.' But this whole time, the perpetrator was still living in the same house, and she had to actually see her rapist.

Every day. He was preaching at the chapel. He was giving me holy communion. He was sitting at breakfast, at lunch, at dinner on the same table at the same table. I was ironing his shirts. I was only working in the kitchen, chopping vegetables, cleaning. Anybody who wants to become a nun wants to serve and wants to give herself to God. And that's why it's so easy to abuse nuns, because they are so ready to listen to others who tell them how they are supposed to be. Again and again, I was reproached for not walking right, not looking right, not sitting right, not talking right, because some men in the house had a problem with me.'

The Veil of Silence by Salvatore Cernuzio (2021), a journalist for the Vatican's online outlet, Vatican News

Cernuzio recounts the torment (psychological, emotional and physical) endured by 11 nuns, as reviewed here by David Averre.

'Every female religious who came to Cernuzio with stories of abuse did so on condition that they would be assigned pseudonyms, due to the 'culture of fear' perpetuated within their congregations, he said.

'Therese', a French woman, was told 'you have to suffer for Jesus' when she asked to be spared physically demanding chores because of a back condition. 'I understood that we were all like dogs,' recounted 'Elizabeth', an Australian. 'They tell us to sit, and we sit, to get up and we get up, to roll over and we roll over.'

'Aleksandra' a 31-year-old nun from Eastern Europe, claimed she was molested by a priest with whom she worked on a project to support young nuns, only to discover other nuns had made similar reports. Aleksandra said she received the same message as her fellow sisters: 'Obviously, if it happened, it's because you nuns provoked the priests.'

And African nuns in Minnesota were forced to shovel snow all day and were told it was because 'they were young and strong' when they questioned why the white sisters of the same age remained inside.'

Vatican newspaper Osservatore Romano, 2018, exposed the plight of foreign nuns sent by their orders to work as housekeepers for cardinals and bishops in Rome with little or no remuneration, as reported by Philip Pullela

'It later chronicled a 'burnout' syndrome, where younger women with good educations were held back by older superiors reluctant to relinquish a boot camp-style tradition of assigning them menial tasks, ostensibly to instil discipline and obedience.

"Whatever may have worked in a pyramidal, authoritarian context of relationships before is no longer desirable or liveable," wrote Sister Nathalie Becquart, a French member of the Xaviere Missionary Sisters and one of the highest-ranking women in the Vatican. Becquart wrote in the book's preface of the "cries and sufferings" of women who entered convents because they felt a calling from God but later left because their complaints too often fell on deaf ears.

Last year, Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz revealed that Pope Francis had opened a home in Rome for former nuns abandoned by their orders. The cardinal, who has launched investigations into a number of convents, told the Vatican newspaper he was shocked to discover that there were a few cases where former nuns had to resort to prostitution to live.'

SECONDARY ABUSE, EXPERIENCED WHEN VICTIMS REPORT THEIR ABUSE TO CHURCH AUTHORITIES

Dora's experience, she was a young German nun working in the Vatican when she reported to her mother superior that she had been raped by a priest

'When I told my superiors, the priest went unpunished, allowing him to rape her again and again. My mother superior became furious. She literally jumped on her feet and was shouting at me, and she was very angry with me. And she said: "You are dangerous for him. Leave him alone." It was unbearable, I almost committed suicide one day when I was high up on a balcony inside the Papal Palace, right in front of the pope. And I could jump on the square. It would have been so easy. And my — you know, I had my leg already halfway up the wall.'

Extract from the Pennsylvanian grand jury, investigation of 70 years of more than 300 priests in six dioceses across the state, 2018

Church officials followed a 'playbook for concealing the truth,' the report states. The patterns were similar enough that FBI analysis of the church's responses yielded seven rules, basically, an institutional guide to covering up abuse. Here are seven principles the jurors noted:

1. Make sure to use euphemisms rather than real words to describe the sexual assaults in diocese documents. Never say 'rape'; say 'inappropriate contact' or 'boundary issues.'
2. Don't conduct genuine investigations with properly trained personnel. Instead, assign fellow clergy members to ask inadequate questions and then make credibility determinations about the colleagues with whom they live and work.
3. For an appearance of integrity, send priests for 'evaluation' at church-run psychiatric treatment centers. Allow these experts to 'diagnose' whether the priest was a paedophile, based largely on the priest's 'self-reports' and regardless of whether the priest had actually engaged in sexual contact with a child.
4. When a priest does have to be removed, don't say why. Tell his parishioners that he is on 'sick leave,' or suffering from 'nervous exhaustion.' Or say nothing at all.
5. Even if a priest is raping children, keep providing him housing and living expenses, although he may be using these resources to facilitate more sexual assaults.
6. If a predator's conduct becomes known to the community, don't remove him from the priesthood to ensure that no more children will be victimized. Instead, transfer him to a new location where no one will know he is a child abuser.
7. Finally, and above all, don't tell the police. Child sexual abuse, even short of actual penetration, is and has for all relevant times been a crime. But don't treat it that way; handle it like a personnel matter, 'in house.'

PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS IN THE 'CARE' OF THE CHURCH

An extract from 'James' story of his time at a boarding school, as given in evidence to the Scottish Child Abuse Enquiry in 2017.

'I went to (the school) aged ten or eleven. The smallest, weakest and most vulnerable boys ended up in the single rooms. My whole life was run by Brother X from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to sleep. He told me when to breathe. He told me when not to breathe. He had total control. There were twelve showers down each side of the shower room and boys would queue to get in. He would put me in the shower at the end and keep the cubicles next to me empty. Then he would expose himself to me because he knew nobody could see him. I don't know if that was the beginning of the abuse or not. Once he'd hurt me, I knew I was in danger. I have dark periods where I am in his room and the lights are flashing in my mind. I see flashes of being hung, being in room, and in the hall. I don't know what made him go from being so nice to being so destroying and a devil. That's where I felt guilty and wondered if I had done something wrong, but obviously it is because I didn't comply with what he wanted to do. There is no way the other (adults) in the home couldn't have known. It is impossible that they didn't know. I regularly got twelve of the belt on each hand when I didn't even know what I had done wrong. That was the psychological abuse because you weren't even allowed to ask what you had done.

I remember being taken in an aeroplane to Ireland with XXX. I have a clear picture of being taken out of the car and taking us to an old couples' house, who I assume were his parents or some relative. I remember [him] sitting there drinking tea like the master of the castle. Looking back now, I think this was his cover. Then we went to a street with a sweet shop, and we got sweets. There was a house right next door to the sweet shop. It was a two or three-bedroom house. There were a lot of men in there. One of the men was older and there were four or five who were younger. I know there was another boy from the home with me. He had blonde hair and I think he was called ZZ but I am not certain. I think there was more than one boy who came to Ireland with me. I have always seen another boy in the flashbacks too... He had blonde hair too. I know I was taken over to Ireland with [him], but I also remember this other boy. It may have been a separate incident. When I have the flashbacks of that house. I can picture the room that we were in. The door opened straight into the living room. There was a long settee and a corner unit. It seems pleasurable then turns satanic. I don't know if I am introduced to the party and it is fun, then it changes. I don't know at what point it changes and whether it is after alcohol and drugs. They are giving me drink or drugs. They've given me something. I am on the older man's lap and he is having sex with me, while everybody else is touching me. I am naked and I am being passed around. I feel drunk. I remember being in the corner and there is a lot of red wine. There is a red light and either strawberries or tomatoes are being thrown at us. We are being attacked. Then we are bent over, and they are raping us.'

After 'James' left school, he went to live with his father aged 16. His father was an alcoholic and he physically abused him. 'James' spent many years abusing alcohol and drugs. He served three prison sentences. Many years later he was in a mental hospital... 'Then I did something I'd never done before. I prayed. When I woke in the morning, my asthma had gone and every time I closed my eyes, I seen a clear blue sky. I felt at peace. I went out to have a cigarette in the garden and put it in my mouth and didn't like it so threw it away. I never had a cigarette again. I had a bottle of vodka hidden in the garden, which someone had smuggled in for me. I found the bottle and the smell was horrible to me, so I gave it away. I never drank again for many years. I was out of the hospital within two weeks after that. I didn't drink or smoke. I spent twenty years completely turning my life around. I went to ... college. I did psychology and sociology. I got in touch with my family... I couldn't keep still so I ended up in Theology college.'



FIRST NATION CHILDREN WHO WERE VICTIMS OF CHURCH AND STATE FORCED ACCULTURATION POLICIES

John Jones, a member of the Nanoose First Nation, a small community of Coast Salish First Nation people in British Columbia, Canada

'The only important thing to a child is to play and be loved. That's what my life was like before residential school - Alberni Residential School - in 1962. When we walked into the door, there were supervisors there. My sisters went in one direction, and I followed my older brothers. The hallways were long and dark. It was cold, really cold. It was uncomfortable during the day and the night.

A friend told me not to speak my language or talk about tradition because if you do, you will get punished. I could understand my traditional language, but I couldn't speak it at the time. And one of the things that we had to do was watch the supervisor strap our friends with a strap that was made out of a fire hose. And it would not just be on the hands, so we had to watch him. And to this day, I can't speak our traditional language, and I think it's because of watching my friends getting strapped for speaking their language.

Boys sometimes peed their bed, and the counsellor would make us form two lines facing each other with our belt in our hands. And as each of the person that was being punished for peeing the bed [passed], we would have to whip them with our belt as they passed to the lines. I chose not to with my friends, and as a result, I had to go through that line and get whipped myself. And each time their punishment took place, I chose not to whip them, but to get punished with them.

I'd seen one of my friends with a chocolate bar, and I asked him where he got it. And he said he got it from a male supervisor called Mr. Plint. You know, so I went and asked him if I could have a chocolate bar. And he said he hasn't got one, but if I go back while everybody's asleep, he'd give me one. So, I waited for everybody to fall asleep. And I went to him, went to his office. And he showed me into his bedroom that was attached to the office. That's where the sexual abuse started. I don't know how long that lasted, but I know I threw the chocolate bar in the garbage, and I took baths three or four times a day to feel clean, and it didn't help.'

John's parents had had no choice. For nearly seven generations, almost every indigenous child in Canada was forced to live in the residential schools.

'I thought my mother didn't love me anymore. As an adult, I learned that they screened our letters, all our letters, and my sad letters didn't make it home to my mom. But I think my stepfather knew what I was going through. He had a talk with me one day, and he started telling me about his experience at Port Alberni Indian Residential School.

And I started crying, and he reached his hand over to me. He said, it's all right for human beings to cry and show their pain. He just held my hand a long time.'

GIRLS AND WOMEN USED AS FORCED LABOUR IN LAUNDRIES AND SIMILAR 'ENTERPRISES'

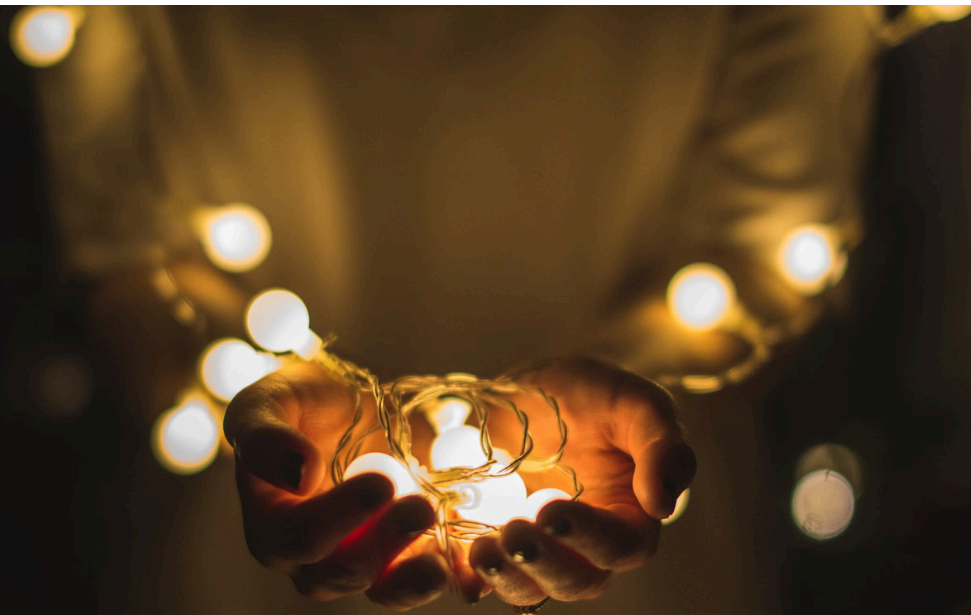
Marina G

Marina was taken to a laundry aged 16 by a priest. She was orphaned when she was eight years old after both her parents died. She lived with her grandmother for a couple of years but when she was 16, she found she had nowhere to go. She was taken by a priest to the laundry.

'I was starving, and I walked up the steps that day and the nun came out and said your name is changed, you are Fidelma, I went in, and I was told I had to keep my silence. I was working in the laundry from eight in the morning until about six in the evening. I was starving with the hunger, I was given bread and dripping for my breakfast every morning.

We had to scrub corridors, I used to cry with sore knees, housemaids' knees, I used to work all day in the laundry, doing the white coats and the pleating. One day I broke a cup and the nun said, "I will teach you to be careful". She got a thick string and she tied it round my neck for three days and three nights and I had to eat off the floor every morning. Then I had to get down on my knees and I had to say, "I beg almighty God's pardon, Our Lady's pardon, my companion's pardon for the bad example I have shown." Another thing I will never forget is the evening I ran out on the balcony, which was all glass on a winter's night, she (a nun) locked me out there for two nights me and two other girls and I nearly died of the cold.

When I came out of the convent I was determined to get out of Ireland. I was 19 years of age then and had a nervous breakdown. I lived in England for almost 30 years before I moved back with my husband. Most of the time I have cried bitter tears, especially when I had nobody, pain never goes away.'



YOUNG PREGNANT WOMEN WHOSE BABIES WERE FORCIBLY REMOVED

Witness testimonies, from the 1980s to the Irish Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation as outlined in the final report. [Click here >>>](#)

Cruel treatment

Some witnesses described unkindness in mother and baby homes during all the decades under review and not just in the early years. Some mothers reported having to do physically exhausting work up to the time of giving birth, or very soon (as little as two or three days) immediately afterwards. One new mother gave an account of being shouted at and taunted while she was cleaning, post-birth stitches bursting, the cold stone of floor and staircase she had already cleaned now flooding with her blood.

Some referenced scrubbing as an inescapable part of their lives in the homes – saying that, while working, they were frequently and very closely supervised by a nun, some of whom would slap or punch them if they were judged not to be working hard or fast enough. Several witnesses from separate mother and baby homes told the Committee that the nun would deliberately ‘re-dirty’ the cleaned surfaces. One related how she had just finished mopping a long corridor when the nun upended her bucket of dirty water and ordered: ‘now clean it again!’

Verbal and emotional abuse

Some witnesses described that while working on their hands and knees, they were verbally abused about their status as ‘fallen women’. Witnesses reported being called ‘sinners’, ‘dirt’, ‘spawn of Satan’ or worse. They related similar, sometimes identical stories from time spent in institutions country-wide.

Young women were neglected

‘I never saw a doctor’ was a constant refrain. Another was not being given time to recover properly from the physical and emotional stress of a normal birth, let alone a very difficult one. Or the experience of having your baby ‘whipped away’ without giving you, as a new mother, a chance even to see, touch or hold him or her. Instead, very many said, they were quickly put back to work, some of it exceptionally heavy work, as in scrubbing stone floors on hands and knees, or working on the land, and being verbally abused while they were at it. Those whose babies had been destined for adoption right from the start told the Committee how frustrating it was to be forbidden to cuddle or even hold their new babies, even when feeding them in a nursery specifically designated for babies going to new mothers and fathers.’

The babies separated from their mothers after birth and sold into adoption were also the victims of this policy.

Witness A

'Part of me died the day my son was taken. I became a sad, empty shell of a girl. It was the end of my prison sentence when my Mum took me home'.

Witness B

Another witness had thought she would be leaving the home with her baby but was simply told: 'You're leaving today' and was immediately sent, without him, to a solicitor's house to be a live-in housemaid. She spent five years there, receiving 'only a few bob (coins) here and there' to mind the children and do the housework: 'When I left, I left in the same clothes I arrived in'.

She was in such despair about losing her child and her own position in life, she went to the banks of a river and was contemplating throwing herself in, when a man who was fishing nearby saw what was happening and, 'stopped me'. She 'ended up' marrying him, she told the Committee. They had more children, but she had never told him, or them, about her son before, sadly, her husband died.

Her first son traced her and after their first meeting, she opened up about everything to her daughters, and all her children now enjoy a 'great relationship and 'it's all a great relief'. The witness said that when she was attending her own mother's funeral, she felt there was still a stigma: 'The priest passed me by, refusing to shake my hand'.

Witness C

In 1990, 25 years after leaving the home, a witness told how she received an astonishing telephone call from the nuns there to come back, as there was 'news' for her. On getting there, she was 'utterly shocked'. Her daughter, equally shocked, was there too. Neither had been told in advance of the other's presence. 'Things initially went well despite the shock,' the witness told the Committee, but the relationship did break down and during the 15 years prior to the witness's interview mother and daughter had not been in contact. On her part, the witness said, she 'doesn't feel she has the right to interfere in her daughter's life'.



WOMEN RELIGIOUS AS VICTIMS OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

An article in the Guardian, 8 May 2019, quotes Lucetta Scaraffia who was, at the time, the editor of the Vatican's glossy women's magazine Women Church World.

In it she denounced the servitude of nuns who work for a pittance to cook and clean for clerics.

'This created so much embarrassment and hostility in the Catholic hierarchy as the priests thought it was their right to have an unpaid nun serving them. They believe that women become nuns to serve them; it's a mistaken belief but is very much rooted within the church,' says Scaraffia. 'Women become nuns because they have a vocation and want to help those who are suffering or fragile, not to serve priests.'

THE CHILDREN OF PRIESTS

Victor's story (His father is JD)

Victor, however, knew the priest as JJ and grew up believing he was his godfather. It was sixteen years after JD died in 1995 that all the clues that had haunted Victor throughout his childhood fell into the place. Vincent had long 'suspected there was more to our closeness than met the eye'. Father D's death had provoked 'the grief of a child for his father' which at the time young Victor 'had neither the words nor maturity to voice.' Everything fitted together on what would have been his father's 72nd birthday in 2011 as 28-year-old Victor read one of his father's poems. 'Reading the poem slowly, I felt something internally crack, a recognition, an awareness, and I knew... "he was my father, wasn't he?" I voiced my newfound knowledge. A tear escaped my mother's eye, and the sense of relief that overcame me was like a prisoner's first breath of fresh, free air. Truth!'

Sarah's story

'I'd always been told that my father was a lecturer in a London university, which he is. But when I was 12, I found out that he was also a Catholic priest. My mother and father met when she was doing a theology degree, and he was a seminarian training to be a priest. And he'd implied that he'd like to leave the priesthood, like lots of his friends had done, and [marry] my mother. But when he found out that she was expecting me, he wasn't happy at all. And a senior priest suggested strongly that he hurry through ordination and become a priest.

I met him the first time when I was 14. I've since been given letters that show that there was a pre-decided thing that he would never have a father-daughter relationship with me — whereas I was getting into the meeting hoping that we could have a relationship. So the meeting was quite cold. And then he said he couldn't see me again until I was 18, because my mother had said, as I was doing exams at the time, she didn't want me to be sort of disturbed by more meetings. And then I met him a handful of times, but I haven't seen him since 2004.

He did send bits of money, but they were always accompanied by letters I've still got that said if she or I ever identified him or speak about his identity, then the money would stop.'



SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Joyce Meyer, April 28, 2021, Global Sisters Report

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/religious-life/blog/bringing-attention-exploited-obedience-spiritual-abuse-religious>

‘As I read more about this issue, I realized that spiritual abuse is probably more prevalent than I had thought, across nearly every religion. Memories flooded my mind of my own relatives suffering from Church practices that engendered shame, such as having to marry a non-Catholic in the church sacristy rather than inside the church. Children also are often spiritually abused, even if unknowingly, by being told that they could go to hell for certain behaviors.

I realized there were many instances in my life where I felt coerced into behaviors that I did not believe in, related to religious practices before and after I entered the convent. As a sixth grader preparing for confirmation, for example, we were expected to pledge to be Pioneers, promising not to drink alcohol for the rest of our lives. I did not want to do it but did not know how to abstain and so went along with it, not intending to keep the promise. The pain for me was making a promise with no intention of keeping it. I realized that the severity of impact of spiritual abuse depends on many factors, including the individual's sense of self and cultural upbringing. No two people respond the same to similar events or proclamations.

I was not raised in a strict Catholic home, nor did I ever attend a Catholic school, so I missed out on many "Catholic" practices and beliefs that I learned about later from others... I knew there were some things I could not teach, particularly when it came to submission expected of women. I had experienced too many times how women were judged and portrayed in the church, especially during my teen years. We were not to wear sleeveless blouses to church as that might cause temptation to the men present. There seemed to be many rules that programmed women's behaviors for submission.

In my later ministry with adults, I realized the magnitude of spiritual abuse women have suffered from religious and spiritual expectations because of gender. Listening to their stories, I was often reminded of the novel *Trinity* by Leon Uris [<https://www.nytimes.com/1976/03/14/archives/trinity.html>] in which a woman confesses her unwillingness to submit to demands of her drunken husband. The priest promptly tells her that she must submit, because it was her duty as a wife, quoted from Ephesians 5:22-24. Even today, this passage is still read in church accompanied by homilies that perpetuate submission of women.

A young woman I met recently told me that after eight years, she is still plagued with fear and guilt for deciding to leave the convent. As a new entrant she had been told that because she had entered believing it was God's will, leaving would only bring her unhappiness. She interpreted her lingering unhappiness of guilt and fear as punishment for disappointing God. Soon after leaving, she was sexually abused by a priest, which only exacerbated this belief and the trauma she already experienced.’

Anonymous

‘[Spiritual abuse] makes you think that everything bad that happens to you is your fault and that those bad things wouldn’t have happened if you had been more devout. I have managed to rid myself of these thoughts, but it has led a friend of mine to blame her miscarriage on herself due to the lapse of faith she had at the time.’

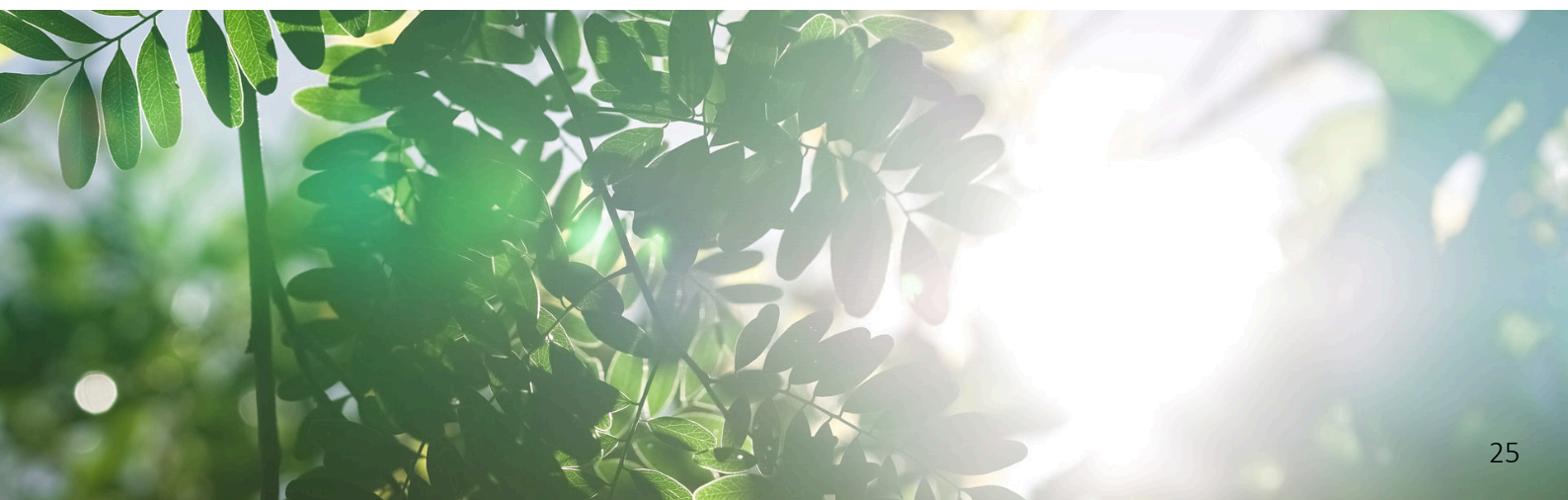
A Church of England Conference, reported in the Guardian, 17 October 2020

‘About 400 church leaders from different denominations are expected to take part in an online conference on Saturday to discuss how churches can be made safe for LGBTQ people.’

The practices of many churches “amount to serious and sustained abuse”, said Steve Chalke, who has organised the Creating Sanctuary conference. “Without action, the coming years are likely to see a crop of high-profile prosecutions that, following the current scandals about child sexual abuse, will further damage the reputation of the whole church.”

In a message of support to the conference, Elton John said: “The failure of many churches to welcome, accept and include LGBTQ+ people creates stigma, loneliness, fear and denial, causing lasting damage to their wellbeing and mental health. Churches must be safe and affirming’. Jayne Ozanne, a prominent figure in the Church of England and a speaker at the conference, said spiritual abuse of LGBT people was “the next big scandal” for the church following decades of disgrace over child sexual abuse. “It’s a ticking time-bomb. When I first spoke out, I felt I was the only voice. Now I’m one of thousands, and people are feeling more and more emboldened to tell their stories. If you are told that your desires are sinful, you desperately want it to work and your prayers to be answered. You submit yourself, thinking you’re doing the right thing. When it doesn’t work, when you still have those desires, the result is terrible anguish. People think this is only happening in developing countries, but actually it’s happening here in the UK in white, middle-class churches too.”

[Steve] Chalke said the aim of Saturday’s conference was to advise churches that they had a legal duty to keep children and vulnerable adults safe from abuse. “People are more willing to say publicly that they have been abused, and they will take it to court if necessary. Whether churches are driven to take action because they genuinely want to care for people, or whether this is just about self-preservation, it’s wake-up time.”



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Veronica, shared with Root & Branch

'You mention helping survivors to rebuild their faith. I think that in order to do that (speaking from my own experience) the first step would be to help with rebuilding our lives. What I am referring to is welcoming us back into the Church community instead of the repeated ostracisation and shunning which I have been subjected to over and over again. Experiencing love and care instead of denial and blaming is what I believe is needed to start rebuilding trust and with it, faith in others.

If the faith community throws you out and blames you, in doing so they are sending you a message that this is their way of witnessing to the God they believe in. It has certainly left me feeling totally abandoned and unable to step inside a church. Up until I made my disclosure, I had been a practising Catholic all my life and had been very active in my parish community.

I was in my early sixties when I stopped going to Mass - I left because I felt that if I continued going with the treatment I was experiencing, I was silently saying that the Church community was right to treat me in this way and that I was accepting their treatment of me. I also couldn't cope with being in an environment where I was being ostracised.

My abuse began shortly after my Mum died leaving me very alone and vulnerable. An order of nuns became aware of my situation, and in an effort to help me, took me to a priest. Unbeknown to them he started sexually assaulting me. It went on for 9 years. 39 years later I finally disclosed it. I had remained close friends with the order through all the intervening years and trusted them hugely. They had been a huge and very positive influence on my faith and values in life.

When I told the nun, who had been instrumental in taking me to the priest, about my disclosure, she cut off contact with me. I told myself that she was a "one off", 2 years later when my legal case was successfully concluded I went to the Provincial, quietly confident of understanding. Nothing could have been further from the truth. She talked about "accusations against Terence". I had brought a document from the police detailing the priest's abuse to many other young people as well as to myself. I asked her for some pastoral support. Her reply was "you don't expect us to help you." By then I was in tears. I summoned up my courage and said, "what about the story of the Good Samaritan". She answered saying "the Good Samaritan took the man lying at the side of the road to an expert". Since then no one in the order ever gets in touch with me.'