

18 November 2014

The Hon Justice Peter McClellan AM
Chair
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to
Child Sexual Abuse
GPO Box 5283
SYDNEY NSW 2001

My name is Edward Arnold Teal and I was the parish priest at Oakleigh from 1992 to 2002. I retired from full time ministry in October 2013.

I came to the parish of Oakleigh from the parish of Mentone. I had not previously had to deal with the pastoral challenges of working in a parish that had victims of abuse by clergy. As I came to appreciate the extent of the abuse that had occurred at Oakleigh and the impact of that abuse on victims, their families and friends, and the parish community, I came to learn and experience something of the difficulty of providing an appropriate pastoral response.

I recall meeting with Christine and Anthony Foster at their home some weeks prior to the eventual meeting of parishioners at Oakleigh. Mr and Mrs Foster had telephoned me and asked me to come to their home to talk about their daughters. It was at that time the Fosters spoke to me about the concerns they had that Emma may have been abused by Father O'Donnell. I cannot recall if they discussed Katie as well.

About two or three years ago I became aware that Christine Foster had referred to me in her book "Hell on the way to heaven" (at page 112) as "our parish priest, O'Donnell's replacement" although my name is not mentioned. Christine Foster said that, at the end of my meeting with them, I told them "Don't tell anyone". The implication seems to be that I was seeking to suppress their complaint or concerns.

Until recently I had decided not to say anything in response to the suggestion that I said these words because I did not feel it would be productive for anyone. I was and remain very conscious of the terrible ordeal that the Foster family has had to endure. That was still my view when I was informed earlier this year that the allegation had been repeated in the statement made by Christine Foster to the Royal Commission (at paragraph 23). The Royal Commission did not ask me to provide a statement or to give evidence in response to this claim.

However, I have recently become aware that the allegation has now been repeated again, both in the submissions of Counsel Assisting (at paragraph 152) and in the submissions made on behalf of the Fosters (at paragraph 26). In those circumstances I now feel compelled to say something in answer.

I would be greatly concerned if the Commission were to find that I had made this comment, or to include the remark attributed to me in its report or findings, without giving me the opportunity to correct the record. I want the Commission to be aware of my position and my recollection.

I have no recollection of saying those words to them and I am sure that I would not have done so. I do know that I advised them to contact Monsignor Gerry Cudmore to tell him about what had happened to their daughters. It was my understanding at the time that Monsignor Cudmore would then advise the Fosters and also refer them for counselling for their daughters.

I also contacted Monsignor Cudmore myself to tell him about what I had learnt in my meeting with the Fosters. I invited him to attend a meeting of our Parish Pastoral Council to hear our concerns and provide his advice to the Parish. Monsignor Cudmore referred our parish's situation to Helen Last, who was then in charge of the Pastoral Response Office for the Archdiocese. She subsequently visited me and said that the parish should have a public meeting in our parish hall to discuss the matter. We wrote to every parishioner to invite them to the meeting. I would hardly make these arrangements if I had any thought of trying to suppress the Fosters' concerns or complaints.

Monsignor Cudmore was unable to attend the meeting. Many Oakleigh parishioners attended the meeting and so did people from other parts of Melbourne and further afield. A great deal of anger was evident and there was a lot of shouting. Towards the end of the evening, I apologised to all who had been affected and expressed my sorrow for all they had been through.

When I learnt of Emma's death in January 2008, I wrote a letter of condolence to Mr and Mrs Foster. I also visited Katie in the Bethesda Hospital after her terrible accident.

My hope has always been that the Fosters and other victims of abuse could be helped to adjust to their awful experiences and be helped to lead a happier life. I certainly do not wish to cause any distress by taking issue with the statement attributed to me but it is necessary for me to make clear that I have never attempted to suppress or hide, even to a limited extent, any complaint of sexual abuse.

Yours sincerely



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