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INTERVIEW WITH KAREN ROGERS AND DAVID CAPPO – PAYMENT OF THE GIFT

Karen Rogers, Parent Advocacy (891ABC 8.43-8.52) Sexual abuse of children at St Anne's School for Children with Intellectual Disabilities

(Abraham: ...a story ... for both the Catholic and Anglican Church in Adelaide, the problem of sex abuse and how that has been handled ... has been one that's dominated much of our public debate this year ... late September, the Catholic Church in Adelaide made a compensation gift, the word gift is used, rather than compensation to a number of parents who children went to St Anne's Special School at Marion between 1987 and 1991, Brian Morris-Perkins ... is a paedophile, he's 67 years old, he's currently in jail ... he was sentenced ... to 10 years jail with a six year non parole period after pleading guilty to the sexual assault of three boys at St Anne's ... he was a volunteer bus driver, he and another paedophile were operating at the school in various attachments to the school ... a number of people have been affected as a result of that, after he was sentenced, the Catholic Church announced a \$2.1m payment of offers of \$100,000, \$75,000 and \$50,000 to a significant number of former students based on the best assessment of extent to which those students were affected, this was portrayed at the time as a gift, a number of parents were upset the way that was handled because it was announced first in the media and some suggested that the spin went before the sin ... the gifts of money are quite substantial for some of the people involved ... I had been in contact with a few of the St Anne parents who are very upset of the way this has been handled and I received an email yesterday from one parent who's child ... was at the school at this time and it says, ...

'you may be interested to know the obstacle course we've been requested to negotiate to receive the "gift" ... from the Archbishop, yes we signed the form of acceptance and sent it back and now we're asked to jump through a number of hoops created by the church ... to ensure that we're in a position to accept the gift on behalf of our son ... they require proof that our son is unable to manage his own financial affairs and that we are qualified to take on that responsibility ... we sent them a copy of our limited administration order

which indicates that we act on his behalf in the event of civil proceedings against the church, not good enough ... Medicare and the taxation department consider it to be compensation ...the Head of the Guardianship Board ... advises us that the order may need to be varied to accommodate the church's expectations, you would expect that maybe the church could accommodate the victims for a change, they seem to forget that due to their negligence, a guy is serving 10 plus years in jail for his activities in one of their schools and maybe they should bear some responsibility for this, we therefore are required to supply the church with our son's banking details ... this will be like sending details to Nigeria, a certified birth certificate ... and proof of our ID ...the lawyer we are dealing with ...can not understand why they need all this stuff, in his 26 years of dealing with the law and compensation etc, he has not seen anything like it ... we refuse to deal with them, the church, any further ... we know of at least one other parent who feels as we do, I spoke to that parent last night ...we will not answer their latest request, they can stick their money, that has never been what we wanted in the first place ... our son has been very ill in hospital ... we've got a lot more important things happening in our lives than to jump through the churches hoops' ...

Karen Rogers ... some parents are obviously going through the process and working with the church, but some have been upset at the way that this has been handled ...) ...

that's right, some parents already have signed the documentation, presented what they've been asked to present and have received their gift, but others like this family ... are really, really angry, they're not prepared to present their bank account numbers and they do feel like they're jumping through hoops ... last night I spoke to one family who said, 'I'm not going to give them my bank account number ... they're asking us to trust them, how can we trust them, our children were abused' ...

(Abraham: ...this question of providing limited administration order ... which one of the couples have ... this is a normal administration order you would need if you're representing a child in civil proceedings? ...)

Yes that's right ... they were advised ... to actually go to ... apply for the Guardianship order for a limited administration order which allowed them to act on their child's behalf in taking legal action or dealing with compensation claims ... because this isn't a compensation claim, it's a gift, the church won't accept it

(Abraham: ...can you take the view that the church is being prudent here in making sure the money goes to the victims?) ...

I'm pretty sure that the money is going to go to the victims no matter what, although in this case ... the people that you read the email from, they don't want the money anymore, they've had enough, they've tried to deal with the church ... they've made several attempts to talk to the church and they feel that they haven't been listened to ...

(Abraham: ...in the media release that went out on in September 24, Archbishop Wilson said that offers of \$100,000, \$75,000 and \$50,000 have been made to a significant number of former students based on the best assessment of the extent to which those students were affected ... one of the parents I spoke to last night read a letter that was ... dated September 23 ... and in it, it says Brian Perkins, who's the paedophile ... has admitted the offences in relation to a few specific children, but it's apparent to all police ... that your son ... wasn't one of them ... this parent's son was on the bus with Brian Perkins and ... used to go away on weekends in Brian Perkins' care and is suffering from a number of behavioural problems ... is it your understanding that the police have informed the church that the abuse was confined to just the three children in the case? ...)

No, I understand that the police were very open with the fact that they could only charge him with these three people because they were the only three children that they had specific evidence in the form of photographs ... they were unlikely to get convictions with any of the other children, given their limited ability to testify ... certainly the police have been very honest in saying ... they have no doubt that there is a number more ... that were involved, but they weren't able to charge him

(Abraham: ...you've spent quite some time talking to the actual ... young men, they were children at the time and have had stories, I've heard some of them, they make me feel sick, literally, physically and yet those children ... are not the three whose cases were sufficient to get Brian Perkins behind bars ...)

A number of those people are receiving counselling ...because any evidence gained in a therapeutic session can't be used in a court of law, there were never charges relating to these children ... I've heard stories that literally like you, make me want to vomit

Monsignor David Cappelletti, Archdiocese of Adelaide (891ABC 8.52-8.59) Sexual abuse of children at St Anne's School for Children with Intellectual Disabilities

(Abraham: ...Monsignor David Cappelletti ... is the church requiring parents to jump through hoops to get a gift?)

Certainly that's not how we see it ... we are certainly asking for some very basic minimum requirements ... birth certificates and recognising that many of the families have fairly complex arrangements involving foster families, guardianship issues and what we're trying to do with those families is just sort out who is to receive the money and who has the legal right to receive it ... we're really quite sensitive in fact to this issue ... 37 families are involved in this process with us at the moment, out of those 37, we have already paid 20 families ... we have responses to the offer by 30, so we are now processing another 10

(Abraham: Is it fair to say that however, some families are not happy with the way this has been handled?)

Some families are very, very angry and venting that anger on to the church staff who are dealing with this matter... and we're really trying to care for those families ... all I can say ... if families continue to find that ... they see this as obstacles and hoops to jump through, please stay with us, please keep talking to us

(Abraham: ...some of them have just given up on that ...they say that their children have never really been spoken to about the abuse and when they get a letter from the Archbishop saying, 'all information available to us from police and other information, your son was not abused') ...

that's another category of those people, that's not this 37 that we're talking about

(Abraham: ...this 37 were among those who received that letter, were they not?)

These 37 that we're talking about received letters regarding the gift of money that the church wishes to make to them

(Abraham: ...did they also receive a letter ... from the Archbishop on September 23, saying Brian Perkins has admitted the offences in relation to a few specific children, but it's apparent from all police and other information available to us that your son wasn't one of them?)

That would be other, that's not part of this 37 ... that decision was made on - the information gained from police and other sources that indicate where children might have been and whether there was any possibility that they were abused

(Abraham: One of the families that I spoke to that's dealing with this issue of the gift also ... received that letter)

Well ... if they would like to keep in contact with me on that, then we can sort that out

(Abraham: They've given up on the church) ...

that's a pity that that's happened because the Archbishop is very clear on what he's trying to do here and offer this gift at this time to help the families who have been in a situation where the children have been either abused or the possibility of abuse ...

(Abraham: ...is this a gift or a compensation?) *

It is purely a gift *

(Abraham: Why not use the word compensation?) *

Because we believe that compensation will be sorted out in the class action and the legal action that is to follow this, we don't see this as the end of the story at all ... no doubt the courts will have a lot to say about this when it gets to that stage and the courts will award compensation for families ... *

(Abraham: ...and if that is done, the gift is taken back? ...)

Well, if the compensation eventually awarded is well in excess of this amount, then yes, what we've said is that we would see it's the fair thing for this to be deducted from that . . that may not happen ...

(Abraham: ...have you spoken to any of the victims? ...) ...

not personally, I know the Archbishop has met with a number of the families ... on this and has talked to them about it

(Abraham: How many families did he meet?) ...

I'm not aware of that ...

(Abraham: ...was that in response to families upset at the way this was handled in the media?)

No, it's a response to families who've requested to meet the Archbishop

(Abraham: ...has he spent much time with the victims?) ...

what he's really trying to do is speak to the legal guardians –

(Abraham: After the gift was made to them, the timing of this ... you hear the stories after you've made a gift to them, after)

That's not correct ...we've got staff involved in this full time talking to the families, talking to victims ... there's a whole process going on where the church has put incredible resources in to listening to people and trying to help and support them ... we're painted as the nasty church, not caring ... *

(Abraham: I don't think so ...) ...

what we're really just trying to do is say, here we've got a huge issue, we've got people in need, we've got very angry people, we've got people dealing with abuse that was just shocking, we're really trying to respond in a very caring way ...

(Abraham: ...thank you...)