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Phone/Fax REDACTED

20th June 2000

Archbishop Peter Hollingworth
Anglican Archbishop
Brisbane 4000

Dear Archbishop

Re your comment in Saturday's Courier Mail (17th June 00)

I wanted to write a letter to the editor of the Courier Mail but I chose to contact you personally, as I did not wish to publicly challenge you. I would like you to know how I felt on reading the headline that sex victims "should have spoken up".

As I sat at my table and read those words it was like a sword piercing my heart. Even at age 52, I was again filled with shame and guilt because I too am a person who "should have spoken up". Even though the adult mind knows that I was only a child and the perpetrator of the heinous abuse (a Catholic Priest) was the adult, the wounded child within still feels guilty for allowing the abuse to continue.

I did not tell because this man was treated like God in our family – who would have believed me? He was the one who my parents confided in, who shared meals, holidays and Christmas with our family. A place was set for him each meal. He christened the children, buried the dead and celebrated the weddings. I was sent off to do his washing each Saturday morning and told to be a good girl and to do as Father told me. After I was abused, I was made to kneel in front of my perpetrator and confess MY sin. This abuse started when I was a little girl of 11 and continued until I ran off to the convent at 17. There I thought I would be safe, but a paedophile will go to any length to have what he wants.

After leaving the convent, I was blackmailed into continuing the abuse. It wasn't until I tried to commit suicide and he suffered a serious car accident that I was free. Thank God, for my beautiful husband who came and picked me up out of the gutter. On our wedding day before the perpetrator of my abuse, my dear husband was denied the pleasure of watching his bride walk down the aisle. He was told to face the altar. Only the priest had that joy.

My heart aches for the many people who have suffered similar experiences and who once again feel shamed because they didn't speak up.

I beg you please, do some reading on sexual abuse. Make it your business to attend seminars so that this foolish mistake is not made again. You may say the word "sorry" but the initial pain cuts deep and the wounds are reopened again.

Ray Wyre comes from Birmingham each year to run a group for the Esther Trust and he can tell you what goes on inside the head of a paedophile. Catholic Bishop of Sydney, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson has written a great paper on the Spiritual Harm of Sexual Abuse. This too would be a good paper to study. Geoffrey Robinson has said that once you learn about sexual abuse, you will never ask a victim why they didn't tell.

As I cannot find an address for you I will have to use your fax number and I apologise if someone reads this ahead of you, but I do want you to know the pain that a throw-away comment can make. I do not wish to offend you but rather challenge you to learn more about this horrid subject that causes life long pain and sorrow.

May our loving God continue to bless and guide you.

Yours sincerely

AYB