



Statement

Name Peter Gerard Barker
Address Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation Doctor
Date November 2015

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. This statement has been prepared on the basis that the Commission will issue a Notice to Produce under the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 2(3A) for the production of a signed copy.

Background

3. My full name is Dr Peter Gerard Barker and I am 60 years old. I am a registered medical practitioner in Cohuna, Victoria. Cohuna is a small town located just under 300km north of Melbourne.
4. I was born and raised south of Melbourne. I went to school at St Finbar's Primary School, East Brighton, and De La Salle, Malvern. My family is Catholic and I am the middle child of five.
5. Between 1974 and 1979 I studied medicine at Monash University. In 1980 I commenced practice as an intern in Box Hill. In 1982 I travelled to the United Kingdom where I was a

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Witness: *Melene Barker*

General Practitioner in training. I also worked in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Yorkshire, and in Anaesthetics in the Midlands. In mid-1983, I returned to Australia and took a position at a Local General Practice in Cohuna, Victoria. I am still in that role today.

6. I have [REDACTED] who has three children - two daughters and a son [BVE] who was born in 1969. [BVE] is the middle child of the three. Because of the age difference between me and [REDACTED] children, I always thought of them as my [REDACTED]. I refer to [BVE] as my [REDACTED] even though he is my [REDACTED].
7. [REDACTED] family lived in Elwood, a suburb of Melbourne until 2010. Her family was raised strict Catholics and they were parishioners of St James Parish, Gardenvale ('Gardenvale Parish'). In 1976, [REDACTED] husband died. [BVE] was seven years old at the time of his father's death, so I became something of a father figure to him as he was growing up.
8. [BVE] attended [REDACTED] Catholic Primary School (I do not recall when he commenced, but I believe it would have been in around 1974), and went to high school at [REDACTED] College, [REDACTED] which is a Catholic High School. [BVE] became an altar boy at Gardenvale Parish around the time of his first communion, which I believe would have been in grade 3 or 4, so he would have been 10 or 11 years old.

Disclosure about Father Ronald Pickering, January 1986

9. In 1985, I was building my home in Cohuna. [REDACTED] came to visit with her family during the school holidays. During this visit, I had a conversation with [REDACTED] about [BVE] coming to stay in Cohuna while he was on school holidays. I understood he was having

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difficulties concentrating at school, and that he was drinking alcohol and smoking. I put this down to being a teenage boy. REDACTED thought it would be good for BVE to spend time with me in Cohuna.

10. In June 1985, BVE came to Cohuna with some of his friends to stay for the school holidays. They camped out on my property and stayed for a week.
11. In January 1986, BVE came to Cohuna to visit me alone for a week during the school holidays. He was around 16 or 17 years old at the time.
12. One day during this visit, BVE and I went hunting. After we returned and cleaned up, we sat at the kitchen table talking. BVE told me that four years earlier, in 1982 when he was about 13 years old, the Parish Priest of Gardenvale Parish, Father Ronald Pickering, had invited him back to the presbytery after choir practice. BVE said that Father Pickering gave him alcohol in the presbytery. He said Father Pickering did this on four occasions in total.
13. BVE said that on the third occasion, after Father Pickering invited him to the presbytery and after giving him a glass of whisky, Father Pickering put his hands inside BVE pants and fondled his genitals. BVE said on the fourth occasion, Father Pickering also gave BVE alcohol in the presbytery and fondled his genitals.
14. BVE told me that Father Pickering touching his genitals made him very uncomfortable and he felt angry about it. He said that he stopped being an altar boy because of Father Pickering touching him. BVE said that he said did not tell anyone at the time about Father Pickering touching him, including his mother.

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15. I believed what [BVE] had told me. I told [BVE] that I would look into it for him, and that I would call and let him know how I went. I did not tell him what I would do, and [BVE] did not ask me to do anything in particular. It appeared to me that [BVE] was happy that someone was going to take some action.

16. No one else was present when [BVE] and I had this conversation. About one week after the conversation with [BVE], I told my girlfriend, Shirlene (who is now my wife) about what [BVE] had told me about Father Pickering. I did not tell [BVE]'s mother.

Report to the Archdiocese, January 1986

17. I decided to contact the Melbourne Archdiocese to report what [BVE] had told me. I believed there was no point going to a Parish Priest - I understood there was a hierarchy within the Church and I wanted to go straight to the top. I got the phone number for the office of the Archdiocese of Melbourne from Directory Assistance. At the time I knew that Frank Little was the Archbishop of Melbourne, but I did not know him personally.

18. I believe I called the number for the Archdiocese within a few days after the conversation with [BVE], so it would have been in January 1986. I believe it would have been around the Tuesday after the weekend that he stayed with me.

19. A woman answered the phone who I assumed was the receptionist. I do not recall her name. I introduced myself as a doctor, and asked to speak to the Archbishop. I told her I wanted to report the sexual abuse of a young boy by Father Pickering. The woman told me that it was 'the Monsignor' who handled complaints. She did not mention whether the Monsignor specifically dealt with complaints about sexual abuse.

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Witness: *Shirlene Barker*

20. The receptionist put my call through to the Monsignor, but I do not recall his name. He told me he was second in charge at the Archdiocese. I explained to him that I was a doctor in the country, and I was calling to report sexual abuse of a [REDACTED] by Father Pickering which occurred in 1982 at Gardenvale Parish. I explained to the Monsignor what [BVE] told me, in the same way that [BVE] described it to me. I said that on four occasions after choir practice, Father Pickering invited [BVE] to the presbytery and gave him alcohol, and on the last two of the four occasions, Father Pickering also put his hands inside [BVE]'s pants and fondled his genitals.
21. The Monsignor said the allegation 'would be looked into', or words to that effect. He didn't specifically state how or by who. The call lasted about 5 minutes.
22. The next day, I called [BVE] and told him about my conversation with the Monsignor. [BVE] seemed pleased that action had been taken. He agreed to allow me to discuss the matter with his mother. He handed the phone to his mother, and I explained to her what [BVE] had told me about Father Pickering, and that I had spoken to the Monsignor about it.
23. After about two weeks since my call to the Monsignor, I had not heard anything further. I called the Archdiocese again and spoke to the same female receptionist. She told me the Monsignor was not in. I left a message for him, but he did not return my call.
24. The following week, which I believe would have been in early February 1986, I called the Archdiocese again. On this occasion the receptionist put my call through to the Monsignor who I had spoken to previously. I asked him what was happening about the

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allegation I reported. He said they were dealing with the situation, or words to that effect. He did not indicate how it was being dealt with or by who.

25. A short time later, I think it may have been within days, I called [BVE] to check on his welfare. During that phone call, either [BVE] or [REDACTED] told me that Father Pickering had left Gardenvale Parish.

26. I did not take any further action because I thought Father Pickering had been removed by the Archdiocese. I was not aware until recently that Father Pickering subsequently returned to Gardenvale Parish. If I had known at the time that he had returned to the parish, I would have followed this up with the Archdiocese. I was not told by [REDACTED] or [BVE] that Father Pickering returned to the parish, even though they continued to be parishioners.

27. I have recently spoken to [BVE], and he told me he knew that Father Pickering had returned to Gardenvale Parish at the time, but he thought his temporary removal must have been how the church dealt with the allegation and he was returned to the parish after his punishment or rehabilitation. I have not spoken to [REDACTED] about Father Pickering.

Signed:

Peter Barker

Date:

18/11/15

Witness:

Shirley Barker

Date:

18/11/15