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**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL LEDINGHAM TO THE ROYAL  
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL ABUSE IN STATE CARE  
AND IN THE CARE OF FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS**

**CONTEXTUAL PUBLIC HEARING**

**OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2019**

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Kia Ora Tatou

[1] My name is Mike Ledingham, one of three brothers, among probably dozens of others, as we are now realising, who were abused by the late Father Francis (“Frank”) Green during his time at St Joseph’s Catholic School in Onehunga circa 1957 to 1969.

[2] I found it extremely difficult to formulate this address. It is hard to remain detached when you have experienced what we did. But for all the victims’ sakes, here I am today, hopefully speaking for a vast silent majority also.

[3] I have written a book about our experience – “The Catholic Boys”. It was published in June this year, after taking me more than 20 years to write.

[4] I have had three other books published over the past five years after finding out later in life that I did have a talent for writing. Oh to have learned this at a much younger age. My publisher, Mike Smith of BMS Books Rotorua, always knew I had a draft copy of “The Catholic Boys” squirreled away and kept encouraging me to finish it.

[5] I had put it aside many times before, not only because I kept becoming disgusted with what had happened to us but also our experience of the arrogant and seemingly non-caring attitude of the Catholic Church towards its victims.

[6] This changed suddenly late last year, when the Bishop of Adelaide proclaimed, “I would never report a priest who confessed to sexual abuse. To me, for the victim this is like having contact with God through the priest.”

[7] I was outraged at this and thought “how sick is that?”. I was appalled that people like the Bishop of Adelaide were in charge.

[8] This was exactly the motivation I needed and I finished the book, ably supported by my sister Mary as the narrator and of course my two brothers who have each told their side of a sordid childhood.

[9] It has taken me forty years to begin to talk fully about what happened.

[10] These were nightmarish times and I have few fond memories from being at St Joseph's Catholic School Onehunga.

[11] I make no apology for my language when describing what happened. It may offend some of you, especially religious people, but then nobody apologised to us when we disclosed that Catholic clergy performed deviant practices on us bewildered, frightened children either.

[12] The horrific abuse that happened can't be told and understood using polite words or watered down rhetoric.

[13] I make the point also, I have not always been a good person, I was screwed up mentally for quite a few years and didn't always do good or the right things.

[14] By the same token I don't preach or tell people to follow me like churches do!

[15] I'm more like "don't follow me I'm lost."

[16] We, my brothers and I, make up the numbers of countless other victims of abuse in the Catholic church who are out there, and I somewhat feel we also have a duty to these silent, suffering people to try and bring a sick and self-centered institution out of the dark ages to face the realisation of what they have done.

[17] Sexually abusing anyone is a crime.

[18] Sexually abusing children is abominable.

[19] If any one of us did it we would face years in jail.

[20] So how can they be allowed to get away with it?

## **WHAT I WILL TALK ABOUT**

[21] Here today, I will tell you about the abuse that happened to myself, my brothers and others.

[22] I will tell you what happened to three little boys, three little brothers, all primary school age, whose lives were inexplicably changed most horrifically, at the hands of a Catholic priest.

[23] I am here to tell you about the horror of the abuse I and my brothers suffered, the way it changed OUR lives and changed our family forever.

[24] I will tell you what it was like to grow up in the silence of not understanding what happened, and the threat of further retribution if you spoke about it. I am here to tell you what it was like not being able to tell anyone.

[25] I will tell you what happened when WE DID try to report what happened.

[26] I will tell you why I have learnt the church cannot be trusted to address the abuse that its religious clergy are responsible for.

## **WHAT HAPPENED**

[27] On the face of it I grew up in a great example of a Catholic family with strong Irish roots growing up in New Zealand. My family was typical of many of those who lived in the area: my father worked, my mother stayed at home, and us 8 kids were raised to respect adults and those in authority, especially priests of the Catholic church.

[28] We were regarded as what was then called a good Catholic family, and it was always impressed on us from an early age that we were privileged to be members of the one true Church and had standards to uphold.

[29] My brothers and I served as altar boys at the local Catholic church.

[30] We attended the local parish convent school, St Joseph's Onehunga.

[31] There were many religious visitors to our house. We became accustomed to seeing them, liked most of them and unfortunately, as it turned out, trusted them implicitly.

[32] In our small wee eyes, the Catholic Church was all powerful, always correct; in fact infallible.

[33] What was not apparent to outsiders was that **one by one, WE, yes, my brothers and I**, were picked off and abused by this sexual predator who was the parish priest at the time. But we did not know about each other's abuse at the time.

[34] For me, the actual physical abuse proper began in 1958 at Father Frank Green's Aunty's place.

[35] Previously when doing gymnastics or especially when riding in the front seat of his car, he would rub up and down your legs and body quite inappropriately, although we certainly didn't understand this at the time.

[36] We'd gone up there, to Green's Aunty's place, ostensibly, as I remember it, to redecorate the place while she was away. We worked for a while and then stopped for a break. He asked me how my training, for the Silver Badge in gymnastics I think it was, was going. I said okay except for the splits exercise which I found hard.

[37] Green said he could help me and got me to do it while he got down behind me and then he began rubbing the area of my crack and my balls, which surprised and unsettled me.

[38] After a while, he said it would be a lot easier if I took my strides off. I was unsure and unwilling about this, but he ordered me to do it. He then started massaging and stroking my whole genital area, while he went quiet and strange, breathing heavily, with some sort of movement of his body going on. I understand now he was masturbating himself, although again, as an 8 year old child with absolutely no idea about sexual matters I certainly didn't understand this at the time.

[39] This man who carried out this despicable act was the same man constantly held up to us as God's representative on earth, who was never wrong – always to be obeyed instantly.

[40] You need to understand, that our PREDATOR was God in our community. He was God's representative in our parish and the authority that ruled over not only the local church, but also the convent school I attended with my brothers and our devout Catholic family.

## **THE EFFECT**

[41] **How did I feel?** Firstly, you need to understand: **I was only an 8 year old CHILD!**

[42] I was totally uncomprehending, shocked, frightened and sickened. I felt very dirty somehow. When he was finished, I went to the toilet and locked myself in and just sat there in abject misery until he ordered me out, dropped me home, then left with not a word spoken.

[43] My life had inexplicably turned into a total nightmare. More especially after all the teaching about love of God, piety and purity and burning in hell-fire forever if you sinned, being hammered into us from an early age.

[44] I now understand that for 8 YEAR OLD me, this was quite a catastrophic event in my life.

[45] I was so traumatised by the events that I never once managed to tell a soul what had happened till years later.

[46] I developed asthma around that time. My attention at school was sadly lacking and the nuns were quick to dish out the strap or other punishments for this.

[47] Green very quickly followed up the abuse with orders to the nuns for me to report to him at the presbytery after school for unspecified reasons. After just about sweating blood over this all day, sick and frightened about what may occur, I knew I could not ignore the instruction to go.

[48] Once there, he would always accuse you of some sort of misdemeanour, all bullshit of course: theft, damage to the school or church or graveyard. But his favourite subject was talking about masturbating.

[49] He seemed to have a fixation on this heinous sin but I didn't even know what he was talking about so became even more confused.

[50] I can still remember him asking what colour the fluid was that came out of my penis when I played with myself. For me, an 8 year old boy, this was absolutely non-comprehensible.

[51] This type of interrogation happened on at least 4 to 6 occasions that I recall, so you can imagine my attention at school had been well and truly diverted, I spent my time with my head over my shoulders, worrying, and after school could not get out that gate fast enough.

[52] My asthma continued to plague me, meaning days at home in comparative safety. I can remember the doctor telling mum that there didn't seem to be a clinical reason for the asthma so it must be a nervous thing. I think he was spot on.

[53] Funnily enough as soon as I left secondary school and went on to a farm the asthma disappeared and I've never had it since.

[54] But it wasn't really safe at home. Father Green turned up often because Mum did typing for the church. And remember, this Priest was God on earth to an Irish Catholic family at that time.

[55] The intimidation continued on a regular basis. I remember once when my brother Gerry had a friend come over on the weekend and Green heard about it, (we found out years later Green had abused that boy too), he called us both up to the presbytery, split us up into separate rooms and told us that the other boy had told him we had all masturbated ourselves round the back of the house.

[56] We denied this, but he kept us there until we both finally admitted it and then he warned us that he would tell the nuns and our parents if we ever got together with that boy again.

[57] On the way home Gerry said he hadn't done it and so did I, but neither of us told the other of our actual abuse at that time. It was only years later I found out Green was abusing Gerry too. Green was probably scared we would compare notes with that other boy, but I can tell you this, it was far from our minds. We were too scared to tell anyone about the nightmare that we were living.

[58] The abuse suffered by myself and my brothers has had a **profound effect** on the rest of our lives and we're still bearing the cost today.

[59] Like many other victims/survivors:

- (a) I lived in confusion and silence
- (b) I achieved no qualifications
- (c) I mistrusted authority
- (d) I developed an almost blind hatred of intimidation which was to cost me a good few jobs
- (e) I did not feel safe letting people get close to me
- (f) I developed a drinking problem which I probably still have.
- (g) I committed a few minor crimes in the latter sixties which should have had me in jail or borstal if I'd been caught, and after I joined the army I did spend a bit of time in the military prison.



## **WHEN GREEN WAS FINISHED WITH ME HE MOVED ON TO ABUSE MY YOUNGER BROTHERS**

[60] My brother Gerry does not remember how old he was when he became the victim of Green's abuse.

[61] Gerry is 11 months younger than me. We are very similar in thinking but have a few differing personality traits.

[62] He is a very private man and I don't think he has told me the full extent of the abuse that occurred to him, although I could be wrong about this.

[63] What I do know is that, like a lot of victims, he loathes the Catholic Church and distrusts them completely, which you can't blame him for, given what happened, and then the shameful way we were treated.

[64] When asked what he would like me to say to you today, he had this to say, I quote:

*"Nothing much has changed. They (the Church) go on about how sorry they are and how they now look after victims, but you know, not once in the 17 years since we were forced to go public, has anyone rung to see how we were travelling or if we needed anything. They are full of shit and as far as I am concerned, they can shove their sick religion right up their jacksy."*

[65] Thanks for that Gerry. That gets your point across pretty succinctly I feel.

[66] My brother Chris was always a quieter, far more gentle and more studious type than me and Gerry. He wouldn't hurt a fly and me and Gerry used to have to fight his battles for him at school. Mum always used to say "look after your little brother", and so we did.

[67] Finding out in 2002 that Green had got him badly upsets me greatly. I felt I had let him down and I cried. My sister, Mary, pointed out that, given the powerlessness of the situation we were in, I wouldn't have been able to do anything anyway. But if I had known earlier while Green was still alive I'd probably nailed the bastard.

[68] Chris used the money he got from the church settlement to go to Uni in Australia. He achieved two degrees. But he was in his fifties by then. If he'd had the education he was supposed to, that would have been in his twenties with the chance of earning good money for far more years before retirement.

[69] Like the rest of us who were abused, he hasn't got much to retire with. In fact, with interference the abuse caused to our early education and subsequent loss of further education, qualifications and employment, we are the example of many bright intelligent children with potential to achieve and be financially independent who are now facing a pretty meagre retirement.

[70] I asked Chris for a quote for you today. This is what he said:

*"Having read the book "Walking Towards Thunder" by Peter Fox, an ex-Ausi policeman, he now knows that the Catholic church did cover up sexual abuse crimes.*

*His quote stems from the Church's handling of paedophile priest Dennis McAlinden, whom they knew had been abusing young girls for years."*

***"BEYOND TRANSFERRING HIM WHAT ELSE COULD THEY DO?"***

***My answer to that would be, "hand him over to the police."***

*But, The Church's Canon Law acknowledged the inherent sinfulness of clergy abusing children, but only required McAlinden to be rebuked and given warnings. They had tried moving him which also failed.*

*Canon Law also dictated that*

*"A priests good name be protected, and secrecy was demanded by Crimen Sollicitationis, a 1962 Holy Office instruction which American*

*priest and academic Thomas Doyle would later describe as 'An explicit policy to cover up cases of abuse by clergy'.*

*McAlindens crimes were concealed, a pontifical secret."*

[71] Thanks Chris. Certainly tells a story and gives the lie to denials of organised coverups.

[72] Before I move on. This Commission will no doubt hear more about McAlinden. McAlinden (1922-2005) is the classic example of a remorseless serial child sex offender over six decades. In 1984 McAlinden was in New Zealand, "on loan" to the Diocese of Hamilton, where he did "supply" (relieving work) in rural parishes. This kind of transfer involved an arrangement between the Maitland-Newcastle diocese and its New Zealand counterpart. It is understood the way the Catholic Church works, the then Bishop of Hamilton would have approved this transfer. He died in Western Australia never having spent a minute in jail despite the devastation and destruction he inflicted on the lives of dozens if not hundreds of children.

[73] There is an old saying, "if you see one cockroach, there's probably a dozen and if you see a dozen, there is an infestation.

[74] I believe this church is infested.

[75] My family, with three of us abused, were the victims of Green's abuse.

## **THE EFFECT: LIFE AFTER ABUSE**

[76] My sister sums it up with her statement:

*"With the abuse came our journey from a happy family with the usual happy feisty kids to one of troubled teenagers who became angry, abusing (and self-abusing) men, with consequences for themselves and traumatic results for our family."*

[77] As I have said, after the abuse by Green started, my attention waned at school and I stopped achieving. My health was also affected.

[78] I'm not a professional man, nor am I well educated. In fact you could well say that I was brought up in the school of hard knocks and arse covering. Literally. It is hard enough, as a young child to recognise that the better your education, the better your employment would be, without having someone with designs on your arse.

[79] I left school after the fifth form after failing School Cert. From memory I had asthma around the time of the exams, which didn't help, but I feel I never really regained the ground that those last miserable years at that convent cost me.

[80] I was certainly very mixed up and confused.

[81] When you've been brainwashed by religion, then sexually abused by a priest at a young age, it's not a good recipe for logical thinking.

[82] Basically, I ran wild for about four years – had jobs on farms, had altercations with bosses, had jobs at the Freezing Works, had altercations with fellow workers, couldn't hold down a job for very long.

[83] I had an almost pathological hatred of intimidation and I wasn't a successful drinker: I got involved in brawls and vandalism, caught a few good hidings, and left a couple of towns one step ahead of the police.

[84] Many of my friends from those days were Maori and this remains so today. They thought I was a mad bastard and I loved their humour, willingness to stand their ground and fight, and also, their stoicism when suffering from racism, which there was a lot of back then.

[85] Doing national service in 1971 and then joining the regular force army afterwards was a good thing for me discipline wise – it probably kept me out of jail although, as mentioned, I did do time in the military prison. I still hated Intimidation and over the years had several fights with more senior people.

[86] I did two tours up to South East Asia with the Infantry battalion stationed there, then in 1978 was talked into having a go at the SAS selection course. Surprising myself I was one of 9 candidates from about 56 applicants who passed and I spent the next 7 years there.

[87] I can tell you this, nothing the SAS threw at me, physically or mentally, phased me as much as the sexual and mental abuse I suffered as a child at that convent.

[88] Sadly the old intimidation thing arose again when, as a corporal, I attacked a warrant officer after an altercation. The boys broke it up when it became obvious I was going to mangle him.

[89] That was effectively the end of my service after 15 years. In another 5 years I would have got a full military pension.

[90] I married a Maori girl I met in the Army in my thirties, although I still had closeness and trust issues. We had 5 children rather rapidly, but sadly one died just before she turned three. My wife suffered from depression after this and, with my own problems, as well as grief, I wasn't much good to her and in the end we split after twenty-five years.

[91] I brought my children up as heathens with a great contempt for any religion.

[92] They also knew that if they struck any problems, especially people problems, Dad would be there for them. You don't need a bible in your hands to be a good person.

[93] I am lucky. My children all have a work ethic, are good people with many friends from all cultures and walks of life. I now live next door to one daughter who has two boys, and five minutes from another who has one girl, my moko's.

[94] Life is good you might say.

[95] But I can't help feeling it should have been much better for all of us victims.

[96] We all had something snatched away from us at a very young age that you can never get back: Trust and Innocence!

[97] The Bishop of Auckland claimed that nobody knew anything about Green's offending in the twelve years at Onehunga Parish, but I find that extremely hard to believe. I was a single soldier for 11 years before I got married and lived in the barracks 7-8 of those years. When you live close with others like that you get to know what they are like and if they have any particular bad habits. Like being bent. Fortunately we only found a couple like that in my time in the services.

[98] With what we now understand to be Green's history of offending, the argument that nobody knew doesn't wash with me Mr Bishop.

[99] I firmly believe what Green did to me, and others, denied many of us of our right and ability to determine our futures.

[100] Initially it was the loss of security and trust and the powerlessness to have control over what was happening. I also felt tainted and not normal, somehow dirty and ashamed, although I felt I had to hide this away along with the terrible secret of what happened.

[101] My feeling of great guilt was made worse later when I realised that the church taught that any form of sexual activity outside marriage was regarded as a mortal sin and could condemn your soul to hell. Where did that leave me after what the priest had done and what I admitted doing? Talk about being mixed up?

[102] I believe any chance of a decent education was stripped from me, especially when the campaign of intimidation started shortly after the initial abuse took place. I began to have doubts about myself and developed the asthma that would cause me to miss a lot of school.

[103] The abuse meant that I didn't feel secure in my own home and probably left at too young an age, in an endeavour to get away from the presence of Father Green and sort out the bewilderment of the second part of my childhood.

[104] Instead of my adolescent years being a time of growth and development, I instead had to try to find myself, which was to prove an elusive goal. I compensated for lack of confidence, especially around females, by drinking heavily. I lacked stability, drifting from

one job to the next, never staying too long in one place and never being able to trust or form a close relationship with anyone, thinking there was something wrong with me because of what had occurred. Keeping my unspeakable secret buried deep.

[105] It would be fair to say I blundered up more than a few blind alleys in my life in an endeavour to find myself, particularly in those early days, and found myself trapped or banging my head against a brick wall. Came out bloodied or bowed, and moved on to the next mistake.

[106] The moment of truth came in August 2002 when our youngest brother Chris confided in Gerry and me about the abuse he had also suffered from Green.

[107] It was then that we got together and understood what the abuse had cost our families and us.

[108] Imagine our horror to find all three of us had been abused by the same priest. I felt anger, shame and guilt that, I had not protected my brothers from the same abuse that had happened to me, although, in reality there was nothing I could have done. My sisters and other brothers also feel anger that they could not protect them. Again, there was nothing they could have done. The impact on my family was devastating.

[109] We didn't even feel safe in our own home after the abuse and intimidation by Green started. It's important at this juncture to say that most of the happy memories, if not them all, come from the period before the abuse started. I have racked my brains and don't remember too many post-abuse happy memories.

[110] After the abuse and intimidation started I felt very vulnerable to Father Green's designs, either at the convent school or at home, where he often visited as an honoured guest.

[111] Because I was unaware that he was systematically abusing my younger brothers and others, I only knew that he might be telling mum some lies about what I was supposed to have done or maybe trying to jack me up to go on a trip with him.

[112] I know the frequency of my asthma attacks got me out of many proposed trips, and I tended to disappear when he was at our home, often going to the park and wandering through the bush or just lurking up at the local shops, hoping he would be gone by the time I went home. We boys all had paper runs. If Father Green was at home we'd all go up to where the papers were dropped off ages before they were due. We'd muck around up there, each for the same reason but not having an inkling of the other's thoughts.

[113] There have been many adverse effects for our family to deal with and in our life since we were abused. Basically, having our childish innocence stripped, a normal education leading to decent qualifications and job satisfaction taken away. After coming in from the cold we were then put through the wringer by the Church, which forced us to go public to gain their attention.

[114] I strongly believe that restorative justice has definitely not been achieved, especially when you have the abusing and enabling clergy retired in the lap of luxury while many victims have endured tragic, lonely, self-abusing lives.

### **WHY DIDN'T WE REPORT IT AT THE TIME.**

[115] We, like other victims/survivors, have been asked why we told no-one at the time? Why has it taken so many years to report what happened to you?

[116] The culture of the time was that we, as children, had no power at all.

[117] If you were accused of something by a nun or priest, you were automatically assumed guilty. If you did have the temerity to protest your innocence, you were generally punished twice. Once for the misdemeanour you were supposed to have committed and once for calling the nun or priest a liar.

[118] Plus of course, as children that abuse was way beyond our meagre comprehension and to actually put it in words was impossible.



[119] I was so traumatised by events that I never once managed to tell a soul until my brother Gerry and I finally spoke about it in 1985. Green was still alive and I suggested, “Let’s do the bastard”, but Gerry cautioned that it would destroy our mum so we let it go.

[120] It was not until 2002 that my brother Chris, encouraged by his counsellor, shared his abuse with us.

[121] Like all others abused as children, we could not make sense of what was happening. Remember, I was 7 to 8 years old when the abuse started. It has taken me 40 years to begin to understand what happened and be comfortable talking about it. I now know that the research evidence says that is not unusual. That is the time it can take. Half a lifetime.

[122] Only when my brother Chris informed us that he had written to the Church twice in 2002, and been ignored, did we know they had been informed of his sexual abuse and then we wrote further to tell them about we other two.

## **THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH**

[123] What did they do? They did what they’ve proved good at – ignored, delayed, deferred, detracted – in fact they did everything they could to not accept responsibility until we were forced to go public.

[124] We didn’t really know what to expect from the Church but they seemed to draw it out as long as possible, with many excuses for lack of progress.

[125] A viable complaints process didn’t seem to be in place in 2002 and they drew things out for so long both my brothers began to have nightmares and flashbacks.

[126] Chris, not knowing we had also been abused had first written to Bishop Dunn on 18 April 2002, explaining what had happened to him and finishing with:

*“I don’t know what to expect from this letter, I just know I have to write it.”*

[127] Having had no answer, he wrote again on 6 June 2002 finishing with:

*“I urge you to take some interest in this matter for our mutual healing benefit.”*

[128] He eventually got replies from the Bishop on 1 July 2002 and the church Professional Standards Committee on 11 July 2002.

[129] By then however, because things seemed to be taking so long, on advice, he had confided in us and was shocked to learn we had also been abused.

[130] Then on 30 July 2002, he wrote to the Professional Standards Committee telling them of our abuse also and giving them his Perth phone number.

[131] Despite various letters back and forward over the next few months to us, there did seem to be a “deafening silence” while they fluffed around with committees and meetings, excuses, claims of an unseen letter and with nobody seeming to know what to do, we made the decision to engage a NZ Lawyer. With no perceivable progress being made over the next weeks and realising just how much the Catholic Church authorities were messing Chris around, we decided to take action.

[132] There is an old Infantry adage that I’ve always been fond of, “The best means of defence is attack,” so in we went.

[133] We went public in the NZ Herald on 7/12/2002.

[134] We three abused brothers were all living in Australia when we decided we needed to bring the sins and crimes of this church into the public eye to gain their attention.

[135] This certainly produced some reaction, with the Bishop flying over to Perth to meet us and also resulted in various other victims coming out of the woodwork.

[136] It wasn’t our greatest wish to have the whole sordid business aired in public but we felt we needed to get some sort of resolution while they appeared to be playing for time.

[137] They did fly Chris and I over to Auckland for a hearing in 2003. We were accompanied by Mary, our sister, and our Lawyer to their place in Ponsonby. They had a couple of QC's with the Bishop and various other religious people present but not too much eventuated from this meeting. They showed us a balance sheet claiming there was no money, and I do recall the Bishop actually stating that they didn't want to pay us too much as it might set a precedent for future cases.

[138] The saga dragged on through 2003; there was another release in the Herald, "no Joy for abused trio." Both my brothers had begun to have nightmares or flashbacks by then. So, in late 2003, when an offer was made, we decided to accept because of this.

[139] The matter was finally settled on 15 January 2004.

[140] After the settlement, we never heard from the Church again. We only began to take interest after the outrageous statement from the Bishop of Adelaide, which motivated us into finishing and releasing our book, hopefully to perhaps assist other victims.

[141] I have to say, although the Bishop prattled on about closure, you don't ever feel you have had closure when you continue to wake up suddenly after having dreamed about the whole sordid frightening mess that was your main childhood memory.

[142] Tellingly, although I am now back living in NZ, both my younger brothers prefer the anonymity of living in Australia after being forced to go public with our story, although they are Kiwis at heart.

[143] Basically they are refugees from their own country.

## **THE OTHERS**

[144] Of course, we **now** know Green was abusing other boys at the convent school in the era 1957 – 1961. We think probably more than a dozen. As Green was stationed at Onehunga for another 8 years, who knows the number of abused there could well be.

[145] My publisher was contacted by a woman after the release of the book. She told him that her brother had been abused by Green around that time also and had committed suicide.

[146] Recently I met and talked to an old school friend from those days. He knew or suspected who the victims were when we were together at school. He shared with us his own horrific story of abuse by Green. I have his permission to share part of his story with you today.

[147] His father was killed in a car accident when he was about 7. Immediately after which, Green zeroed in on him and began abusing him. Soon he became pretty wild, which you might well understand. His mother, with four other children younger than him, the youngest a babe in arms, could no longer control him.

[148] In desperation she eventually sent him off to stay with relatives in another region. There, away from the perverted attention of the predator, he settled down again and was happy. After some months of this, Green told the mother that he should be at home. He, Green, would help control him. Green went to where this child was staying, and picked him up.

[149] He continued abusing this child for some years afterwards, until after finally leaving the convent, this child refused to attend a catholic school and went to a public one.

[150] Sadly, now, he has been diagnosed with a terminal illness and is in palliative care. He may never be able to report his abuse in person.

[151] My friend saw our case in the Herald in 2002, got a lawyer himself and took issue with the church.

[152] His experience of reporting to them was similar to ours. He said he had to face a Board and felt very intimidated as they questioned him, seemingly looking for some sort of hole in his story that they could seize upon.

[153] He reported that the Bishop told him that “the church was not responsible because they did not employ Father Green.”

[154] So, he asked the Bishop, “Who did then, God?”

[155] Didn’t go down too well.

[156] The Church had already accepted responsibility for our abuse by Green. So, to me, this was a pathetic way to try and avoid responsibility.

[157] I reckon its porky telling, although the Bishop may well differ.

[158] A terminally ill man has no reason to lie you’d think? I know who I believe.

### **SUPPORT AND COMPASSION FROM THE CHURCH YOU’D HOPE?**

[159] This same victim suffered a further trauma when he first went to have chemo.

[160] On his hospital record he was listed as RC [Roman Catholic], even though like the rest of us, he’d tossed away religion years previously. A Catholic liaison woman rocked up to see him but he soon told her he was no longer a Catholic because he was abused as a child.

***“Are you sure it happened” she asked?***

[161] I’m sure I’m not allowed to repeat what he told her here, but she got out that door pretty quickly, he said.

[162] This incident highlights a problem we’ve also found in this church: the denial: the denial that the abuse happened, the denial of responsibility AND **THE SILENCE OF THE LAITY!**

[163] Where are they, the laity?

[164] Why are they not questioning and asking for explanations from their leaders.

[165] This is serious; these so-called leaders of the faith are having input into what is being taught to the children in your schools.

[166] Many are possibly guilty of permitting crimes against children to go unpunished.

[167] I could never send any of my kids to a place like that.

[168] My sister, who acted as conduit for us boys in dealings with the Catholic Church at the time of reporting our abuse had this to say:

*...The church at the time did not handle them in the way that it should have. It is my most sincere prayer that those at the top will see the error of their ways, ...and reconcile what was, in reality, further abuse, at that time.*

## **SO, WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?**

### **COMMISSIONERS,**

[169] I agreed to give this testimony today to give voice to the abuse that has happened not just to us but to many, many children in NZ by members of the church institutions, in this case, the Catholic Church.

[170] I am not just reporting our experience to you today Commissioners. I am reporting an experience that many other victims/survivors in the Catholic church in NZ and their families will recognise as being only too similar to their own.

[171] The Church must be held accountable. The Church cannot be trusted, in my experience, to do what must be done so the criminal abuse of children stops.

[172] I believe that of the many things you need to look at, the confessional is one.

[173] I quote from The Heal Projects website:

*“This culture of silence and shame around sex and sexuality creates a breeding ground for child sexual abuse.”*

[174] This is exactly what the confessional does. It forgives these perverts of their crime, does nothing to stop them and allows them to continue on with their deviant ways.

[175] Therefore I strongly recommend that their supposed “sanctity of the confessional” be totally disregarded, especially legally.

[176] There is no doubt in my mind that many of these abusers went to confession after defiling children, got themselves back into a supposed “state of grace’ then went on to re-offend, again and again and again.

[177] Surely the safety and the sanctity of the children come first.

[178] When abuse occurs and is confessed, you have two serious criminal offenders - the Abuser and the priest who heard the confession and did nothing about it.

[179] This Church needs to abolish this monstrosity immediately and all alleged abusers should be interrogated thoroughly as to who they confessed to and/or who knew about the offending.

[180] This nonsense is what has allowed these abusers to flourish.

[181] The other point I want to make is: the Catholic church should in no way be allowed to handle allegations of sexual abuse in-house.

[182] Serious sexual abuse is systemic right throughout this organisation world-wide, ably encouraged by their archaic confessional laws.

[183] They were extremely reluctant to take ownership of the abuse suffered by my brothers and I, and were extremely difficult to engage in meaningful dialogue, and there were three of us. Imagine the difficulty facing a single victim.

[184] Sexual abuse, especially of children, is a crime after all.

[185] All allegations should be handled by the police, or, if historic, a non-aligned professional group, funded by the church themselves.

[186] The Catholic Church, I believe, is the biggest shareholder in faith-based abuse. They don't pay tax anyway, so why can they not take the burden placed on our society by the hundreds, if not thousands, of victims of abuse by their own clergy?

[187] They have amply demonstrated they cannot honestly, fairly and charitably deal with the blight that afflicts their church.

[188] This church has a debt, not only to victims and their families but also to the taxpayers. Talking to an old army mate of mine recently who has been a prison guard for 30 years, he told me that most of the prisoners he looked after had been abused in some form or other, yes and many by faith-based organisations.

### **To the Church I say:**

[189] Stop reading from the Judas file of betrayal, denial and hanging on to the thirty pieces of silver and read from the Jesus file. Do the right thing. You have the assets. Sell some of them and fund a program for victims run by professionals. I'm sure Jesus would agree with that.

[190] You preach that you and your followers are going to inherit the kingdom of Heaven, so you should be able to afford sell a few of your many castles on earth and use the money as reparation for the countless victims of your clergy.

### **I would also like to address all the abusers and enablers out there:**

[191] Many of you are getting closer and closer to the Big D Day (Death). You may think you have been forgiven by going to confession, but I really do have my doubts. Why don't you do something to break the cycle of silence and perhaps even gain back some vestige of your own self-respect.



[192] Simple. You are propagating a fraud and you ARE LIVING A LIE.

[193] Own up. Own up for abuse and/or its cover up.

[194] At least have the balls to stand up and be counted, a last chance to do the decent thing, before you front up to the Big Man.

[195] And finally, I am a great fan of the words in Bob Dylan's earlier protest songs. He had a great one protesting about weapon manufacture called "Masters of War". I've changed one of the verses and called it "Masters of Shame".

[196] For all you Abusers and Enablers out there: -

I THINK THAT YOU'LL FIND WHEN YOUR DEATH TAKES ITS TOLL

YOUR MONEY, POWER AND CONFESSION, COULD NEVER BUY BACK YOUR SOUL

AND I'LL TELL YOU FURTHER, FOR I KNOW THAT IT IS TRUE

EVEN JESUS COULD NEVER FORGIVE WHAT YOU DO.

Thank You

Mike Ledingham.