



Chapter Two

Listening to survivors



1. Introduction

Most of the twenty-two survivors who spoke to us had been sexually abused as children by priests or religious brothers. Two were abused by other authority figures in Catholic family and school settings. Almost all had already shared their stories, some publicly, some with supportive professionals, most with Church representatives of some kind. Several were among those who agreed to participate in our research because of their particular role or ministry and then disclosed during our conversations that they had also experienced abuse. In the interviews, we did not ask participants to recall their abuse or narrate what happened to them, but some chose to do so. Our intention was to understand the impact of abuse and to hear about how Catholic authorities and institutions responded to victims and handled the allegations.

Inviting victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to be interviewed for research purposes is contentious. Some survivors who declined to speak to us felt that research such as this risked using survivors in an extractive way so that the Church might benefit. They feel that the Church as an institution is an offender and that research such as this project has no right to contact survivors or to ask them to speak.³² In their perspective, the Church cannot be trusted and they will not engage. We acknowledge that viewpoint and hope that at some point a dialogue may be possible.

Research in this area needs to be carried out with ethical sensitivity. We were aware of the cost of the conversations into which we invited victims and survivors and the potential for further harm through triggers and re-traumatisation. Those who spoke to the research have all done so in full knowledge of the possible implications for them and of the ways in which their contributions will be used and the ethical commitments on which the research is based. Many have said that they want to do this work not so much to help the Church but to ensure that what happened to them does not happen to other children in today's Catholic institutions.

Many survivors of child sexual abuse were robbed of their voice often before they knew how to speak. We hope that this project has helped some survivors find ways to speak and extended the reach of others who have already spoken in other settings. Survivors' voices are heard especially in this chapter, which will not be easy for many to read. They also speak in later chapters, especially in Chapter Five which presents more positive aspects of their testimony and experience, and of how the Church has responded.

Each survivor's experience and perspective is unique. Each voice matters. We know that the survivors with whom we have worked in this research represent only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more in these two countries who choose not to come forward, be identified or respond to requests for interview. It is all the more important to listen with deep attention to those who are willing to speak.



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2. The impact of sexual abuse

The sexual abuse of children causes deep anguish, fear, guilt and shame in those abused. It can undermine their sense of who they are and disrupt the development of self-worth and self-confidence at the point when these should be embedded in the self. The damage can be long-lasting; many live with the effects all their lives. A survivor, now in his sixties, who was sexually abused by male religious at school, told us: *'I get by but it's, it's not by any means a happy, oh right I'd say, there's certainly happiness that's in it, but it's not by any means a fulfilled life'*. Another spoke of how the abuse he suffered had severely damaged the self-worth and dignity he should feel and that *'it would take a lifetime, if ever, to recover half of that self-worth.'* Participants told how they tried to fight against these effects, so that the impact of abuse did not define them. *'I want to be, hold it without being bitter or, you know, it's how to integrate it really. How to feel that it's not holding me, that I'm, it happened but it doesn't have control'*, said a female survivor.

Survivors explained how their abuse had affected all areas of their lives. It had harmed their education and subsequent life-chances; their relationships and their capacity for sexual and emotional intimacy; their physical and mental health and their family life. They spoke of having difficulties at school and of deteriorating academic records following their abuse: *'Things really did come off the rails'*, one survivor said. Another became *'petrified of school'*. *'I used to wake up in terror'*, he added. Others described how having been abused made them more vulnerable to bullying and other forms of abuse at school. Some spoke of being unable to complete university degrees, not being able to hold down a job, or not succeeding in their chosen career.

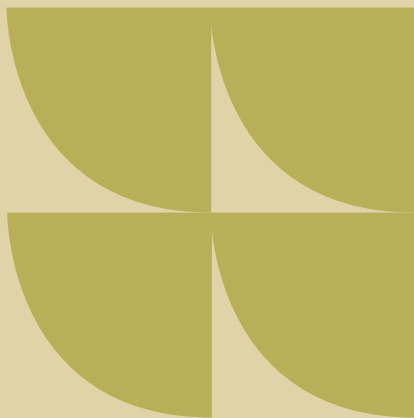
In their personal lives and relationships, some survivors have struggled with their sexuality. Some described a series of broken relationships or being unable to trust others and build long-lasting stable relationships. A male survivor who had never married felt *'I've failed in relationships'*. Another described how he *'couldn't bear to hold hands'*. *'I just knew in my mind I'd got an issue and I'd had an issue ever since it happened really.'* Survivors also spoke of other emotional and psychological impacts including nervous breakdowns, alcoholism and attempted suicides.

We learned that the person abused is not the only one who suffers. The effects of abuse are felt keenly by family members. One survivor spoke of the impact of his mood swings on his wife. Some survivors described how they held back from disclosing their abuse to protect their parents and because they wanted to avoid undermining their faith in the Church. Some had never told their partners; a survivor who recently lost his wife of nearly fifty years talked of how that he had never told her what had taken place in junior seminary, but after speaking with us, he decided to tell his children. The impact can also be intergenerational. The daughter of a survivor described her mother's reaction to learning some time after her parents' divorce that her father had been abused: *'she then had a lot of guilt, because she now thinks she should have known...and it's so*



A survivor, now in his sixties, who was sexually abused by male religious at school, told us: 'I get by but it's, it's not by any means a happy, oh right I'd say, there's certainly happiness that's in it, but it's not by any means a fulfilled life'.





obvious now, when you look back, and she didn't know, she feels guilty that she didn't ask'. She continued

There definitely is a knock-on effect, absolutely, I know that I, myself have mental health issues because of things I've seen, because of things I've heard, because of the way my dad was, and I'm not blaming my dad in any way, I don't mean that, but I just know that it's affected me and my relationships.

She recalled how her father was overly protective of them as children and spoke of how she too now finds touch and intimacy difficult.

Alongside these painful experiences, we also heard testimonies of survival. The survivors who participated in this research described what they had achieved in their lives, in successful professional careers and in family life. Friendships in particular were vital. But they each described how the abuse was always present, even during many years in which they buried the memory or when they eventually found the right relationship. In the words of one survivor: *'We have a granddaughter and life is good, life is, well, I say it's good, the trauma to do with [the site of abuse] still goes on.'*

There are misconceptions and ill-informed beliefs about survivors which affected some very deeply. Several spoke of how they carried secret fears arising from their abuse. For example, they may be affected by the widespread assumption that people who have been sexually abused will go on to abuse others themselves.³³ This is untrue. In fact, most survivors who spoke to us were deeply committed to the need to protect other children. The combination of that misconception and a concern for other children had tragic consequences for one survivor of abuse by Benedictine monks at school:

I took a decision not to have children. I didn't want to bring children, even though I hadn't faced up yet to what had gone on, I was burying what had gone on; I decided not to have children because I didn't want any child of mine rubbing up against anyone like the predators I'd met. Do I regret that? Yeah. I regret, every time somebody says to me, you'd have made a great father, it kills me inside...I'm terrified because I think, supposing they believe all that stuff about how victims of paedophiles become abusers themselves.

Another survivor recalled that *'I used to wake up in the mornings and consciously think to myself, is this the day when I'm going to start abusing children, because I was abused?'* There was a turning point for this survivor when a therapist told him that it is not true that victims of abuse are more likely to go on to abuse others. Hearing this released him from the fear that he would abuse his son, and represented *'a massive opening'*, allowing him to start *'thinking about it in a way that I'd never done before.'* It was an important step on the road to healing.

Survivors also spoke about the sense of guilt and shame caused by the abuse. One survivor explained:

The big thing for many survivors is that they simply cannot have compassion for that part of themselves because they think it was weak, they think they should have. 'Why did I go back? Why didn't I speak up? Why didn't I do something?' And the answer is, because of a psychological survival mechanism which says 'I'm paralysed, the best way to deal with this is to play dead basically.'

He described how victims need to *'re-integrate that part of yourself which didn't actually do anything bad or wrong'*. For this survivor, this means looking outside himself to find resources for healing, resources he found in the passion of Christ.

Another survivor who blamed herself for not resisting her abuser more forcefully explained how this experience interacted with a negative understanding of God that she already held, to inflict even more damage: *'I saw myself as a bad person, so then I just went to Mass every day to try and make myself good. I thought God couldn't send me to hell if I was going to Mass every day.'* This is then compounded by a feeling of being 'damaged goods'. Another survivor, a religious sister, said she saw herself as dirty and tainted, which made her question her religious vocation and every day she asked herself whether she was just hiding away. A male survivor saw shaming as a weapon that perpetrators use to maintain power over victims, and so standing up and disclosing *'removes the means by which they can exert control over their victims'*. He continued: *'one of the first ways of doing this is to stand up and be counted and to show your face and say, there is no shame.'*

3. Survivors' experience of mishandling

The trauma of not being believed

All the research participants who had experienced child sexual abuse by a Catholic priest or religious brother had also experienced being treated inadequately by a representative of the Church — its leaders or institutions — when they came forward with an allegation or sought support around a disclosure. We heard many examples of survivors whose disclosures and allegations were met by denial or disbelief or by a lack of compassion for the person and their pain.

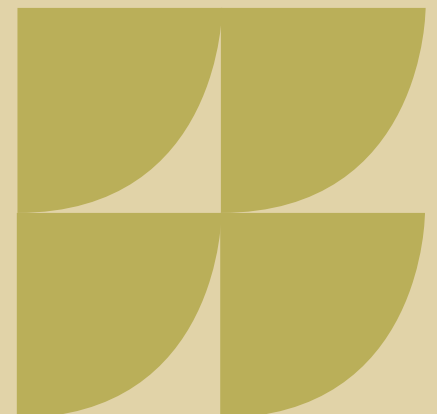
A survivor of abuse in a junior seminary described meetings with leaders of the religious order to which his abuser belonged, in which he spoke of his abuse:

And when they completely disagreed with what I said and, and said I was the first, told me a load of lies, I was the first person ever in the history of the order to complain of any abuse, in any of the schools, in any of the world.

A female survivor described how the religious order of which her abuser was a member sent a letter of apology but *'they never bothered to get in touch and see how I was, they never paid for any therapy for me, so as far as I'm concerned, the letter of apology is an admission of guilt, so they don't care'*.

Another male survivor described a meeting with a bishop in which he described his abuse and recalled the bishop's response:

It's a shame that you weren't over eighteen, I'd quite like to reconcile you with [the abusing priest]. I have no statutory authority to do anything about it. I then said, why on earth could this happen? and he





responded, Well, we're all human. That was his response, well we're all human, even priests, and unfortunately, at that meeting, I was a bit shocked.

For many survivors, the most painful part of disclosing and seeking acknowledgement and support was the experience of not being believed. Several described what happened when they approached office-holders or community leaders. One survivor who had been abused by a priest known to have been responsible for abusing other children described what happened when he finally managed to meet the priest responsible for safeguarding in his diocese:

He kept hinting, you know, have I been well all my life? Did I imagine things, and that was infuriating because it was as though it was, somebody had, pushing a knife in to provoke me.... And he sat down and he said, are you sure that you didn't imagine this?

After hearing this five or six times, the survivor's hope that 'something's going to happen' crumbled. Instead he felt:

negativity being prodded in, that the Church are, you can't get into us, we've got a shield around us, and none of those things go on or, if they do go on, we're not letting anybody know that they go on. We're going to protect.

He described his pain: *'What happens is, you want belief more than anything or any financial compensation, before anything whatsoever, for somebody to say that they believe you means everything'*.

Other reactions which victims experienced involve minimising what had happened. Several participants described wider attitudes that indicated a cultural pattern in Catholic institutions of denying or minimising abuse. In one example, a priest who was also a survivor described talking to a colleague whose predecessor in a different parish had been convicted of abuse and hearing the colleague say *'I don't know what all the fuss was about. He was sixteen, it was just a bit of masturbation.'*

Using spirituality to silence victims

Some survivors were told that they should accept what had happened to them and, in the traditional phrase, 'offer it up'. One female survivor was told *'that I needed to just take up my cross and suffer, suffer gladly'*. A religious brother spoke about a case in which a female survivor whom he described as *'too wounded to trust anybody'* had been told *'Oh, you should forgive'*. He had taken up her case, believing that the mishandling she described could not possibly have happened. He described what happened next:

When I contacted [the diocesan] safeguarding, that certainty was banished. It felt like they did know about it, and ... there was not clear that they were going to do anything about it, if I told them. And my discourse had been, of course, I'm going to support you, we're going to talk to safeguarding. It's not possible that we can tell them about this and they don't do anything about it. And I've lost that confidence.

Sometimes a spiritualised response was used to suggest or insinuate denial. The male survivor who described being prodded and provoked

explained how at the end of their meeting, the priest took him into his church;

And he stood there and he goes, 'I think, I think we'll just say a prayer for you now.' And [a friend] who was with me, said, 'Isn't this where it all started, at these prayers?' And he just never took any notice and he just said, 'Lord, if these, if this really happened to [name] or if it did not happen, we pray for him and hope that he, his mind, gets better.' I'm thinking, you know, it's just like, I didn't think at the time, it was like a cover up.

Poor procedures

Several survivors' experience of mishandling also concerned what they experienced as inadequate responses or procedures involving safeguarding staff or leaders in Catholic institutions. One male survivor described writing to a number of bishops and archbishops about his abuse, copying in others, and whilst some replied, others did not. Slowness of response from office-holders was described by survivors, family members and safeguarding staff. A safeguarding professional expressed concern about how internal processes hamper a pastoral response:

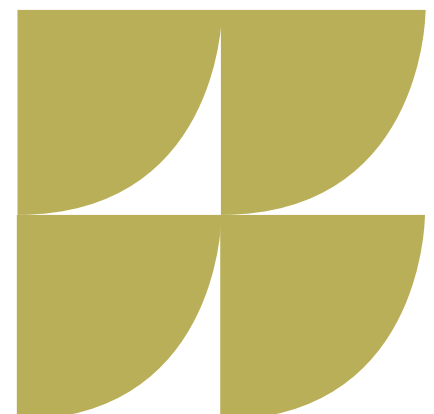
The prime example of that is, a survivor might contact a religious order and it takes them eighteen months to get back to that survivor because they have to go through so many processes and so many things get signed off and they don't talk to the survivor in the first instance.

A survivor commented bluntly: *'I mean, on customer service, its crap... that kind of organisational ability is just not there'.*

Another survivor described accessing records of her original disclosure through a Freedom of Information request and finding them *'a complete eye opener'*; *'they're not even proper records, they're not in date order'*. Several survivors had found the response they experienced so poor that they sought access to complaints procedures but found these just as unsatisfactory. It is not surprising that some then contacted a solicitor. In one case, we listened to both a survivor's experience and the perspectives of diocesan staff against whom he was raising a complaint. Both were motivated by similar values and concerns yet no resolution had been found. Another male survivor of abuse in a monastic school recounted his experience;

They gas lighted me. In other words, they treated me as though as I was off the rails, because I was refusing to accept their refusal to comply with GDPR. So at that point, I told the lawyers who had represented us at IICSA to sue the school, because I believed that the current management, how shall I put this, even though they used gentler language and they're not as thuggish as previous lay headmasters and bursars, they're just as dangerous.

Such experiences suggest that when a response to survivors becomes mired in procedures such as those covering complaints, it soon becomes constrained and unsatisfactory. It also risks the survivor further losing fragile trust and confidence that anyone in the institutional structures will respond adequately.



In many instances, we could only hear one side of the story, one account of the impact of mishandling. Some research participants reflected on the difficulties inherent here; survivors may not have communicated as clearly as they think they have, as one religious brother who had advocated for a survivor pondered. Some safeguarding staff may feel they have done all they can within the exact constraints of their responsibilities. There may be explanations for some aspects of mishandling; but that does not mitigate how such experiences extend the impact of abuse for victims.

Mishandling as secondary abuse and injustice

It is clear from survivors' voices that many of these kinds of mishandling are traumatising and damaging. They are accurately described as a secondary form of abuse carried out by the people and institutions who should have listened, believed and supported. A male survivor of abuse which took place in a junior seminary run by a religious order explained this experience:

The secondary psychological abuse is... the power of the institution and how the institution treats you, how the institution ignores you, how the institution doesn't want to know you. That is the secondary psychological abuse and that is sometimes harder to deal with because you're not just up against something that's happened a long time ago, who may be dead now, who you can sort of process, you can come to terms with all that in your head, you can talk to someone about that, and put that to one side, put it to bed, if you have to, you're able to do that through, come to terms with it whatever way you can, therapy, talking, counselling, psychoanalysis, whatever. But the secondary abuse tends to, for me anyway, and I believe for others, tends to stay with you and it's harder to deal with because it's in your face all the time. Every day when we don't get acknowledged that, what happened to us, that's secondary abuse. The abuse is every day because we're still waiting an acknowledgement...that's how I understand it.

The hurt and isolation that victims and survivors have experienced and the complexity of their finding a way to disclosure and healing are deepened by the mishandling that has taken place. The experience of knowing you are not being listened to or not believed is possibly the most harmful of all the forms that mishandling takes. This absence of basic pastoral care from those representing the Church is even more wounding for survivors because despite the abuse, they expected a response of attention and care. A female survivor brought up in a strong Catholic family, explained how she felt every representative of the Church, both lay and ordained, that she approached had let her down:

I think if you're already part of the Church, you want a response that makes you feel as though you're kind of being, well, listened to would be the minimum and looked after would be the next step really. I didn't experience either of those.

Another female survivor who was abused by a religious priest says that her hope and expectation was that someone in the Church would accompany her in the longer term, to help rebuild the damaged trust, but



The secondary psychological abuse is... the power of the institution and how the institution treats you, how the institution ignores you, how the institution doesn't want to know you.





Not being listened to is a form of injustice, a denial of dignity.



no one has even offered. Instead, she felt kept at arm's length and her allegations dismissed. She now feels unable to trust any priests, not only because of her abuse but because of the mishandling of her allegations and subsequent complaints. It is hard to see how relationships can be rebuilt where trust has been betrayed to such an extent.

A religious sister abused by a Catholic priest as a child, explained to us that she had never told the leaders of her congregation, nor most of her sisters, about what had happened to her, because she didn't trust them to believe her or respect her experience. When asked what she would want from her Superior, she said simply *'I'd like her to listen and be supportive, not try and fix anything, just to listen and just to say, I'm here if you need me.'*

One survivor, now in his 60s, who was abused by a member of a religious congregation, has fought with the congregation for many years seeking to be believed. He addressed some of the myths and fears people hold in relation to survivors of abuse:

I want them to come forward, sit down and meet with us. I'm not going to get angry with anybody, don't be afraid of us, and I don't want your money, by the way either, that's another thing. I want you to sit in front of me, listen to what I have to say, and say sorry for what happened, and we were wrong to re-abuse you by not meeting you and not coming forward and saying, it happened to you.

Mishandling is a form of injustice. The Church rightly upholds the demands of justice in many areas of social, economic and political life, and now also in regard to the environment. But there are kinds of injustice that are more personal and less visible but which still deny what is owed to people's dignity and the rights that flow from that dignity. Not being listened to is a form of injustice, a denial of dignity. When procedures are insufficient or responses are slow or information is unclear or withheld, these are also forms of injustice, ways in which people are being treated unfairly. Catholic social teaching holds up a principle known as commutative justice, giving each person what is due to them as a person. This could also be described as 'process justice', treating people in a way that is seen and experienced as being fair. Margaret Farley, a leading Catholic ethicist, argues that in practical terms this means taking account of each person's concrete reality; their needs, vulnerabilities, claims and capacities.³⁴ If the Church preaches justice, it must also be able to practice it, and to show what it looks like in its own life. The abuse crisis reveals our communal failures to do so.

Dealing with negative perceptions and responses

Survivors also encounter negative perceptions of their situation, perceptions that other research participants confirmed as being commonplace in Catholic institutions and communities. One attitude still widely encountered is the belief that victims and survivors are seeking financial compensation when many are not. A woman whose father had been abused as a boy in the care of a religious order explained what he needed:

It's the acknowledgement that it did happen, and just believing these men because there has been so many stories, so many opinions that these people are, like my dad, the survivors, they're out just to get money, they see it as an opportunity for getting money from an organisation. But I know what it took out of my dad to admit, there's no one who's just going to sit and, and lie about that kind of thing. I just don't see anyone would be able to put themselves through that for, just to get a couple of thousand pounds, from somebody. So I think that was the thing that sickened me the most, the fact that, that they've been looked on as being money grabbers at any point.

Sometimes a victim or survivor who has been undermined or had their experience denied will, out of frustration, seek redress through legal means and in these cases, financial compensation is likely to be sought as part of the approach. Sometimes victims don't know where to go, and if they approach legal advisors first, some may be advised to seek compensation through a legal process, so the picture is complex. One former religious priest told us how he tried to address his community's attitudes towards survivors telling them that, in his experience *'the people who are now going to the press or whatever, have tried and tried and tried to get a response from bishops and from provincials and it's only as a last recourse that they're now going to the media.'*

Another common misconception, particularly amongst some office-holders, is that people who make an allegation are not telling the truth. One survivor spoke of how he was not believed because he didn't present as sufficiently traumatised. Survivors frequently describe a sense of moral injury inflicted on top of the wounds inflicted by the original abuse.

Another form of negative response happens when survivors find that their expressions of anger or their desire for justice are perceived as them being difficult and making trouble. Survivors are not the only group within the Church expressing anger about abuse, as later sections will describe, but their anger is important. Some survivors spoke about how they dealt with their own anger. One said *'I have to turn that anger into something useful because otherwise you're going to just seethe with it'*. Anger in this context is a valid signal of a sense of injustice or pain. A priest who works with survivors spoke of how one survivor's anger is *'because no one has actually sat him down and said, actually [name] inside this anger, there's a hurting child, let's listen to you'*. There are situations in which anger is rightful and necessary, however hard it is for office-holders to hear.

These negative perceptions demonstrate a failure on the part of the Church to recognise the victim or survivor as a person who is owed respect, compassion and pastoral care as well as justice. The need and desire for recognition is well expressed by a female survivor of abuse which happened because of a lack of safeguarding in a Catholic setting:

Moral injury

When people are compelled to act or become involved in activity which they know or sense or later realise is wrong, they suffer an injury at the level of their dignity and moral conscience. They lose confidence in their own goodness and feel betrayed by those whom they trusted to act rightly. The idea of moral injury emerged from thinking about the experience of soldiers in combat but is now understood to apply in many other contexts where people experience moral anguish as a result of what they are asked or required to do. One definition is that moral injury is 'the harm caused by betraying a moral code'.³⁵

In relation to sexual abuse in Catholic settings, the moral injury is all the greater because the Church claims to be a moral community. The Church teaches us about conscience and what is right; so how can abuse have happened? For survivors especially, but also for bystanders and office-holders, there is moral confusion that can shatter faith. Moral injury adds to the trauma of the actual abuse, making it harder for people to believe in themselves or others or trust those in authority.

A research project undertaken in Xavier University in the USA, *Measuring and Exploring Moral Injury Caused by Clergy Sexual Abuse*, based on a survey of 389 survivors, church employees and Catholic students details the ways in which moral injury operates not only in survivors but also in other members of the Church.³⁶ The report explains the importance for survivors of making sense of their experience in some way, so that they can recover a degree of moral agency. Right relationships with others play an important role in recovering a positive moral identity.

The Church, it needs to stand kind of face to face with survivors, as Church...to put the survivors first, not the Church. And not their own feelings because they can't cope with it. As a survivor, you never had your permission asked when you were abused...We're told how we're going to do this, or we're told we won't be capable of doing it and we'd just like to be asked for once. And then we can say no, if we want to. So just please ask ...Give the voice back that was taken.

Becoming a survivor

You start becoming a survivor when you make a conscious decision to take your due back from them, to take back from them what they stole from you. And part of that means standing up and saying, no more.

Each victim's response to their experience is different, so the point at which they become able to speak about their experience will depend on many factors. Most of the survivors in this research described how the moment of disclosing their abuse was crucial in the journey towards becoming a survivor and finding degrees of healing. Accepting that the abuse had taken place was significant, as was asking for help. Some survivors made their initial disclosure to a support professional. One male survivor broke down during a routine medical appointment just before attending the IICSA hearings. Others responded to one or more trigger incidents and others realised they needed to transform their anger into something useful. One survivor who spent years concealing his feelings was finally prompted to disclose his abuse when his son was born.

Half of the survivors in the research told us that they had been welcomed with more compassion and found more support from people outside of the Church than from their own pastors. These included a survivor who was treated with care and compassion by his employer – an experience which contrasted starkly with how he was treated by diocesan staff to whom he took his case. Another survivor experienced no warmth at all from diocesan staff yet received kindness, compassion and practical help from his GP, who found free counselling sessions with a survivors' charity for him.

Several survivors told us how valuable they found the experience of being witnesses at the IICSA hearings, where they felt affirmed and supported.

It brought me a great deal of comfort. The sadness was, it was the first time we'd experienced that and it was in a secular setting. Now what does that say for the Catholic Church that we had to go to a quasi-judiciary secular setting to receive the first element of a healing process? I mean, you know, hang your head in shame, Catholic Church for that.

Often this support involved being told from the beginning 'I believe you', an experience they felt had been denied in the Catholic institutions they had approached. Another noted: *'I have to say, it's so ironic, the whole process of giving evidence at IICSA and going along and the preparation experience, I was better looked after, than I was by the Church really.'* All those who described taking legal action against Church institutions and organisations found themselves well cared for and supported by their



barristers. As one survivor explained, *'to feel that you had been better looked after by the lawyers and the Inquiry, than the Church, and [that] spoke volumes really.'*

The impact on survivors' Catholic faith

The impact of abuse and mishandling on personal faith and Catholic belonging is also different for each survivor. For some, their Catholic faith and practice is a comfort; for others, a problem. Some are angry with or have moved away from the Church. One male survivor described undergoing an active 'unbaptism' from Catholicism. Others stay connected but find a particular space where they can feel comfortable, which might be feminist theology, or their local parish, or a relationship with a spiritual director.

One survivor told us she felt the need to carry on the faith of her grandparents and doing so gave her comfort. The positive grounding in faith afforded her by good experiences of Catholic life in home, school and parish sustained her faith in spite of what happened to her. Others find their own paths and resources, mentioning sources such as feminist theology, mindfulness or retreats. There was also a strong testimony to the power of a specific healing retreat, From Grief to Grace, which recognises that the harm done by abuse is deeply spiritual as well as emotional, psychological and even moral.

Some continue to draw on Christian faith and spirituality but from other traditions and churches. Some survivors have discovered a kind of spirituality in the solidarity and mutual care and concern they share with each other. These are places where good can flourish and where people's spirits are nourished and become generous and receptive. One survivor talked about the companionship of a support group: *'There's a closeness which takes away the loneliness, for me. It's a lonely journey; dealing with abuse is a lonely journey.'*

The paradox here is that the Church, the place where abuse happened, can also be for some people the place where healing resources can be found. Sometimes the resource is a priest who says the right thing, asks the right questions and enables trust to grow. Crucially, the places and people who might offer some hope of healing were discovered by the victims and survivors themselves.



From Grief to Grace

From Grief to Grace is a specialised five-day programme of spiritual and psychological healing for anyone who has suffered sexual, physical, emotional or spiritual abuse in childhood, adolescence or adulthood. Also described as a retreat, the process is grounded in the Scriptures, the Sacraments and prayer as well as using therapeutic tools from psychology and treatment of trauma. Survivors who have taken part in the programme testify that it brought immense healing. For more information see [Home | Grief to Grace \(griegtograces.org\)](https://www.griegtograces.org)

4. ■ Conclusion: Why have we failed survivors?

Listening to survivors is a searing experience. The impact of being abused as a child is shattering, as their testimonies describe. It seems incomprehensible that the Church, in its institutions and office-holders, and also sometimes in its communities' attitudes, has so often failed to understand and respond with attention, compassion and justice. It has so often seemed that office-holders were more concerned to protect the institution and its reputation than to care for those who have been deeply harmed. As this research progressed, we realised that the need to explore why our communal response has faltered and frequently betrayed our own principles was perhaps our most important task. This is where the abuse crisis calls us to the profound conversion of hearts and practical action of which Pope Francis speaks, because it is the area which lies within all our capacities and responsibilities to change.

