

# St John of God brothers 'set up' abuse victim

By Rory Callinan, The Age, November 15, 2012

Brothers from the St John of God order fabricated a sex assault allegation about one of their own child-abuse victims to discredit him, confidential legal settlement documents allege.

Another brother from the order was the subject of at least seven abuse allegations between 1975 and the 1990s and was reported to officials in Rome, but not to police or his victims' families, according to the records of settlement negotiations seen by Fairfax Media.

The claims were made during secret legal negotiations in 2001 that eventually led to the order's Victorian abuse victims receiving \$3.6 million in compensation.

The documents, an account of the negotiations kept by the order, raise questions about why no brother from St John of God has faced court for abusing children in Victoria and about the order's apparent failure to act on the abuse.

The 2001 meeting involved lawyers and representatives of the order, its insurers and the victims. It was held in response to legal claims by dozens of men who alleged they had been abused while being cared for as boys at the order's homes in Victoria.

The victims were mostly intellectually or physically impaired and had been living in the care of the order, which had homes at Cheltenham in Melbourne's south, Lilydale in the city's east and one in Greens-borough called Churinga.

Peter Gordon, of Slater & Gordon, and barrister John Gordon represented victims and opened by laying out their claims for compensation and with stories of abuse.

According to the written summary of the meeting prepared for the order, John Gordon told those present a claim had been fabricated by brothers against one of the parties claiming to be a victim of abuse, attempting to discredit the victim by alleging he was himself guilty of assaulting a three-year-old. The meeting notes indicate the lawyers for the order did not respond to the fabrication claims.

Other allegations contained in the notes include:

- One brother was the subject of seven or eight abuse allegations starting in 1975 through to the 1990s, but was never reported to police.

■ Complaints were ignored and the complainants were shifted from institution to institution. ■ Parents wrote letters complaining about abuse allegations and the order either did nothing or swapped the brothers around.

In response, Howard Harrison, the lawyer representing the order, was reported to have said the brothers had tried to act on this sex-abusing brother at the time by ringing "the provincial of the day who rang Rome".

Mr Harrison also noted that this suspected abusing brother should have been sent to an expert in dealing with such behaviour but such a person did not exist at the time.

Mr Harrison told the meeting there was "no mandatory reporting" of abuse at the time and the brothers had "devoted their lives to these clients and a lot of them are hurting badly".

But barrister John Gordon is reported to have noted that the particular abusing brother had assaulted one client, the assault was covered up and then two years later the same brother abused another boy.

Only one brother was named during the meeting as an alleged abuser. Others responsible for the fabricated sex abuse complaint or a failure to act have not been identified.

The order reported the allegations to police in 1997 after dozens of victims came forward but Victorian police have declined to explain why they were unable to charge any of the brothers despite a lengthy investigation.

Fairfax Media put questions about the meeting to a spokesman for the order's Provincial in Australia, Timothy Graham. But the spokesman said late on Wednesday Brother Graham had yet to respond.

**LISA Comment:** There were many alleged questionable activities at the Churinga (Residential and Day Services) facilities, Greensborough, Victoria. The funding body was/is the Department of Human Services. The department has the power to take action against any service provider they fund. But, as is the department's standard practice - they did nothing.

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