

Exclusive National Victoria [Catholic church](#)

Victim awarded \$1.75m over paedophile priest as Catholic insurer warns on abuse claim costs

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Warning: This story contains graphic and distressing content

A survivor of one of Victoria's most notorious paedophile priests has received a further \$1.75 million from the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne to settle a long-running legal case, after getting \$75,000 and an apology from the church in 2016.

The latest settlement comes as the Catholic Church's private insurer struggles to meet a wave of new claims following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and legislative changes in several states. Last week, Catholic Church Insurance called for urgent funding to stay afloat.



Paedophile priest Michael Glennon in 1991. MARIO BORG

Stephen, who asked for his surname not to be used, was subjected to horrific sexual abuse between 1975 and 1976 by disgraced priest Michael Glennon, who was a football coach and karate instructor at St Monica's Primary School in Moonee Ponds.

Glennon died in Ararat Prison in 2014 while serving a 10-year sentence for a string of child sex offences committed between 1973 and 1991, but had been incarcerated on four previous occasions for clerical abuse of more than a dozen children.

The Catholic Archdiocese recently agreed to the massive settlement – one of the largest for clerical abuse in Victoria – following extensive criticism of the church's redress scheme by the Royal Commission in 2015.

The archdiocese also agreed to pay Stephen's legal costs as part of the settlement, pushing the total payout beyond \$2 million.

Catholic Church Insurance released a statement on May 5 conceding it would be forced to close its "new and renewal general insurance business" without a significant injection of capital.

"Our shareholders have already made a significant contribution to the equity of the organisation in recent times, and we expect to know very soon how we will proceed," CCI chair Joan Fitzpatrick said.

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe moved swiftly to allay concerns following the dire warning from CCI, insisting the church was committed to engaging with survivors of clerical abuse and meeting its legal obligations.

"The church is also working closely with all Catholic ministries currently affiliated with CCI to ensure continuity of general insurance cover," Archbishop Costelloe said in a statement last week.

In 2016, Stephen provided harrowing details of his encounter with Glennon to the church's independent commissioner, Peter O'Callaghan, KC, who was appointed to investigate allegations of abuse under the archdiocese's contentious redress scheme.

Known as the Melbourne Response, the scheme capped compensation payments – first at \$50,000, and later lifted to \$75,000 – and survivors were required to sign a deed of settlement waiving their right to take civil action.

Victims received an average payout of \$36,100, according to church figures provided to the royal commission.

Stephen's statement to the commissioner included a graphic account of him being raped at a school camp at the age of 12.

"He (Glennon) told me to bend over and hold on to a tree. He then sexually assaulted me. I was crying and screaming in pain, and he said to me to be quiet because the other boys don't scream," the victim recalled.

Stephen was awarded \$75,000 by the archdiocese in September 2016 along with an apology from then-Melbourne archbishop Denis Hart.

Now 58, he told *The Age* in 2020 that he had been urged by a managing clerk at law firm Slater and Gordon to pursue compensation under the Melbourne Response, rather than launching civil proceedings against the church.

“I got this feeling they wanted me to go quietly and pushed me into the easier option,” he said. “I wanted to make the church pay, I’ve not had a life and I have nothing,” he said.

Rival law firm Arnold Thomas & Becker filed a [professional negligence claim](#) on behalf of Stephen against Slater & Gordon in 2020, which was later withdrawn.

The law was later amended, allowing Stephen to launch a new legal claim in 2022 against Archbishop of Melbourne Peter Comensoli, as the legal representative for the archdiocese.

Arnold Thomas & Becker lawyer Georgia Sneddon said the settlement reflected the importance of legislative changes following the royal commission, which enabled victims of clerical abuse to pursue fair and just compensation.

“Stephen has had to deal with the effects of the abuse for his entire life, and while compensation cannot take away his trauma and suffering, we are pleased that this settlement has given him a strong sense of validation and justice,” Ms Sneddon said.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne did not respond to requests for comment.

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