

Open letter to the Members of the National Executive of the Australian Christian Churches.

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to you again, as I did just over 12 months ago to appeal to you to assist Mr Brett Sengstock, a survivor of childhood sex abuse by clergy and, as you well know, a victim of our Frank Houston (dec).

I am assured by the NSW State Secretary that you did receive my original email of 29th September 2018 and further, it has been forwarded to you again through him recently yet I still have had no reply so I feel writing an open letter is now not only appropriate but also my only hope of bringing proper attention to this matter that you appear to have chosen to ignore. It read as follows:

“Hi Chris,

I wish to bring a serious matter to your attention and would be grateful if you would forward this to John McMartin and the National Executive.

Brett Sengstock was a child victim of Frank Houston’s sex crimes. He was identified at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse, Case Study 18 by the pseudonym “AHA”.

It has come to my attention that Brett is suffering Stage Four Lymphoma and, as an invalid pensioner, is struggling financially because of the additional strain on his limited finances caused by his ongoing medical expenses. In short, he is dying and is broke.

A friend of Brett’s has started a “go fund me” page in an attempt to ease his financial burden at this time. Please refer to the following link: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/justiceforbrett>

I am hoping that we, as a Christian Movement, may be able to help Brett financially.

At the Royal Commission there was never any question raised about Frank Houston’s guilt in regard to the sex crimes committed against Brett when he was a little boy in Coogee. From the evidence tendered, everyone now knows that Frank Houston was a serial paedophile with multiple victims in New Zealand as well as Australia and the crimes committed against Brett were both serious and numerous. The impact on Brett’s life from this abuse has been devastating and ongoing.

Despite the Executive of the time knowing all these facts, they chose to conceal Frank Houston’s crimes from the Police and the Movement. In doing so they effectively took away any hope Brett would ever have of obtaining justice.

I am aware that in recent times Brett sought compensation from the Australian Christian Churches for the crimes he suffered at the hands of one of our most highly respected pastors. I understand that we, as a movement vigorously defended ourselves against his claim and won.

Now, we have a situation, where a Survivor, sexually abused by one of our own, is suffering a terminal illness and is in financial hardship to the point where he has to beg from strangers.

With all this in mind, I find it shameful that we have given huge amounts of money to top tier law firms to defend ourselves against a claim made by a victim who should have been shown compassion and mercy instead.

I appeal to you, and the current Executives, that even if the ACC through loopholes did not have a legal obligation to compensate Brett we definitely have a moral obligation before God and man to help him now.

I intend to take up a special offering for Brett in my church this Sunday and hope that you could encourage others to do the same.

Kind regards,

Bob Cotton
Maitland Christian Church
29/09/2018"

Since writing the above quoted letter to you, public awareness of Brett Sengstock's appalling treatment at the hands of the church has only increased. Please refer to the following links where his story is told on 60 minutes, mentioned on two occasions in Parliament by Mr David Shoebridge MLC, and also in a recent article by Joanne McCarthy in the Newcastle Herald.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=4g2FgAu1NYw>

<https://youtu.be/nq4aCQDJd1U>

<https://youtu.be/5sHo9tXrBDE>

<https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6436900/abuse-survivor-slams-prime-minister-over-close-ties-with-hillsong-church-leader/>

How much better it would have been if we had acted with mercy and compassion at the earliest opportunity instead of layering further abuse on an innocent and vulnerable victim. Regardless of this monumental failure I believe that it is still not too late for us to do the right thing. I would again ask that we do something collectively for Brett Sengstock and take up an offering to support this good man who has suffered more than we could possibly imagine. At the very least would you please make our fellow ministers aware of Brett's "go fund me" page <https://www.gofundme.com/f/justiceforbrett> and through them grant our congregations the opportunity to directly provide the financial support that Brett should have already received.

As it stands, Brett's abuse at the hands of Frank Houston cannot be compensated under the National Redress Scheme so his only hope for compensation for a life stolen is the generosity of others. Surely we can find it in our hearts to help a victim of one of our own. Let us not fail him again.

Respectfully,

Bob Cotton
Pastor
www.maitlandchristianchurch.org.au
#justiceforbrett
15/10/2019