

## Time to speak out: victim

By JOANNE McCARTHY

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**ACCUSED:** Repeat sex offender, the late priest Denis McAlinden.

TWENTY years ago a Hunter woman's attempts to stop a paedophile priest from within the church allegedly ended with a one-way ticket to England for him, and defeated silence for his victim.

On Wednesday, as the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry opens an investigation of church and police responses to allegations about Denis McAlinden, the woman – a key witness – had a message for other victims.

"Now is the time," she said on Tuesday, about breaking the public silence that allowed McAlinden to commit crimes against children for more than 40 years.

Pope Benedict's surprise retirement showed we were living in historic times, she said, but it was her experience of speaking to the Newcastle Herald in 2010, and then police, that led her to encourage victims to make a submission to the NSW inquiry.

"I was scared," she said, about identifying herself as a McAlinden victim from the early 1960s, and making a statement to police in which she named senior Catholic clergy with alleged knowledge of his offences.

"But what I found is that the journey you go through is actually easier than the fear."

There were marked differences between church responses in the early 1990s to allegations about McAlinden, and responses by the media and police in 2010 that led to Newcastle police's Strike Force Lantle, she said.

The media and police had been supportive, professional and caring, she said.

The church had been "cold, insensitive and very brusque" and "paid lip service" to stopping McAlinden, she said.

She first raised claims about McAlinden with a priest in the early 1980s.

In 1995 she alleges she was phoned by a senior Australian Catholic church representative to confirm details of the childhood sexual assaults. She alleged he told her McAlinden "made admissions to me" about sexually abusing at least six young girls.

"At first I believed they were genuine in dealing with the matter," she said.

"There were probably many people who were aware of problems with this man, but I was the one who gave them evidence to do something to stop him. But as time went on I realised that was not the goal of the church. Their goal was to get him out of the diocese and out of the country altogether if possible."

She "gave up" after a Maitland-Newcastle priest allegedly told her McAlinden was told "he could go and live elsewhere now" after his right to act as a priest was removed. She alleges the priest said: "We have agreed to buy him a one-way ticket to England."

A letter to a McAlinden victim in June 2002 confirmed the priest was in Western Australia. McAlinden died in 2005, only weeks after the diocese reported his location to police.

The woman's statement to Strike Force Lantle is in a brief of evidence before the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry. People can contact the inquiry on [sisa@agd.nsw.gov.au](mailto:sisa@agd.nsw.gov.au).

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