

**Witness Name:** GRO-A Mr J

**Statement No.:** WITN0024001

**Exhibits:** WITN0024002 – WITN0024009

**Dated:** 31/08/2020

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF** GRO-A Mr J

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I, GRO-A Mr J, state: -

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. I was born at the GRO-A in Gisborne in GRO-A. I grew up with my GRO-B brother GRO-B sisters and my parents in state houses at GRO-A GRO-A and GRO-A, GRO-A, Gisborne.
- 1.2. My Mother was the fifth of 12 children in a South Australian family, largely of Irish Catholic descent. Two of her siblings joined religious orders, and one remained a nun until her death in GRO-B. The late Bishop GRO-B, Bishop of GRO-B in GRO-B who died in GRO-B, was my mother's first cousin. I also have two living Australian first cousins who are nuns.
- 1.3. On my father's side, the GRO-B family also had strong links to the Catholic Church with some religious vocations including the present time.

*Early life*

- 1.4. My parents were practising Catholics active in the parish and supportive of the Catholic schools. I have many good memories of a happy, loving and caring family where Christian principles, concern and respect for others were instilled and modelled. Judeo-Christian ethical values remain important to me. We went to local Catholic schools, at a time when state funding had not been achieved in New Zealand, so attendance required the payment of school fees - from my parent's meagre household income.
- 1.5. We regularly attended Sunday mass as a family and as we became more independent it was still expected that we would attend mass and go to confession regularly.
- 1.6. My experience of abuse within the Catholic Church community revolves around the unexpected and predatory sexual behaviour of Father Norbert Berridge who was the Parish priest in Gisborne from 1949, the year I started school at St Mary's Convent Gisborne. Father Berridge is no longer alive having died in Gisborne in 1970.

**Refer EXH WITN0024002- Copy of Catholic Directory 195**

- 1.7. I started school aged 5, walking and later biking St Mary's Convent (run by Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart- the "Brown Josephites") and situated in Childers Road, Gisborne, before moving to the adjacent Marist Brothers School in Standard 3.
- 1.8. School discipline was not questioned, and we were expected to be diligent and well-behaved. Catholic nuns, brothers and priests were all held in high regard in our family and they were treated with strict obedience and respect.
- 1.9. At the age of 7, on GRO-A 1951 I made my first communion with Father Berridge and a few years later was confirmed by Bishop Liston.
- 1.10. We all admired Father Berridge and like most parishioners held him in very high regard. My parents were delighted whenever he came to the family home to tell stories and show slides of his local and international travel. In my parents' eyes Father Berridge was a saintly gentle and trusted man.

**Refer EXH WITN0024003 – Certificate of Holy Communion**

**Refer EXH WITN0024004 – Photo of Holy Communion and with Father Berridge**

1.11. In 1960 all Marist classes moved to a new campus on the edge of town named Edmund Campion College. This school is now co-educational and an integrated state school - Campion College. I have provided separately a one-page chronology of my early years at school including the names of the teachers who taught me. Photos relating to school and Church events have also been provided separately to the Catholic Church and the Commission

*Marist culture*

1.12. The Marist Brothers ran a strict and highly disciplined education programme although many of the Brothers lacked formal teaching qualifications. There were several Brothers at Marist Brothers High School who stood out as tough and threatening teachers. One was Brother Maurus who had previously taught in Fiji. In 1957 he coached a [GRO-A] team of which I was [GRO-A]. A stern disciplinarian and renowned user of excessive corporal punishment Brother Maurus took our school team on a [GRO-A] trip to Napier, where some of the team were accommodated in double beds in a hotel.

1.13. I was most uneasy when late one evening Brother Maurus entered the bedroom in which I was sharing the only bed with another team member. Without turning lights on he sat for a considerable time right near the end of the bed we were sharing. His behaviour was most unsettling, and feigning sleep I did not let him know I was aware of his presence. Eventually he left and I was not aware if he had ever touched me or my bed-mate who remained asleep during the time Brother Maurus was in our room.

1.14. At school there was understandably indoctrination in the teachings of the Catholic Church and likewise the encouragement of religious vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood. This was during a period in the life of the Catholic Church in NZ when the Church had a strong and growing following and most Catholics attended mass.

1.15. Several of my classmates ([GRO-B] and [GRO-B]) and friends ([GRO-B] [GRO-B] and [GRO-B]) joined the Marist Brothers although two did not remain. In our final year, both [GRO-B] and I were both awarded [GRO-A] - [GRO-A] [GRO-A] in [GRO-A] at Campion College and we often wondered if this was intended to signal to us that we also should have pursued a religious vocation.

*Parish culture*

- 1.16. In my final years of school (1960 and 1961) the Catholic Church arranged “Missions” by visiting priests for the whole Catholic parish, for what were promoted as faith strengthening programmes. In reality, these events (straight out of James Joyce’s book “Portrait of the artist as a young man”) included the visiting priests putting the fear of God into parishioners by preaching “fire and brimstone” consequences of sin, while at the same time raising extra funds for the Catholic Church.
- 1.17. During one such mission a visiting English Passionist priest named Father Stephen (but likely Stephen Horkin) whose profile now seems to be well below the internet horizon, was part of the mission. He had a very distinctive red birthmark on his face and was based in Hamilton. He heard the confessions of the boys at Campion College and invited some to the Gisborne Catholic presbytery and expected us to meet with him in his bedroom to discuss the possibility of a vocation for the priesthood.
- 1.18. My unaccompanied visit to Father Stephen’s bedroom was a particularly disturbing occasion as I was told to kneel at the end of his bed and to discuss personal aspects of my life that I would not normally discuss with my parents. Then after further discussion he encouraged me to join the priesthood and fully enveloped me in his large black cloak embracing me for what seemed like minutes. This frightened me and I quickly departed from his bedroom and speedily biked home not daring to tell my parents about this most unsettling incident.

*Father Berridge*

- 1.19. At both schools I attended Father Berridge was a regular and popular visitor to the school and would interact well with students. His presbytery was several kilometres away from the school, near the parish Catholic Church- St Mary Star of the Sea.
- 1.20. Father Berridge was unmistakably both a figure of total trust and of Catholic Church authority in our Catholic community. As the parish priest, Father Berridge was held in such high regard, for him to visit the family home or offer to spend time with young boys from the school was considered to be a special privilege.

## 2. THE ABUSE

- 2.1. Thus, when Father Berridge called at our homes offering to take my brother **GRO-B** and me with him to the Te Puia hot pools in his large modern car, my parents were both pleased and fully supportive.
- 2.2. As I recall, there were several occasions from when I was pre-pubescent in 1953 (aged 9) through to early-pubescence in 1956 (aged 12) that Father Berridge took me, along with other different class-mates to Te Puia Springs ostensibly as a special treat to swim or bathe in the hot pools.
- 2.3. At Te Puia Springs pool there were male changing sheds where with Father Berridge we would naturally start undressing to change into our togs to be able to swim just as we would have for our parents had they taken us there.
- 2.4. However, on these occasions Father Berridge would direct us to either not wear or to remove our togs before entering the water naked; something we were all uncomfortable with. He would undress with us at the same time and accompany us naked into the pool.
- 2.5. While being naked was already embarrassing enough for me and my class - mates, Father Berridge would then direct that we played his diving and swimming game. This involved us having to dive as best we could from a standing position and then one-by-one swim between his open legs. Then likewise we were directed to open our legs, so he could try and swim through them.
- 2.6. As in most hot pools, there is a lot of standing, splashing and moving around slowly rather than in swimming lengths. This Father Berridge "game" involved a lot of touching and nervous smiling as we were all innocently encouraged to play his games.
- 2.7. We were told by Father Berridge that what we were doing was quite normal, healthy and natural for bigger boys. He suggested we were bigger now so there was no need to tell our parents about this game.
- 2.8. On early visits to the pools my brother **GRO-B** also came. As we got older Father Berridge would come around and ask only for my brother, which was strongly resisted by him and eventually these trips ceased.

- 2.9. During the time of these events involving me, I did talk with peers at school about what Father Berridge had been doing to us but while there was no mention of anything more serious than swimming between his legs we were puzzled and perturbed but did not know whether it was against the law.
- 2.10. While upsetting, confusing and a huge relief to me when the visits to the hot pools ceased, I did not have the words to describe what was going on. In retrospect I see Father Berridge's behaviour as sexually predatory and grooming in nature but as he is no longer alive it is not possible to confront him on this matter as I wish I had done.
- 2.11. In 1962 straight from school I worked at the Ministry of Works before transferring to Auckland to further my engineering studies from 1964. While still in Gisborne my association with the Catholic Church was mainly through a young curate named **GRO-B** whom I found to be refreshingly smart and articulate and a model of good values closer to my own generation. **GRO-B** later left the priesthood but remained very active in matters of social justice and I was in touch with him occasionally. Quite recently **GRO-B** has agreed with me to talk briefly with the Royal Commission investigator concerning his time in Gisborne as he was aware of such allegations about Father Berridge.
- 2.12. After leaving school I also kept in touch with the now late **GRO-B** and **GRO-B** both of whom became Marist Brothers and likewise **GRO-B** who is still a teaching brother. I was also active in the Old Boys Association set up in 1961. However, this was the era when the great majority of my contemporaries were obliged to leave Gisborne for tertiary education and career opportunities and the Old Boys Association seemed to become inactive.
- 2.13. Some of my class-mates involved are now no longer alive including **GRO-B**, **GRO-B**, and **GRO-B**. There was also **GRO-B** and **GRO-B** who both later joined the Marist Brothers. Both quite separately and on different occasions told me they had left the Marist Brothers because of unwanted sexual advances towards them from other Marist Brothers. They also told me when they complained about them to their local Marist superior, they were told nothing could be done about it.

2.14. I still remain in touch with a number of former classmates and fellow students from my schooldays and am always saddened when I learn that any have died as is happening now more often due to our ages.

*My later years*

2.15. After leaving Gisborne, I qualified as a chartered civil engineer and later as a professional town planner and my education and professional development along the way in the secular world finally enabled me to gain a more mature perspective on the boundaries between and the roles of science and religion.

2.16. My profession led me to work with the United Nations for some 20 years holding senior posts globally over that time. As a senior UN official in a specialized UN agency, I worked with the   
  
  
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2.17. My international work experience covering some 40 countries has given me the great privilege of working with a wide range of social, cultural and political issues and when I was elected  of my UN , I was also able to advocate for a more open and transparent system of internal justice within the UN system.

2.18. There were very few school reunions over the past 60 years. One was a Silver Jubilee in 1985, and a 50th in 2011 and a more recent reunion “The final assembly” in Rotorua in 2019 involving students who were mostly older than I am. It has always intrigued me as to why Campion College which initially had an Old Boys Assn has not established an active Alumni Association as Alumni can be very supportive of current students and also effective as fund raisers. Was this because the experiences of the students of 50 and 60 years ago were best forgotten?

### **3. THE IMPACT OF THE ABUSE**

3.1. While these disturbing experiences of peculiar sexualised behaviour by an adult priest involving compliant young boys could be seen as minor on the spectrum of abuse in society, they have nevertheless remained with me as troubling events. Why would the parish priest require us to repeatedly perform his naked

swimming games? Had he not taken a vow of chastity and had he not also misused the authority of his position? How many other boys were abused and over how many years? Did the level of abuse change?

- 3.2. All of us have various levels of resilience, and in the post-war New Zealand environment where corporal punishment in schools was normalised (and not criminalised until 1989/1990) all children are likely to have experienced or witnessed unreasonable and harsh use of authority in many institutions.
- 3.3. Given the stability of my family life I consider that I have not suffered any enduring trauma, but I was and remain aggrieved by this intrusive and predatory behaviour involving the grooming of me, my family and selected school peers. This offending was by someone presenting the image of a virtuous and devout religious leader.
- 3.4. My lasting concern is that Father Berridge does not seem to have ever been confronted or called to account for his actions, which he did not advertise to the wider parish. It was secretive and selective. We did not talk with our parents about it – as directed by him. He was clearly a Sexual Abuser as defined by the Catholic Church in Section 3.7, b, ii and iv of the “Path to Healing” document.
- 3.5. Swimming is central to life in New Zealand and I was slow to learn to swim properly and I never had the water confidence I see in others until I was in my late 30s. While other family members and neighbours attended swimming clubs, I chose to avoid swimming pools, preferring dips in the ocean at local beaches.

#### **4. REDRESS**

- 4.1. My aim is to put the record straight regarding this priest’s unacceptable behaviour towards me and my brother. Ironically it is the strong sense of social justice instilled in me by my family and the nuns who taught me that encourages me to proceed. It is also my hope that my decision may also motivate others so affected to come forward.
- 4.2. I would like to see the removal of Father Berridge’s name from any Campion or Catholic Church awards or Catholic building names in Gisborne. Ideally for me the name changing exercise could be an overdue opportunity to honour a successful woman of the Catholic Church from Gisborne and there are many worthy candidates for that.



- 4.3. By persevering with my submission so far now for many months, I have also gained some insight into how those more seriously abused than I was must feel about the drawn-out complaint processing. I would like to be able to contribute to making these processes easier and faster for others who may have withdrawn and may now reconsider or those who are still to come forward.

*Commission 2020*

- 4.4. This Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions offers me the last chance for formal recognition of the abusive behaviour of a former Gisborne parish priest. It is my hope however that this submission will also be handled by both the Catholic Church and the Commission in the Christian manner promoted by Pope Francis.
- 4.5. To date I have not received a copy of the two investigators' reports into my allegations.

*The process – view on A Path to Healing document*

- 4.6. The very fact that this inquiry is finally taking place and covering such a broad period of years shows that the Catholic Church has seriously failed to adequately moderate the contemporary social and moral behaviour of its own clergy over a long time. The consequences of that have tragically created a nightmare for so many ordinary members of the Catholic Church.
- 4.7. I have found the process to be generally cumbersome and time-consuming and have often felt inclined to abandon my participation to stop having to reflect on the abuse each evening when I had previously tried to forget about it. However, I do commend the courtesy and consideration of all those to whom I have spoken.
- 4.8. The chronology of my contact with the Commission and the Catholic Church is attached as Annex A.
- 4.9. To date this process has now taken more than 6 months. This time factor is a major deterrent to anyone who has been abused. One really needs to know from the very start how long the interviews and each next step will likely take and it should aim to be as short and simple as possible. I realise that my case has been deferred by COVID 19 but if I had known it would take this long, I would likely not have bothered to come forward.

- 4.10. Lengthy delays disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. It would be a pity if any have withdrawn or worse have been retraumatized and then withdrawn as a result of such delays.
- 4.11. My discussions with both Jacinta Stopforth and Virginia Noonan on 25 August 2020 to state my objection to signing away my rights to the privacy of my records were very cordial. They kindly agreed that if I adapted and signed the consent form removing access to health records that their assessor's report would then go forward to the NOPS Complaints Assessment Committee. They also agreed that there was a need to significantly improve their consent form and also the document "Path to Healing" and I have agreed in principle to do this.
- 4.12. I would however prefer to have the opportunity to critique both the consent form and the "Path to Healing" document after my case has been processed and as a quite separate matter. The obvious major flaw in that the "Path to Healing" document in the way it has been written is that it makes it impossible to discern between Canon law and its application and Common law. It will require a restructuring and major rewrite in plain English to make it more useful and relevant to those who seek justice after have suffered abuse.

**Annex A**

1. **12 Feb 2020:** Having learnt the New Zealand Royal Commission was investigating abuse in faith-based institution I registered with the Commission via their contact centre.
2. **6 March 2020:** I then elected to complete a written submission which I emailed to the Royal Commission.
3. I was then advised that there were quite separate investigation processes for the Royal Commission, which also handles cases involving those who suffered abuse while in the care of the Catholic Church, and the independent investigation process of the Church itself and that if I wanted the Catholic Church to examine my case, I would need to contact them separately.
4. I was not aware of the National Office of Professional Standards (NOPS) nor had any prior knowledge of the Path to Healing process but aware of the Te Rōpū Tautoko website.
5. **10 March 2020:** I forwarded the written submission I had made to the Royal Commission to Te Rōpū Tautoko website of the Catholic Church by email

**Refer EXH WITN0024005 – email to NOPS**

6. **11 March 2020:** I received an email from David Mullin, the project manager for Te Rōpū Tautoko outlining the contact details for their professional standards office (NOPS) and advising me that they had quite a different role. I responded asking him to also forward on the copy of my written submission to NOPS and asked for an explanation of the differences between NOPS and Te Rōpū Tautoko.
7. David Mullin responded confirming a copy of my confidential complaint made to the Royal Commission had gone to NOPS and described how **Tautoko has the role of preparing material in response to requests made of Catholic Church organisations by the Royal Commission.** He further described that **NOPS has two roles, managing complaints and developing the safeguarding practices of the Catholic Church today.**

8. **13 March 2020:** The next contact was via email from Jacinta Stopforth, a professional standards officer from NOPS acknowledging my complaint had been forwarded to them by David Mullin and her email had the “Path to Healing” attachment summarising the process for reporting of abuse to the Catholic Church in New Zealand.

**Refer EXH WITN0024006 – email from NOPS dated 13 March and attachment**

9. **13 March 2020:** I responded on the 13th of March 2020 supplying a copy of my written submission to the Royal Commission and further personal details that were asked for by NOPS. I further asked to be advised of the likely process and timetable in handling the complaint.
10. **16 March 2020:** I received a follow up email from Jacinta Stopforth of NOPS stating she needed to do some background and would get back to me.

**Refer EXH WITN0024007 – email from NOPS dated 16 March**

11. **16 April 2020:** I received an email from Jacinta Stopforth of NOPS. The email had two attachments outlining that I had been assigned an investigator and another copy of the summary document outlining the process to report abuse in the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Refer EXH WITN0024008 – email from NOPS dated 16 April and attachments**

12. **23 April 2020:** I received an email from Bruce Shadbolt introducing himself as the investigator for the Catholic Church. He requested a chat on the phone and we had an hour-long telephone conversation later the same day.
13. **20 May 2020:** Due to the COVID 19 lockdown Bruce Shadbolt and I exchanged emails before being able to have a three-hour face to face interview. It was my understanding from these cordial interviews with Mr Shadbolt that any representations to the Catholic Church in this matter had be made via him.
14. I had also been asked by the Catholic Church to sign the NOPS consent form but this I declined as I found it both intrusive of my privacy and rights-negating. When I discussed this with investigator Shadbolt he informed me that he did not actually require me to sign it as it was.

**Refer EXH WITN0024009 – NOPS Consent form**

15. **29 July 2020:** I met with the Catholic Church investigator Bruce Shadbolt and was informed that a NOPS colleague investigator of his had recently received corroboration of my allegations against Father Berridge's behaviour from two Gisborne residents. I did not seek the names of the concerned persons. I record here my appreciation to Bruce Shadbolt for his investigative skills into my allegations of events of more than 60 years ago. I certainly had my doubts that others involved may not come forward especially when I decided it was inappropriate for me to approach potential witnesses directly or to have my name mentioned to them.
16. At the same meeting I was further asked by Bruce Shadbolt if I was an altar boy when in Gisborne to which I replied in the affirmative. I was then advised that he had now found out that most of the boys who went "swimming" with Father Berridge were in fact altar boys. Recruitment into the altar boy system was an annual affair and this obviously provided the ideal opportunity for new boys to be easily accessed by Father Berridge each year. But for how long did this continue and did the nature of his "swimming games" change?
17. **20 August 2020:** I received a reminder email from NOPS asking that I sign the Complainant's Consent Form as they could not forward the report of their investigator to the Complaints Assessment Committee until they had my signed Consent Form.
18. **25 August 2020:** I discussed my rights to privacy under the NZ Privacy Act with the Privacy Commission with respect to having to provide NOPS with access to my medical records and being aware of my rights I then called NOPS and spoke to Jacinta Stopforth and Virginia Noonan.
19. **31 August 2020:** I emailed an amended Complaints Consent Form to NOPS and submitted this statement to the Royal Commission investigating officer.

**Statement of Truth**

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Signed **GRO-A Mr J**

**GRO-A Mr J**

Dated: 31 August 2020