

**Witness Name:** Robert Patrick Carl Donaldson

**Statement No.:** WITN0011001

**Exhibits:** WITN0011002 - WITN0011004

**Dated:** 24.08.20

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF ROBERT PATRICK CARL DONALDSON

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I, Robert Patrick Carl Donaldson, state: -

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. My full name is Robert Patrick Carl Donaldson. I was born in 1948 and I am a 71-year-old Pakeha male.
- 1.2. I was born and raised in South Dunedin, New Zealand. My parents [GRO-B] and [GRO-B] Donaldson had five boys. In order they are [GRO-B], [GRO-B], [GRO-B], me and [GRO-B]. We all lived on [GRO-B] in South Dunedin.
- 1.3. Our family were very Catholic and attended Church religiously every week at St Bernadette's parish a few hundred metres down our road. The Church was a big part of our family.
- 1.4. I still live in South Dunedin. I got married to my wife [GRO-B] in 1981 and we have two adult children who were born in 1986 and 1989. My wife, son and daughter all live in Christchurch as a result of issues arising from the abuse I suffered.

- 1.5. My abuse story occurred while in the pastoral care of Father Magnus “Max” Murray (Father Murray). The abuse occurred on an ongoing basis between 1955 and 1965 when I was aged between seven and 17 years old.

*Family life and education*

- 1.6. As our family all attended St Bernadette’s Church my brothers and I all attended our Holy Communion ceremony there and at different time were altar boys.
- 1.7. Father Murray was the assistant priest at St Bernadette’s Church living there at the presbytery with the parish priest and housekeeper. As a young boy I would visit the Church on a regular basis to practise being an altar boy but also to have a shower as we only had a bath at home.
- 1.8. My parents would never say anything bad about the Church and held Father Murray in very high regard. My mother considered him the sixth son of the family.
- 1.9. I remember later in life a parishioner told me that the saying was that if you ever wanted to find Father Murray, he would be at the Donaldson’s. He loved my mother’s cooking and would visit a lot.
- 1.10. Being Catholic we all attended Catholic schools and I started at St Bernadette’s School (St Bernadette’s) in 1953 when I turned five years old. St Bernadette’s is a Catholic primary school which was affiliated with St Bernadette’s Church and situated on the same grounds.
- 1.11. The St Bernadette’s Church building was demolished in 2017 and the congregation merged with St Brigid’s (Tainui), St Alphonsus (Waverly) and St Patrick’s (Macandrew Road) to become the Mercy Parish.
- 1.12. After St Bernadette’s, I attended St Edmund’s School (St Edmund’s) from ages nine to 12. St Edmund’s closed in 1989. The principal at St Edmund’s was Brother Vincent Sullivan.
- 1.13. In 1963 I went to Christian Brothers High School. In 1964 it changed its name to St Paul’s High School (St Paul’s) which is the year I left. Years later St Paul’s became Kavanagh College in 1989.
- 1.14. I left school at age 16 to do a carpentry apprenticeship. I never did that well at school and thought it was more practical to learn a trade.

- 1.15. My mother died from lung cancer in 1976. My father died in 1991.
- 1.16. One of my older brothers has been a GRO-B for the last 70 years. My other older brother died three years ago at age 85. My younger brothers live in Motueka and Australia.
- 1.17. I still go to church on Sundays and I read Catholic magazines. I do charity work through St Vincent de Paul. I still have my faith and pray regularly. It was just one bad apple that ruined my life.

## **2. THE ABUSE**

- 2.1. My abuse started in at St Bernadette's parish in 1955. Father Murray was not long out of the seminary at this point and was probably around 21 years old.

**Refer exhibit WITN0011002 – Copy of Catholic Directory showing Murray at Forbury Road Parish.**

- 2.2. Father Murray began by touching my head with his hands and putting his fingers through my hair. This then extended to watching me have a shower at the presbytery and then he began to fondle me and touch my penis.
- 2.3. Father Murray would take me to his bed and start to fondle and play with my genitals in the bed. We were both naked and this then led to him raping me in his bed. At the time I did not know it was abuse. I thought it must be okay as he was a priest and was regarded as a powerful man.
- 2.4. Father Murray would also come over to my parents' house late at night, around 11pm. My father would let him in.
- 2.5. Father Murray would then come into my bedroom where I was asleep and get into bed with me and fondle my penis. Sometimes I would push him off and he would leave.
- 2.6. St Bernadette's Church also had a house at Warrington Beach, and I went there with Father Murray on a few occasions in the mid-1960s. I was about 12 years old at the time. At this house I was taken to the bedroom and again Father Murray would play with my penis.

- 2.7. My father would be in the kitchen and others would be asleep. Father Murray just came to visit me. I think my parents thought I was privileged because a highly regarded priest was interested in me.
- 2.8. This sexual abuse occurred approximately twice a week for a period of ten years. My recollection is that I was raped around four times but only in the presbytery. I remember the offending very clearly but did not understand it for a long time.
- 2.9. GRO-B  
GRO-B  
GRO-B.
- 2.10. After complaints arose Father Murray was transferred from St Bernadette's Church to a parish in Mosgiel where there was further offending.
- 2.11. I have been told there was a Dutch family whose three sons were all being abused. The parents found out and complained and Father Murray was transferred again.
- 2.12. After Mosgiel, Father Murray was sent to Sydney by Bishop Kavanagh. We were told that Father Murray had been sent to get treatment. I later found out that he was moved to various parishes in Sydney where he committed further offending.
- 2.13. My wife met one woman who was raped by Father Murray as a young girl in Sydney. Her parents had wanted her to go into a convent.
- 2.14. After Sydney, Father Murray was moved to Waihi where further allegations of sexual abuse were made. The police in Waihi advised the Church that he should leave. Father Murray then went to Ngāruawāhia where more abuse was alleged.
- 2.15. A lot of parents would have known what was going on, but nobody spoke out against the Church because it was "up here", and we were "down there".
- 2.16. Over the years I have met several other people in Dunedin who were abused by priests, nuns and Catholic teaching staff. Many of these people and their abusers have since died.
- 2.17. I was taught by Brother Vincent Sullivan at St Edmund's. He was then transferred, and Brother Fay came in. Brother Fay was very strict, and several parents took their kids out of the school because of him.

- 2.18. Both Brother Fay and Brother Sullivan are known to have abused boys. I was not sexually abused by either of them although they would regularly cane boys on their bottoms at school. Caning was considered normal at the time and went out in the mid-1970s. I suppose I was lucky only to have been caned on the hand.
- 2.19. During my time at St Edmund's, Father Murray was teaching Latin at St Paul's. He had been sent to do this by Bishop Kavanagh but hated doing it.
- 2.20. My brother who is a GRO-B does not like that I have made allegations against the Church and we do not have a good relationship because of this.

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

- 3.1. The sexual abuse that I suffered at the hands of Father Murray has affected my entire life. It took me over forty years to understand that I had been sexually abused.
- 3.2. I would never have dared speak out about abuse in the Catholic Church when I was younger. The Church had all the power, and my parents would never have believed me. They went to their graves not knowing.
- 3.3. I started an apprenticeship after school but had to give that up as I could not concentrate.
- 3.4. I then worked in a smelter in Invercargill for six months in the early 1970s, followed by a job truck driving for the City Council Drainage Board, which I also lost after a short time.
- 3.5. I worked part time as a taxi driver for 15 years but otherwise I have been on the benefit. I was never able to hold down a full-time job for long because of the anxiety I suffered.
- 3.6. Because of this I have never been able to save any money and I have never been able to own my own home.
- 3.7. I have worked out I have lost over \$880,000 dollars over the years. I should be sitting in my own home.

- 3.8. My son has [GRO-D], which I believe is a result of my abuse. He [GRO-B] from [GRO-B] and suffered from [GRO-D] ever since. I was never able to be a good father.
- 3.9. In the late 80's I had a breakdown and was admitted to Cherry Farm psychiatric hospital in Dunedin and later to the psychiatric ward of Dunedin Hospital. None of my doctors knew that I had been abused.
- 3.10. Cherry Farm was awful and some of the staff members were physically abusive. One of the nurses used to be physical and shove me around. I cannot remember the name of him, but he just pushed me around and grabbed me every time he was near. It was like he had something in for me.
- 3.11. When I was admitted to Cherry Farm my children were taken away from us for a while. They were able to visit me, but it was very difficult.
- 3.12. I was discharged from Cherry Farm after 15 months. I hated my time there.
- 3.13. The abuse I suffered affected my ability to be a father to my own children. I was like a zombie when they were growing up. They always wondered why their father acted so strangely.
- 3.14. My relationship with my children is not good. They did not know about my abuse until I went through the court process.
- 3.15. My son has [GRO-D] and doesn't talk to me. I think a lot of this stems from the abuse I suffered and the impact this had on the way I raised him.
- 3.16. The abuse affected my relationship with my brothers, particularly my brother [GRO-B]. He, like a lot of the older generation, doesn't believe the scale of the abuse.

#### **4. REDRESS**

- 4.1. The catalyst for first making a complaint about my abuse or even addressing it in any way was because of my wife [GRO-B].

- 4.2. She had been on holiday in Australia in the 1990's and had heard stories in the media about abuse that had occurred in the Australian Catholic Church. She recognised immediately that that's what had happened to me.
- 4.3. When she returned to New Zealand, she went to visit an old school friend named Sister **GRO-C**. She had become a Dominican nun in recent years. Sister **GRO-C** then started coming to the house and slowly I started talking about my abuse to her.
- 4.4. Over time, I disclosed to her what Magnus Murray had done to me. Sister **GRO-C** provided support for me and then arranged to make a claim with ACC. I made a claim and began to have regular counselling.
- 4.5. I also had some dealings with Lyndsay Freer who is the spokesman for the Catholic Church, but she was not helpful at all. I was given no support or avenue for complaint. It was like it's only ACC.
- 4.6. The next thing I did was to visit the Dunedin Bishop, Lenny Boyle with my wife. We sat down in his office and I told him about what had happened with Father Murray. Bishop Boyle was very cagey and took some notes.
- 4.7. I remember he wrote the notes in the back of his diary or journal. He never offered any further support in any way. He did not explain the Catholic complaints process or any type of redress. Bishop Boyle died in June 2016.
- 4.8. The next stage was when I was rung by a detective in Auckland and asked if I would make a statement against Magnus Murray. I was advised the court case would be in Dunedin and the officer-in-charge was Detective Mark Lodge.
- 4.9. I completed a statement and **GRO-B** **GRO-B**. When Murray was arrested, he was placed in custody and it was my brother **GRO-B** who was the prison chaplain.
- 4.10. Next, I was asked to accept a guilty plea offer if the police reduced the sodomy charges to the lesser indecent assault. I agreed. In hindsight, Murray got off lightly.
- 4.11. In 2003, Magnus Murray was convicted at the High Court in Dunedin for sexual offending against four boys, including myself, over a 14-year period. He was

sentenced to five years' imprisonment and was released after serving two years' and nine months.

4.12. At the sentencing I had to read out my victim impact statement along with the other victims. This was an okay thing to do but I was later annoyed when victim support didn't update me when Murray was released.

4.13. After the court case I went to see Monsignor Harrison and during this meeting a nun came in and all they wanted to do was pray and do some penance. This did not help my anxiety and depression.

4.14. Next, I was asked to attend a restorative justice meeting with Murray at Presbyterian Support. His support person was Don Murray who I now know sexually abused a person known to me. At the meeting I asked why he abused me. Murray didn't have a straight answer and the whole process achieved nothing for me—no closure, no healing.

4.15. A little while later, I again approached the diocese and spoke with Bishop Campbell. I got no help and was left on my own. I ended going to Sonja Cooper. I went to her because the Church told me to man up and go to a lawyer. I first went to a lawyer in Stewart Street, but he wanted \$300,000.

4.16. Cooper Legal were dealing with the lawyer for the Church, Judith Ablett-Kerr and pointed out that my abuse was severe and thus deserved a higher ex gratia payment. This was totally rejected by the Church and instead they queried why I had now even approached them again.

**Refer exhibit WITN0011003 – Letters between Cooper legal and Judith Ablett-Kerr dated 30 April and 5 May 2008**

4.17. At Cooper Legal I dealt with Amanda Hill. Cooper Legal put a claim in and I got a payment of \$20,000 minus \$5,000 for legal fees. This was in December 2008. Bishop Campbell was in charge then and was responsible for signing this off. No one wanted to talk to me about the complaint from the diocese and the whole process took ages with no input from me or updates.



## **Refer exhibit WITN0011004 – Deed of Settlement dated 5 September 2008**

4.18. I have now found that only three of us from the court case got paid out from the Church. To me the settlement was a pittance for what happened to me. It was insulting, and it should've been more.

4.19. Never has anyone from the Church offered me any counselling apart from Sister GRO-C.

4.20. I have also participated in Confidential Forum in relation to my abuse at Cherry Farm. It was Murray Heasley who put me onto the Forum. I just rang the 0800 number and told my story. I then got a call from the Ministry of Health offering me \$4,000 and telling me to "take it or leave it".

## **5. LOOKING FORWARD**

5.1. Magnus Murray was defrocked in 2019, this was 16 years after his convictions and only because of a public backlash. It was a disgrace it took so long for the Catholic Church to defrock Murray and I felt insulted.

5.2. I think celibacy in the Catholic Church is a big problem. If Murray was just allowed to be married, then he would not have abused me.

5.3. Murray is still alive and in his 90s. He is being well looked after by the Catholic Church and I have nothing.

5.4. Just like Magnus Murray his brother Don Murray, a Christian Brother, was also an abuser. Despite this, neither of them has ever been reported on by the Catholic magazine, a publication I still read religiously.

5.5. The secrecy, the minimisation, and the cover up continues to this day.

**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-C**

Dated: *24.8.20.*