

Witness Name: Marc GRO-A

Statement No.: WITN0001001

Exhibits: WITN0001002 – WITN0001009

Dated: 14-09-2020

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MARC GRO-A

I, Marc GRO-A, state: -

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. I am a 53-year-old male survivor of historical sexual, physical and emotional abuse that I suffered during my schooling and altar boy years in Dunedin, New Zealand.
- 1.2. This abuse occurred at various schools and other locations and was committed by two Christian Brothers, a priest and a lay teacher. The period of abuse, although separated, covered approximately 5 years from the age of 10 to 14.
- 1.3. This is the first time I have ever told of my abuse in a public forum and up until very recently it had been a secret I have suffered through and kept for almost 40 years.

Background

- 1.4. Born in Dunedin, I lived in a lower socio-economic, small family home in Oxford Street, South Dunedin. I would describe my childhood as growing up in a happy, loving family. I was brought up in an extended family with my grandmother and

grandfather (Nan and Pop), living with Mum, Dad, myself, a brother and three sisters.

- 1.5. At the start of the abuse in 1977, the age order of the family went: eldest sister, 17; older brother, 15; older sister, 12; myself, 10; and my younger sister was 2 years old. My mother was 35.
- 1.6. I have no memories of any domestic or any other abuse occurring in our family.
- 1.7. Our entire family regularly attended church and actively participated in the local St Patrick's congregation. All my sisters and my brother attended Catholic schools and I remember Dad even counting the church-plate collection money with other men every Sunday morning.
- 1.8. There were several priests at St Patrick's Basilica that I remember from this time: Father Cosby, Reverend Boyd, Father Cumming—who later gave my father his last rites in 1978—Father McCarthy, Father Healy, and Father Harrison.
- 1.9. Father Healy and a junior priest, Father Harrison, were friends of the family and would regularly visit our home after a family church celebration and have lunch and a beer with Dad and my uncles.
- 1.10. My siblings and I all had our Holy Communion, First Confession and Confirmation at St Patrick's. My Holy Communion was in August 1974 and was conducted by Father McCarthy.

Refer Exhibit WITN0001002 – Certificate of Holy Communion

- 1.11. St Patrick's Church was a big part of my life growing up and both my brother (Michael) and I were altar boys there for extended periods of our childhood. It was also the church my eldest sister was married in.
- 1.12. My life and family began to change when I had just turned 10 years old, and early into my second year (or Standard 4) at St Edmund's School. I was told my father was dying of cancer and he only had a few years to live.
- 1.13. I think the reason I was told at this time was due to the cancer being in its later stages and Dad was requiring repeated chemotherapy and hospitalisation treatments. Dad died in November 1978 at age 42 after a rough battle with cancer. I was 11 years old when he died.

- 1.14. About eight months before Dad died in 1978, another family tragedy was also unfolding. My only brother Michael, at age 17, became very ill after a summer 'fruit picking' holiday. After repeated doctor's visits and hospitalisations he was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of cancer. Michael died at home after a terrible illness in 1980 at age 19. During and after this period, my Mum took on the role to care for and support the whole family.
- 1.15. Around the same time my brother was dying, my grandfather's health also deteriorated quickly. Although we had all been raised Catholic, including my grandmother, 'Pop' had never been baptised or been part of the religion. He told me once it was something that he never really wanted to do after serving in the First World War.
- 1.16. Father Harrison was our family priest at this time and gave my brother (Michael) his last rites. At the same time, Father Harrison also performed my grandfather's baptism, Holy Communion, First Confession, Confirmation and last rites all at once. This was all done at our family home.
- 1.17. I was 13 years old when my brother (Michael) died. It was an incredibly difficult and tragic period made harder given my brother was at the same hospital and being treated by the same doctors as my Dad, but in a different ward. My Dad died without being told about my brother's (Michael's) illness.
- 1.18. Pop lived long enough to go through my brother's (Michael's) death, but after about another year of nursing him at home, my 'Pop' died at age 94. I was 14 years old. My grandfather was my closest friend and his death intensified what was already a very sad time.
- 1.19. Outside of these tragic events, it is also important to know that the abuse I suffered was by people who had full knowledge and understanding of my family situation. It was committed by people who were meant to 'care' for me, and it was all committed during the same period as my father, brother and grandfather were sick and dying.

2. THE ABUSE

St Edmund's Intermediate School

- 2.1. The abuse began when I was 10 years old and in my second year at St Edmund's 'Intermediate' School on Macandrew Road, South Dunedin. This was the same year I found out my father was dying.
- 2.2. St Edmund's was an all-boys school that I attended for four years in Standard 3, Standard 4 and then Form 1 and 2. It was run by the Christian Brothers Catholic Order. My older brother had also attended this school.
- 2.3. Prior to St Edmund's I had attended the St Patrick's Junior Primary School for four years which was situated next to St Patrick's Basilica on Macandrew Road.
- 2.4. St Edmund's was a very regimented school where you had to wear a uniform, garters to keep your socks up, and keep your shoes polished. Every morning we would be 'inspected' by our teachers and if you were not up to 'scratch' you would be hit with a leather 'strap'. This was the punishment for most things; late homework, talking in class or even having your hair too long.
- 2.5. Outside of being strapped, other punishment was often brutal. Being told to stand still and then punched in the back of the head or stomach with the full force of an adult man. This punishment was often given by Brother Fay, a former school boxing trainer.
- 2.6. In my second year at St Edmund's I was caught by Brother Fay playing with another student inside an old school house by the art shed and I was punched twice in the stomach. I buckled over, fell to the ground and was blacking out from the pain and being winded. I remember lying there, coming in and out of consciousness, unable to move or stand for a long period of time. This was one of many instances of violence that I received from teachers at this school.
- 2.7. This culture of violence aside, I still describe my first year at St Edmund's as excellent and my favourite year at school. I was happily involved in many aspects of the school and had a wide circle of friends. At the end of this year I was awarded '1st Place' overall for my excellence in schoolwork for the entire year level.
- 2.8. My teacher in Standard 3 was Brother Mills.

Refer exhibit WITN0001003 – Class photo 1960

- 2.9. My second year at St Edmund's was not the same. I was 10 years old and in Standard 4 when Dad was now getting visibly ill. I started to become very unfocused at school and began to get in trouble for small infringements such as late homework and then later for stealing lollies from a nearby shop. I also started to become more withdrawn and had less interest in friends.
- 2.10. My attention in class continued to deteriorate but after a time the teachers would not directly strap or hit me anymore. Instead I was sent directly to the principal's office for any indiscretion and subsequent punishment.
- 2.11. This was the beginning of almost weekly abuse in the office of Brother Sullivan, the principal, for the rest of that year and the year that followed.
- 2.12. On the first few occasions I was instructed by Brother Sullivan to pull down my school shorts and underpants and bend over his knee. He would 'smack' me repeatedly with his open hand until I was crying so heavily that I could not breathe. I would start to hyperventilate, and it was usually only then that he would stop.
- 2.13. Brother Sullivan was known by students to be a volatile, abusive and at times violent teacher.
- 2.14. I was told repeatedly on these office visits that I was 'naughty', and I was 'lucky' he wasn't telling my Mum about my bad behaviour or sending me home. This frightened me as I didn't want to upset Mum any further given what she was already going through.
- 2.15. On about the third time being sent to his office, there was another Christian Brother present, Brother Fay. He was seated talking to Brother Sullivan casually when I was told to again pull my pants down.
- 2.16. But this time I was told to stand in the corner with my shirt pulled up. This then became the regular way I was treated whenever I entered Brother Sullivan's office for punishment.
- 2.17. I remember often being ridiculed, as I was standing in the corner semi-naked. Told how small my 'little sausage' was or how 'girlie' I looked. I was humiliated, ashamed and often petrified to move.

- 2.18. The length of time I would be made to stand varied, but it always ended with me being told to walk over and lie across Brother Sullivan's knee for punishment. I would be made to walk without pulling up my pants from the corner of the office to his chair. My stumbling was often met with laughter or giggles from them both.
- 2.19. The 'punishment' from this point became increasingly violent, humiliating and more sexual on each visit. On two separate occasions, while being 'smacked' across Br Sullivan's knee, I had my head held by Brother Fay and pulled forward to force my mouth around his limp penis. I was crying and begging for Brother Sullivan to stop. I remember the smell of the stale urine and not being able to breath as my face was pushed into Brother Fay's groin.
- 2.20. It was during these 'worst' office visits, and especially if Brother Fay was around (about four times), that Brother Sullivan, while I was bent over his lap, inserted his finger and other small objects into my anus. I remember the intense feeling of 'scratching' pain this inflicted on me and how painful it was to walk and pass bowel movements after each of these times.
- 2.21. This type of 'violent' abuse ended early the following year when I moved into Form 1. I do not remember seeing Brother Fay around at the school in my final two years at St Edmund's.
- 2.22. The relationship between Brother Sullivan and I started to change and moved from the violent beatings to one of fondling, caressing and cuddling me when I was on his lap in his office.
- 2.23. I think I also found a form of 'comfort' in these later meetings and for my own reasons started to seek out time with Brother Sullivan in his office. When I was there I would pull my own pants down and allow him to fondle my genitals while we cuddled on his lap. He would hold me and talk, especially if I was upset with everything occurring at home, which often I was. My father died in November of that year.
- 2.24. After about six months of this abuse, I became increasingly ashamed of myself and with what was occurring. I told my brother about the abuse. He told me I needed to 'stand up for myself' and tell Brother Sullivan to stop or that I should tell people about what he was doing.

- 2.25. Before the end of that year, I finally built up the courage and refused Brother Sullivan's request to pull my pants down or be put over his knee anymore. He became very angry that day and I was scared he was going to hit me.
- 2.26. I never sought him out again and when forced to 'attend' his office I would also refuse his punishment. Although he would become aggressive and sometimes still hit me with a strap, there was no further sexual abuse.
- 2.27. The following year was my last at St Edmund's and when I returned to school, my family situation had intensified after the death of Dad and my brother's illness. I think as a child I had become even more introverted. I was quite 'fragile' and I believe this was recognised by all of the teachers at the school as I was also punished less.
- 2.28. At the same time as attending St Edmund's I was an altar boy at the St Patrick's Basilica in South Dunedin. It was in about 1979 that a new 'head' parish priest commenced, Father Kean. I was 12 years old.
- 2.29. In the later part of that year, in the summer, I was caught by Father Kean after the Sunday night church service stealing 'altar wine' from the storeroom.
- 2.30. Father Kean became very aggressive and told me he was going to take me home and tell my mother. I immediately began to plead for him not to. This didn't work, and I was forcibly walked from the back of the church to his large American car that was parked in the adjoining garage to the 'Priest House'.
- 2.31. The priests at St Patrick's Basilica, including Father Kean, lived in a house that was between St Patrick's Basilica and the primary school. At the back of the house was a carpark with garages where the priests kept their cars.
- 2.32. I remember Father Kean's car was so big the garage door couldn't be shut. It was a really flash car for a priest to own and I thought he must have a lot of money to have such a nice car. But Father Kean was also a very obese man and the altar boys would joke that it was the only car that would fit him.
- 2.33. I realised once we left the church that we were not driving to my house but towards an area known as the 'foreshore'. This was an area down Macandrew Road toward Anderson's Bay. It was not that far from my home and was an area I regularly played in with my family and friends.

- 2.34. At first, I thought we were heading a longer way home, but he did not turn towards Oxford Street, rather he drove past it then further down into Otaki Street, which I knew was a dead-end road. At this time, most of the foreshore was still predominantly a marshland area with some small roads and very few businesses.
- 2.35. I was surprised he pulled the car to a stop in the empty, unlit road. He started talking and trying to engage me in conversation about what was happening with my family at home but then slowly began moving his body sideways towards me along the bench style front seat.
- 2.36. When he was near, he moved his right arm down to my stomach area and then pushed his hand underneath my shorts and underpants to grab my penis and testicles. I was taken completely by surprise by his actions.
- 2.37. I immediately began to fight back and try to pull away from him but his grip on my genitals increased until I was in pain. When I stopped struggling he relaxed his hold. I then swung my legs up and I started to kick with my feet and hit him with my hands to push him away.
- 2.38. I managed to get the door unlocked, break free of him and I ran straight home which was only about one kilometre away. I was still scared that Father Kean would tell my Mum that I had stolen alter wine, so I decided not to tell her about the abuse.
- 2.39. On two separate occasions after this assault I was followed by Father Kean. On both occasions he attempted 'talk' and to persuade me to get into his car.
- 2.40. The first time was when I walked past his car in Melbourne Street, around the corner from our church. I was on my way home after the Saturday night 'Novena' service where I was the altar boy. He had parked his car out of sight and I only saw him as he began to call out to me. I ran home.
- 2.41. The second and last time I was walking down the main street of South Dunedin during daylight hours and heard a car slowly approaching from behind. As it passed me I saw it was Father Kean in his big car. He parked a little further on, by the post office.
- 2.42. I was scared and tried to walk past but he had opened the passenger door and was leaning out trying to talk to me. He then grabbed my forearm and pulled me

towards his car. After I started yelling loudly and drawing the attention of other pedestrians, he released my arm and quickly drove away.

2.43. It was after this second time that I finally told my Mum that I was being “followed by the creepy priest” and he had tried to pull me into his car.

2.44. Mum took me immediately to the Priest House next to St Patrick’s Basilica, and demanded to see Father Kean. When we were in private with him Mum told him in no uncertain terms that she would “kill him” if he ever tried to lay a hand on me again.

2.45. I had no further contact with Father Kean and a short time later I stopped being an altar boy and stopped attending church.

St Paul’s High School

2.46. In 1980, I moved to St Paul’s High School in Rattray Street, Dunedin at the age of 13. This school was also run by the Christian Brothers and had recently incorporated the adjacent Christian Brother’s Junior School.

2.47. The school went from Form 3 until Form 7 although I left near the end of Form 4.

2.48. In the first year, like many other students, I got to know one teacher, Ian Thompson, as an extremely violent and volatile man who would frequently assault or beat other students for minor school infringements.

2.49. Ian Thompson was feared by students and known for his corporal punishment with a long, thin cane.

2.50. I received this punishment only once in my first year at St Paul’s and it was brutally delivered. I, like other students, was bent over in the classroom hallway, with my head below a window rail when Thompson would take a ‘run-up’ of approximately 10 meters and deliver each swing in a similar way to a full ‘cricket bowler’s’ motion.

2.51. These were delivered as ‘six of the best’ and the first time left me semi-conscious with incredible pain and swollen welts across my buttocks.

2.52. This was a common punishment delivered by Thompson and would occur almost weekly to a student.

2.53. In 1981, in my last year at school (Form 4), I started photography as an ‘extra’ subject which was taught by Ian Thompson. It was during the developing of

photographs in a dark room that I was first sexually assaulted by Ian Thompson when he entered the room, walked up directly behind me and put his hand up the inside of my school shorts and started to 'fondle' my lower buttock and genitals.

2.54. Although I had heard someone enter the room it was completely dark, and I was taken by surprise. I immediately pulled away and screamed. Ian Thompson became embarrassed and started to say he was looking for someone else. There was one other student in the darkroom at the time.

2.55. I tried to avoid Thompson as much as possible after that, but it was difficult given my photography interest and other English subjects he taught.

2.56. The next incident occurred nearer the end of the year when I walked into the main photo developing room. I disturbed Thompson who was under 'red-light' developing and hanging to dry what appeared to be pictures of young males in various poses and states of nudity.

2.57. I realised as I got closer to him that he had not heard me, so I called his name. On seeing me, he became extremely aggressive and started yelling at me to get out immediately, which I did.

2.58. It was approximately one week after I saw him in the darkroom that I was caught for smoking by Ian Thompson on school grounds. I was told I needed to 'attend' his house for my punishment at the end of the lunch break.

2.59. Ian Thompson had a residence almost directly across from the school in what I believe to be York Place. It was not an uncommon practice for students to be sent for punishment to his house or he would invite other students to visit him as a 'reward'.

2.60. At this house I entered and saw other students present. I did not know the students but they all wore the white school shirts of senior students.

2.61. When Thompson arrived in the kitchen area he was carrying his cane and I was immediately told to bend over the arm of a nearby chair. I was very scared to be there and started to comply.

2.62. As I was leaning forward, both of my arms were grabbed by a student seated at the table and I was held down forcibly and repeatedly caned until my legs collapsed beneath me. I believe I was hit with the cane about 8-10 times.

- 2.63. The next part of this abuse story is the hardest for me to both explain and to recollect as an entire event. I remember being helped up onto a bench seat near the table after the caning and being presented with a cup of tea by Ian Thompson.
- 2.64. There were at least two other students also seated near Ian Thompson. As the cup of tea was put in front of me, Thompson also put two small white tablets next to the saucer and said they were Aspirin for the pain, and I should take them before leaving.
- 2.65. I was scared to do this as I had always been told that Aspirin was only for adults. I was scared and shaken, and after some hesitation, I was convinced, but only took one tablet and drank the tea.
- 2.66. I do not remember anything after this, but I woke next to another student lying on the seat. When I stood up, I found my school shorts undone and my underpants were not fitting properly. I also felt extremely nauseous and began to experience severe stomach cramping and a feeling like I was going to 'lose' my bowels.
- 2.67. I did not see anyone else in the kitchen/dining area but could hear voices near the rear of the house. I was confused and scared. I found the side kitchen door and it was locked. I saw an open window above the sink and I crawled out and fell to the path.
- 2.68. I was too sore and distressed to go back so I immediately began to walk home. At the bottom of Rattray Street, I stopped at the public toilets due to the severe cramping, vomiting and diarrhoea.
- 2.69. It was only when I was in the toilet that I saw my underpants had blood on the inside of them, my anus was extremely sore to touch and there was blood both in the toilet bowl and on the toilet paper I had used.
- 2.70. I never told anyone about this incident. I convinced my mother that I was sick and given the timing before my end of year exams (and my poor school marks) she let me stay home.
- 2.71. I think Mum had realised there was something wrong because she got me a full-time job and negotiated that I could leave school and not return for my final year (Form 5). I was 14 years old when I left school.
- 2.72. Although my memory is fractured about this last abuse, I believe I was drugged and sexually assaulted or raped.

3. IMPACT OF ABUSE

- 3.1. I suffer both the emotional and physical trauma of my abuse every day of my life. It has caused significant damage to my ability to form meaningful, loving relationships and has created a life that has been filled with fear, shame and guilt.
- 3.2. I have been diagnosed with complex PTSD for many years and more recently with associated dysthymia and somatic disorders. My life has only become manageable through ensuring I have a feeling of safety and structure around me but while often good, it is also broken by terrible bouts of depression, anxiety and periods of isolation.

Refer Exhibit WITN0001004 – Psychologist report, Lawrence Field

- 3.3. I am not proud to say that there has been more than one occasion in my life when I have been in the darkest of places or at my rock bottom. During these times, I have not only contemplated but made attempts to commit suicide.
- 3.4. I started drinking alcohol at age ten. I had easy access to the altar wine and often my Dad's beer. I had a hip flask by the age of 12 so I could take alcohol to school and self-medicate. I found that the visits to Brother Sullivan's office were easier to deal with if I just had a few swigs. It was at this early age that I began to find ways of hiding my reliance on alcohol and especially the reasons why it made me feel 'normal'.
- 3.5. I began working full-time at the age of 14 as soon as I left school. This allowed access to alcohol, heavy drinking and cannabis use. I found that alcohol and cannabis would block the thoughts, feelings and vivid dreams of my abuse. Throughout my teenage years these thoughts and feelings became overwhelming at night and the only thing that helped and allowed me to function 'normally' was self-medicating.
- 3.6. I believed that the only way I could survive or 'get over' my abuse was to make a new life and leave Dunedin. At age 19 I moved to Australia. I began a career in the police, got married and started a family. For a number of years, I had a sense of everything being okay or at least manageable.
- 3.7. However, to survive and feel normal my relationship with alcohol progressed to an almost nightly comatose sleep. This was the only way I knew how to quieten

my mind and stop the effects the abuse took on my body, including terrible dreams, depression and anxiety.

- 3.8. Whilst now divorced, with a new partner and a career in project management, I still suffer the effects of the trauma and abuse every day. I manage my life now sober but focus on just 'one day at a time'.
- 3.9. Until very recently I did not understand or appreciate what I have been trying to live and deal with since this abuse. It has taken me four residential rehabilitation programs and now three years sobriety to learn how to move forward in my healing journey. I need to address my trauma and also the reality of its impact to me and to the other people in my life.

4. REDRESS

- 4.1. In 2013, after a lengthy battle with cancer, my Mum died at age 64. This was an enormous event in my life and happened not long after the breakdown of my marriage.
- 4.2. I was not just close to my Mum, she was my best friend. In her last year I visited her several times in New Zealand and was fortunate to make it to her bedside just hours before she finally passed.
- 4.3. After the death of my grandmother in 1986 my mother had gone 'back to school' and became a qualified care-giver. She spent the last 12 years of her life looking after elderly and dying nuns living in the Sisters of Mercy residence in South Dunedin. When Mum was in her final months she was afforded the privilege of hospice care in the nun's nursing home in Maori Hill, Dunedin. Her funeral service was in their private chapel as a testament to how favourably she was regarded.
- 4.4. It was not long after Mum's death in 2014 that I began my journey of reporting this abuse from Australia.
- 4.5. I could have never told anyone about the abuse when my Mother was alive. The catalyst came when, after her death, I was watching a story on the Royal Commission on abuse in Australia and felt overwhelming anger at the Church.
- 4.6. I made my first complaint to the New Zealand Catholic Church via email. I was drunk at the time. I said in that first contact that if a commission of inquiry was

ever held in New Zealand into Church abuse, I would come forward and tell my story.

Refer Exhibit WITN0001005 – Email to Catholic Church New Zealand

- 4.7. When I received a phone call a few weeks later from the Church, at first, I could not even remember I had made a complaint. I was then asked if I would speak to the head of the Christian Brothers Oceania, Brother Brian Brandon.
- 4.8. Although I had some very personal talks with Brother Brandon at first, from the initial contact through to the last I never felt that I was 'safe' to talk openly about the true nature and extent of my abuse and suffering.
- 4.9. In my email to the Church I had only mentioned some abuse by Brother Sullivan, and on my first contact by phone was told by Brother Brandon that the allegations were "surprising". Brother Brandon said Brother Sullivan was well thought of and this was the first complaint received of abuse. I was made to feel like I was making the abuse up and it was inferred the allegations were difficult to believe.
- 4.10. On my next contact, Brother Brandon said that he had found one other complaint, from a young girl, who had alleged abuse some years ago and that I should be glad that my story could help to provide further support to this other person.
- 4.11. These conversations did not instil any confidence that if I told my entire story I would be believed. I was also beginning to understand that no part of my abuse was being sent to New Zealand and it would all be managed within Australia. This felt very wrong to me and set the tone for the very rushed proceedings that followed over the next four months.
- 4.12. Then came a request to meet the head of Adelaide's Professional Standards Office (PSO), Sue Cain, to be formally interviewed and report my abuse.
- 4.13. I met with Sue Cain and one other person at their office. At this meeting, a statement was taken and some notes. The process included both further telephone and in person interviews.
- 4.14. As part of my initial contact with Sue Cain I was also sent to a psychologist, Laurie Field, for what I would describe as a formal assessment. I was given five sessions with him and within a week I had my first visit. When I asked why I had gotten in so quickly, Laurie Field stated he was told by the Church to clear his schedule to

fit me in and said this included rescheduling other patients. This heightened my strong belief that the Church only wanted the matter settled quickly and for me to simply 'go away'.

- 4.15. I was in a very dark place during this time, mentally and emotionally. One night I went out by myself and became immobilised with fear, anxiety and then alcohol. I reached out and rang Brother Brandon for help. I was very drunk, overwhelmed, and suicidal. In hindsight it was probably only talking to someone that night that stopped me hurting myself or another person by not driving home.
- 4.16. It was only after this event that an additional five sessions were approved by the Church with Laurie Field. I was told no further counselling or support would be approved at the end of this process.
- 4.17. I only attended three of the five sessions as each session became more difficult and I recognised that I was not safe continuing to make myself more vulnerable and traumatised only to be left unsupported. I could not afford to pay for private treatment to finish what I was starting with Laurie Field.
- 4.18. The next step was the 'redress' and settlement process where I was sent to a lawyer for legal advice. This advice was not about my abuse. It was only a review of the terms of the Deed of Release with the Christian Brothers and what accepting financial redress and signing would mean.
- 4.19. After the lawyer's visit I was introduced to their negotiator, Greg Rooney. He was positioned by the PSO as an independent mediator and arbitrator, who they regularly used for this sort of negotiation process.
- 4.20. At an arranged date and time Brother Brandon flew to Adelaide and was present to represent the Church. I had expected an offer would be presented at the start of our meeting, but I was only asked how much I thought would be a reasonable amount as restitution for the abuse. I asked for quarter of a million dollars (\$250k) and ongoing support.
- 4.21. I was immediately told by Brother Brandon that this offer would never be considered. He said they were really sorry about what had happened to me and offered me twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25k) with no ongoing support. At this he removed himself from the room and I was left with Greg Rooney to further discuss the offer.

- 4.22. Throughout the negotiation Greg Rooney went in and out of the room to speak with Brother Brandon and then with me. I was crying, visibly upset and concerned that the money may only cover a short rehabilitation but not help with any ongoing and long-term support. I then asked for one-hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars (\$125k). They raised their offer to forty thousand dollars (\$40k).
- 4.23. After more negotiation that included me pleading for help, a final offer of sixty thousand dollars (\$60k) was made.
- 4.24. At the final offer, Brian Brandon came back into the room and I was strongly told that the negotiation would go no further, or higher. He further stated that if I did not agree to this final offer the meeting would conclude.
- 4.25. It was then that Brother Brandon added, and in front of Greg Rooney, "You should be thankful for this amount of money as people who have had worse happen, have gotten less."

Refer Exhibit WITN0001006 – Deed of Release 15/8/13

- 4.26. This final remark from Brother Brandon left me shattered and broken. I left the office deeply traumatised, feeling worthless from the experience. It only re-enforced my belief that the entire redress process was unsupportive, traumatising to go through, and I wanted nothing more to do with it.
- 4.27. At every meeting with Adelaide PSO or Brother Brandon, it made no difference or even seemed to matter that I was visibly distraught, emotionally unbalanced and trying to hide my intoxication. There was never any offer of any type of assistance or ongoing support, other than pastoral care.
- 4.28. Following the closure of this process I was sent a letter of apology from the New Zealand Christian Brothers along with the signed Deed of Release with Christian Brothers Oceania.
- 4.29. Although I attempted to move on from this, what followed was an emotional roller coaster and the 'rock bottom' period of my life.

Refer Exhibit WITN0001007 – Apology Letter Christian Brothers 2/8/13

- 4.30. I signed the agreement, accepted the offer, and I went into rehabilitation. After rehabilitation, I had no further money to support my long-term recovery as I did not have employment for about another six months.
- 4.31. After I completed rehabilitation, I was overwhelmed with severe waves of depression, anxiety, insomnia and recurrent vivid nightmares. I had no ongoing support to safely deal with this trauma. I realised that once the alcohol had been removed from my life, without this 'crutch', my past abuse came flooding back. My life became unmanageable. Before I reached three months, I broke my sobriety, began to drink and withdrew from my life again.
- 4.32. In August 2015, with the support from doctors and a psychologist, I re-contacted the Adelaide PSO seeking further assistance from the Christian Brothers to attend an addiction treatment centre as a matter of urgency.
- 4.33. I was provided a consultation with the same lawyer to provide advice to me about the Dead of Release I had signed with the Christian Brothers. The lawyer advised it would be costly to get the agreement overturned, however, as he had only used \$800 of his \$5,000 allowance from the Church he would write and ask for the difference to go to me to seek help.
- 4.34. The Church declined this request and offered no more support other than pastoral care.
- 4.35. Over the course of the next year I had two further hospitalised rehabilitation stays to help with my alcoholism and trauma.
- 4.36. The final part to my story was in 2018. I had just returned from Europe with my partner after celebrating my first year of sobriety. I had been following the events of the Royal Commission in New Zealand closely and was very interested in the scope as I had found out that faith-based institutions had just recently been included.
- 4.37. During my internet research on the Commission, I came across several articles recently written by Chris Morris of the Otago Daily Times.
- 4.38. The articles by Chris Morris covered historic cases of sexual abuse at the hands of the Christian Brothers, many of whom I was aware of and who taught at the schools I had attended. The articles also covered other sexual abusers like the parish priest Magnus 'Max' Murray.

4.39. I saw in these articles the faces of my abusers: Sullivan, Fay and Thompson. I started shaking, dry-retching and broke down crying. My partner found me like this outside. I could not move from that spot and stayed there for nearly three hours. This was a sober reaction, not attributed to alcohol but to the real and raw pain of my unresolved and unhealed abuse. I knew my mental health had been triggered and felt my world falling apart again.

4.40. It was then I realised that without truly addressing my abuse, telling my whole story and seeking real support, I did not think I would ever be able to truly heal. I also decided that I would keep the promise from my first email, to attend and participate in the New Zealand Royal Commission into abuse if one was ever held.

Refer Exhibit WITN0001008 – Newspaper article ODT

4.41. I was concerned about what to do next after having signed the Deed of Release in 2013 so I went to a local lawyer's office. There I met Grace Wilson from Right-Side Legal and she kindly gave me two hours of her time and free advice.

4.42. I was told that after the Australian Royal Commission, the Deed of Release settlements were being overturned and the advice I got was to push back and make a complaint.

4.43. As only a part of my story was told in 2013, and with the establishment of the Inquiry, I decided that I needed to tell my whole story not just to the Inquiry but also to the Church.

4.44. I then registered with the New Zealand Royal Commission and organised for a private session in New Zealand.

4.45. In March 2019, I began to actively engage directly with the New Zealand National Office of Professional Standards (NOPS) to commence the process of reporting my full story of abuse. As part of this I successfully had the Deed of Release from the Christian Brothers Oceania put aside to allow an investigation into my other claims of abuse. It was agreed the investigation would not only include the further claims against Brother Sullivan, but the abuse by Brother Fay, Father Kean and also the lay teacher, Ian Thompson.

Refer Exhibit WITN0001009 – Letter to NOPS

- 4.46. In September 2019, my partner and I flew to Christchurch and met Commissioner Coral Shaw where I gave my evidence in a 'private session'. I was supported by a sister from New Zealand during this session.
- 4.47. I then flew to Wellington and had the first in-person interview with the assigned Church investigator, Micky Earl from Corporate Risk, on Tuesday 24 September 2019. I found him friendly and interested although it was a long, five-hour process.
- 4.48. In November 2019, I revised the first copy of my transcript for review and returned it to Micky Earl. The investigation did not appear to have moved much. I kept up monthly requests to the New Zealand NOPS office for updates, but the communication flow was limited and only if initiated by me.
- 4.49. I had another video meeting with Micky Earl in June 2020 to clarify a few points and was then sent the final statement of interview to sign.
- 4.50. A very important part of the reporting for me was to ensure my abuse story was kept together at every stage of the process, as Ian Thompson was a lay teacher and initially NOPS refused to include him in the investigation. I had to fight to have my whole story kept together. I got advice on this from a New Zealand survivor advocate, Liz Tonks. I was told to push back and request it to be all kept as one story, of which they finally agreed.
- 4.51. The latest update from NOPS in September 2020 is that that Micky Earl was continuing to conduct some inquiries at the request of the Church into my claims. My investigation would then be finalised and passed on to relevant areas of the 'Church' once the council reviewing my abuse claims had completed and formalised their recommendations.
- 4.52. I do not think the 'Church' is interested in finalising my complaints until the Royal Commission is finished and has made formal recommendations.

5. LOOKING FORWARD

- 5.1. I believe proper redress and change can only occur if the Church is truly willing to accept accountability and responsibility for the suffering caused to abuse survivors and recognise the requirement for long-term support.

- 5.2. There should be independently managed support structures and opportunities for survivors to attend recovery and healing programs or facilities when they feel the most vulnerable.
- 5.3. The Church must commit to the longevity of this support requirement and put aside perpetual funding for the future care and support of survivors.
- 5.4. A truly independent 'body' should be established, with full judicial and inquisitory powers, to replace the current Church aligned self-assessment that occurs now. There should not be any instance where the Catholic Church, or any organisation can investigate this type of offending and predatory behaviour without scrutiny or consequence.
- 5.5. The Church has clearly shown they have no impetus, urgency or transparency in their processes for me to believe it is impartial, fair or just. Rather they choose to fight, defend and contest outcomes irrespective of it being a single abuse survivor, group of survivors or an entire country. I do not believe the Church has the best interests of survivors or their healing at its core, rather only the protection and survival of their own organisation.
- 5.6. At 53 years old it is hard to admit how scared and vulnerable I feel giving this evidence and knowing what is still in front of me to heal. I believe that by telling my story it will contribute to stopping similar acts of abuse on other children and provide a voice for other survivors who suffer in silence.

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated:

19/09/2020