

Witness Name: Anne Louise Hill

Statement No.: WITN0013001

Exhibits: WITN0013002 – WITN0013012

Dated: 28/09/2020

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANNE LOUISE HILL

I, Anne Louise Hill, state:

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. My full name is Anne Louise Hill (née Byrne). I am 58 years old and was born in England on GRO-C 1962. I live in Whangārei and am a New Zealand citizen.
- 1.2. I was sexually abused by Father Michael Shirres from the age of four until the age of 12. Some of the abuse occurred while I was in the care of the Star of the Sea orphanage in Howick, Auckland, which was run by the Sisters of Mercy. The orphanage came under the Diocese of Auckland.
- 1.3. I suffer from complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This affects my memory, concentration, and ability to work. I have also experienced other health problems, which I discuss further below.
- 1.4. I have worked in several volunteer jobs, including working with people who can't speak, visiting rest homes, foot massage, dog training, and individual art tutoring. I am trained as a secondary art teacher but am no longer able to work due to my PTSD, depression and anxiety issues.

Background

- 1.5. My father, Alfred Byrne, was an Irish orphan and my mother, Daphne, was a World War II refugee from Burma. My mother survived the 1941–42 bombing of Rangoon. After that, she lived in India and then England, where she met my father. I have two GRO-B GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-2.
- 1.6. In 1966, we travelled to New Zealand on an Italian ship called the *Flavia*. We moved from a North London environment. My father sold the family home to come to New Zealand believing our family, and in particular my mother, would have a better life in New Zealand.
- 1.7. The ship was full of passengers migrating to Australia. We were the only ones coming to New Zealand. The ship went via Panama and Tahiti. Due to a strike, all our possessions were on board a different ship, the *Canberra*.
- 1.8. The day before we arrived, my father got a telegram saying that he no longer had a job. We arrived in New Zealand with no income and nowhere to live. I remember arriving in Auckland and walking up Queen Street with the family and our hand luggage. We were told to find a Salvation Army hostel, but everything was closed. We knew no one and we couldn't get back on the ship. We were the wrong kind of foreign migrant. My father had a Dublin accent and my mother was brown.
- 1.9. We found an old Victorian bed and breakfast by the university. From there we moved to our first home in Blockhouse Bay.
- 1.10. My parents were the most Catholic people I knew. I have an early memory of them praying in front of cardboard Russian icons in our London house. I believe my parents were ill-matched and had marital troubles, so the move to New Zealand was a big effort to rebuild the relationship. Asian Catholicism and Irish Catholicism are different. I think GRO-B even said they were going to have another baby.
- 1.11. We attended the local parish together as a family. It was the parish in Blockhouse Bay near Hillsborough. This is when Michael Shirres entered our lives.

2. THE ABUSE

- 2.1. Father Michael Shirres had recently arrived back from Australia and was based at the local parish in Blockhouse Bay. He ingratiated himself into our family and he would hear my parents' confessions. My mother thought it was wonderful and

was so pleased that a priest was paying attention to her. My mother was very vulnerable at that point in her life. We had no friends or relatives here.

Refer exhibit WITN0013002 – Ministry movements for Michael Shirres

- 2.2. Soon after meeting Michael, people started telling my father that he should be careful because Michael had history and that he shouldn't leave his children alone with him.
- 2.3. By February 1967, Dad had a job at Lands and Deeds. My mother got a job at the post office, and soon after my mother kicked my father out after they had a fight about Michael. I do not know whether my father fully believed Michael was an abuser because I don't believe it would be easy for my father to accept a Catholic priest would do such things.
- 2.4. I always thought it was sad that my father and my mother would have gone to confession with Michael, so he would have known about their troubles. They would have trusted him and been honest with him about their marriage.
- 2.5. One time, when I was four and I was being babysat by Michael, my mother and father arrived home and I was semi-naked and got in trouble for not being fully dressed. It was a shameful event. This incident was in Blockhouse Bay and I have a vision and memory of seeing Michael in the room.
- 2.6. The next event was when my father came over to the house one day after he had moved out and my GRO-B GRO-B-1 and I let him inside. My mother and father then had what you would call a domestic. I have a memory of my mother lying naked on the floor after being in the bath and my father kicking her. She climbed out of the window and grabbed a sheet off the neighbour's clothesline. The neighbours called the Police who took my father away and the incident made the Sunday papers. Somehow Michael then arrived.
- 2.7. When my father was taken by the Police he tried to tell them and his employer about Michael, but he was ignored. He was described as, "feeling sorry for himself." My father became very depressed after that. At that time, he was living in Park Avenue by Auckland Hospital.
- 2.8. GRO-B and I were separated for a few days. A short time later, a lady arrived in a car and took GRO-B and me and dropped us to the door of the Star of the Sea orphanage in Howick. My mother never said goodbye or gave us an

explanation. It just happened. I believe the idea came from Michael and it was his advice to my mother.

- 2.9. My mother then trained to be a teacher. I believe this was at Michael's suggestion. Michael had a role as a chaplain at Epsom Teachers' College. My mother and him were very close. As a four-year-old, I did not understand that my mother was under his influence and that they were involved in what my mother believed to be a loving relationship.

Star of the Sea orphanage

- 2.10. The Star of the Sea orphanage was run by the Sisters of Mercy and it was bleak and awful. I was four years old when I went there with my **GRO-B**. I was the youngest child there when we arrived. My **GRO-B** were older, and we lived in different parts of the orphanage. I had no idea where my mother was at this time.
- 2.11. I was in the orphanage for about two years. My **GRO-B** told me it was only six months, but I realised later that this was not true.
- 2.12. Occasionally my father would come to visit, and we would see him in the sewing room. My **GRO-B** got to go home to visit my mother sometimes, but I didn't as often.
- 2.13. I remember some of the names of the nuns at the orphanage as Sister Fabian, Sister Patrice, Sister Theodore, Sister Conrad, Sister De Lourdes, Sister Frances, Sister Edmund and Sister Savitri.
- 2.14. Very few children at the orphanage were actually orphans. I think that is why there were fewer Māori there. It was also because that was pre-social welfare benefits.
- 2.15. We were not shown any affection and we were rarely spoken to by the nuns at the orphanage. We were identified by numbers for our clothing. We were dressed differently from day students. We all wore **GRO-B** as a uniform. We all had the same haircut and it was treated with kerosene each week to control lice. We did not have individual day clothes.
- 2.16. As a four-year-old I was just placed in a small room during the day when the older kids went to the school. I was kept in there during the day. I was in that room mostly alone until I started school. I didn't realise until now that this was a form of neglect.

- 2.17. The nuns would hit me often with a strap. At the time I didn't think it was a big deal. I remember my GRO-B GRO-B-2 objecting one day when I was being strapped for getting wet in the rain.
- 2.18. One day, two young Māori girls arrived, Raewyn and Reihana. They were put in the same small room as me. I remember after they arrived that my life was easier because the nuns would focus their punishments and irritation on them. One day, one of the young Māori girls was accused of stealing lollies. My GRO-B and I saw the nuns hitting both girls with a shoe that they were passing around. My GRO-B GRO-B-2 ran and got the head sister, who was in bed at the time with heart problems, to make them stop. We were really upset.
- 2.19. My GRO-B ran away, along with two GRO-B girls. After a few days they were found and then the two GRO-B girls were thrown out. I realised later that my GRO-B was not thrown out because GRO-B was one of Michael's "chosen" children. One of the GRO-B two girls was beginning to gather herself to make a complaint but passed away last year.
- 2.20. There were two priests that came and visited the orphanages—Father Shirres and Father Burgess. Michael would come to visit the orphanage regularly. When he did, he would ask to see us. We were then sent to the parlour to see him. We were expected to be excited and grateful to see Michael in the parlour. The door to the parlour would be shut when we were in there with him, so it was very private. The sewing room was where we met other visitors. Father Burgess also visited. My GRO-B GRO-B-1 called him "chocolate without tears" and we saw him out of the parlour in a visible area.
- 2.21. Whilst at the orphanage I got pneumonia and anaemia and I was sick for a long time. I don't remember any medical attention for a recurring cough, which led to later health issues.

Holidays

- 2.22. During the Christmas holidays at the orphanage, the Church organised for us to be sent to stay with Catholic families in Edgecumbe. We travelled by bus. I stayed with a few families. At one time I got in trouble with one family and was sent to another.
- 2.23. There was physical, emotional and sexual abuse in these homes. Some of the men in these families were sexually abusive.

- 2.24. Some women showed off the children they “took in” as examples of their virtue. I have always wanted to ask the mothers of these families whether they knew that some of the children in their care were being abused by the husbands.
- 2.25. I know one of my **GRO-B** had a really hard time on holiday placements, too. My **GRO-B** were very different. One I would describe as a **GRO-B**, whereas the other one was very brave and tougher. It was the tougher one who had the worst abuse.
- 2.26. We were abused at different locations. For example, I remember one of my **GRO-B** being abused when mum was staying in a one bedroom flat in Waikōwhai. **GRO-B** went to mum and told her about being abused by Michael. I think it was manhandling type abuse. My mother did nothing and taunted **GRO-B**. She told **GRO-B** **GRO-B** was the spawn of **GRO-B** father for making such accusations.

After the orphanage

- 2.27. After two years at the orphanage, we went to live with my mother in Panmure. Michael continued to be a major presence in our lives. He would come and put us to bed at night. My **GRO-B** and I shared a room.
- 2.28. We then moved to a new house in Māngere. I remember coming home from school one day and seeing Michael's car parked in front of the house. It was a green three-wheel Citroen.
- 2.29. It was my mother who told Michael that he should learn Māori and he was now studying in some depth and doing university study. I remember my mother asking, “how can you talk to the natives if you don't learn the language?” in the Blockhouse Bay house. A short time later she started learning the Māori language with Michael. They went to the Anglican priest, Kīngi Īhaka. He was considered a good Māori leader.
- 2.30. When I was 12 years old, I had a medical procedure called a “D&C”—or a dilation and curettage—at Middlemore Hospital. There was no discussion with me at the hospital but afterwards my mother told me that the doctor said to remind me that I was not a virgin. I had some sort of gynaecological illness which I believe was a result of earlier abuse and was the reason I had to go to the doctor. I do believe my mother should have asked questions. I have no idea what my mother thought the reason was.

- 2.31. The abuse from Michael stopped when I was in Māngere. I turned around to him one day when he was groping me and said no. I do not recall any abuse after that but do remember him being very angry and I thought he was going to hit me.
- 2.32. I remember my GRO-B GRO-B-1 telling me when I was 12 years old that I didn't have to let him touch me anymore. Other than that, we never ever talked about the abuse from Michael.
- 2.33. At nearly age 13, I was abused by a friend of my father who took me up north to Mōkau. His name was GRO-B-3. He was a predator. I returned home and didn't tell my mother or my father. I couldn't tell my mother. I then found out he was coming to my GRO-B's wedding.
- 2.34. So there was Michael who abused me, and then the second person was my father's friend. At that time, I was frequently approached by older men proposing sex and they scared me.
- 2.35. At age 14, my art teacher chose me and then later married me at age 17.
- 2.36. I was advised to leave school by the principal due to my "exhaustion". He said that I could return as an adult student in the future. I was effectively ending my schooling to prevent the relationship with my teacher being a problem. I was happy to say whatever he told me to say to keep our relationship.
- 2.37. When I returned to school I was with the same year group that left. The relationship was known to many staff and a few teachers raised concerns, but as I was over 16 by that stage it was deemed an adult relationship.
- 2.38. I left home and over one year lived with my GRO-B, then my father, and then my art teacher who was my partner, raising two stepchildren from a young age. No one challenged my living with the teacher and I had a manner which shut people down when they made any inference that something was wrong. The children were at the school crèche and I did my best to care for them and keep them safe.
- 2.39. After I finished school, I worked, returning to school at 17. I went to Auckland Teachers' College and then the University of Auckland, Elam School of Fine Art. Michael was there teaching a class in Māori spirituality. His transformation from when I had seen him last was remarkable. When I knew him, he was a "white man" and over the years he took on a greater and greater Māori persona. He even began speaking with a Māori accent. He still slightly stuttered.
- 2.40. After seeing him at university he started visiting my home. I had GRO-B-4 and 5 GRO-B-4 and 5 living with me. I kept thinking how Michael could not be bad when

he was doing so much to help Māori. I wondered how he could have continued to abuse me while helping others at the same time.

- 2.41. One day I was at home with Michael and [GRO-B-4 and 5]. Michael was in the bedroom with [GRO-B-4 and 5]. My [GRO-B] arrived and wanted to know what the hell I was doing. I then went and got [GRO-B-4] out of the room. I realised then that he had gone for my mother, my [GRO-B] and myself, and now [GRO-B-4 and 5]. I was 19 at the time.
- 2.42. From ages 14 to 44, I was with my husband. I now understand that 14 is too young to be in an adult relationship, but at the time I saw myself as more adult than the examples around me. He never did anything about the fact that he knew what Michael had done to me. I always wondered why he didn't do anything, but he said he had to sit on the fence. I wondered why I married him. I have never had any partner since that marriage ended effectively 15 years ago
- 2.43. I think my mother went to the grave believing that Michael Shirres loved her. In her later years, before she died and was about 87, I used to go and look after her in Auckland. One time I was by her bed and she looked up at me and said, "He told me he abused children, but I never thought he would abuse mine."

3. THE IMPACT OF THE ABUSE

- 3.1. I have struggled with the effects of abuse for my entire life.

Education

- 3.2. The education system failed me. I had no expectation of being safe in a school. That is why I did not disclose the abuse from Michael. While at school, I was treated with anti-depressants for emotional exhaustion.

Family

- 3.3. The abuse has at times caused major rifts and breakdowns in all my relationships within the family.
- 3.4. My relationship with my mother totally broke down. My relationship with my father was awkward, having been separated at four years old. It was also affected by his lack of response to his friend's abuse of me. With my father we talked about politics and ideas but not family issues. I had become proficient in keeping secrets.

- 3.5. Except for two visits I didn't see my father for the rest of his life. I feared his anger, his depression and his frustration. I know my father challenged the Church in the 1990s. It is recorded in *The Tablet* newspaper. He went to great lengths to document history.
- 3.6. I am still ashamed of my teenage self and my lack of ability to speak to anyone honestly in my family until very recent years. I feared Michael and feared my father's friend. I literally had no one to turn to in the adult world. I did bring up two excellent stepchildren and my only son. I am proud of them.

Psychological impact

- 3.7. In 1977, when I was 15, I first saw a psychiatrist. It was Dr Ogg. My ex-husband allowed me to visit Dr Ogg but told me not to tell him about our relationship or abuse.
- 3.8. I only spoke about the neglect at Star of the Sea, and not the abuse by Michael. I saw them as separate, with the nuns having provided the basic shelter and food we needed. Any little kindness was magnified, such as a nun giving me three guavas to eat. I was starved for affection, or any touch.

Medical impact

- 3.9. I suffer from complex PTSD. This affects my memory, concentration and ability to work. I also have intermittent aphasia and other health problems. I have Graves' disease and have needed medical repair and management of my reproductive system and bowel.
- 3.10. I developed a serious lung infection in my twenties and at age 27, I had part of my lung removed. I had an operation at Mercy Hospital in Auckland to remove a lobe. During this operation there was a discussion as to when I had started coughing. It was then that it was suggested that I had "pits" in my lungs due to the pneumonia I suffered from, and never got properly treated, as a child at Star of the Sea orphanage.
- 3.11. This thoracotomy operation was a real trigger for all the abuse that occurred at the orphanage. The next time I was booked for surgery there I cancelled while in the prep room due to anxiety.

- 3.12. In 1991, I had major bowel surgery that took four hours. The surgeon told me afterwards that he could tell that I had been sexually abused as a child. I had signs of an untreated sexually transmitted disease, which I had had symptoms of since age seven. This had caused considerable damage, and it took the surgeon a long time to remove scarring, but he was pleased I would be able to conceive a child.
- 3.13. After my surgery, I became depressed. My surgeon told me that I needed to get help to deal with the sexual abuse I had suffered. He was the first person to ask the right questions about what I had gone through. Unfortunately, he died not long after.
- 3.14. I was then referred to a psychiatrist who referred me to a female counsellor who had experience in treating childhood sexual abuse.

Work impact

- 3.15. I have been diagnosed with PTSD and have received treatment for years. Because of this I was unable to continue working as a teacher and continue to be unable to work to this day.

4. REDRESS

- 4.1. In 1990, I left Auckland and moved to Whangārei, where I began teaching at Pompallier College. The first person I disclosed the abuse to was the head of religious studies at Pompallier College, Father Kevin Murphy.
- 4.2. I told Kevin in the early 1990s. Kevin had come into my art room and told me about the abuse of two young boys by a priest. Their parents did not want to make a complaint. For a long time, I thought it was only my family who had been abused by Michael. Then I told him about my abuse and out came the name Michael Shirres. I remember being surprised that there were boys that Michael abused as well.
- 4.3. When I first disclosed the abuse, I asked Kevin Murphy to go to the bishop, but I am unsure if he did. What he did do was go to the head of the Dominicans. It may have been the bishop, that is Bishop Denis Browne, who told Kevin to go to the Dominicans.
- 4.4. One time, I indicated Michael Shirres' name to the former principal of Pompallier, Father Darby. He told me some men should not be allowed to be priests. I felt he

was genuinely supportive, but I didn't ask him to do anything, assuming it had been done. He retired.

- 4.5. By early 1993, I was still teaching at Pompallier College, but I was finding it very difficult to continue working in a Catholic environment. I had reduced my hours to four days a week. One day I saw an advertisement on the school noticeboard that Michael was coming to speak at the school about Māori spirituality.
- 4.6. After seeing this, I again disclosed my abuse to Father Jim Gersham, the new principal. He set up a meeting with Gloria Ramsay, who ran an abuse survivor network at the Auckland Diocese, to make a formal complaint about Michael.

Refer exhibit WITN0013003 – Report prepared by Gloria Ramsay

- 4.7. Jim was then put in touch with Father Peter Murnane. Jim inferred he knew Michael was an abuser. Once, when I talked to Peter Murnane, who was the Dominican head, and asked why nothing had been done about Michael, he told me he thought it was a woman that Michael had been with not a child, as if that was all right anyway. In a letter later sent from Kevin Murphy, he stated my complaint was that I hated Michael.
- 4.8. On 29 June 1994, I got a letter from the manager of the Protocol Advisory Committee, Terry Leslie, informing me that Michael had been enrolled in the SAFE programme and that he had been withdrawn from all pastoral ministry, and priestly functions from May 1994, and was no longer allowed to teach through the Catholic Institute of Theology.

Refer exhibit WITN0013004 – Letter from Terry Leslie

- 4.9. I contacted a lawyer as I thought that the only way the Church would react efficiently was if it became about money. Whangārei lawyer Chris Muston acted for me. Paddy Driscoll was the Dominicans' Catholic lawyer.
- 4.10. My GRO-B and I then had a meeting with the head of the Dominicans from Australia, Father Mark O'Brien and Paddy O'Driscoll. After that meeting they offered me \$20,000. I heard Michael had confessed.
- 4.11. At the end of the process they offered me \$50,000 and I wrote a list of conditions that I wanted to happen. I was naïve to think that they accepted these but one of them was that Michael was not allowed to continue to have the respect of vulnerable Māori communities.

- 4.12. At one point during my negotiations with the Dominicans, they described the abuse by Michael as just him having an affair with an adult woman.
- 4.13. Making a complaint against Michael caused a lot of problems in my family. My mother and one of my **GRO-B** did not want to come forward, whereas my father and other **GRO-B** did and wanted to take him to court and expose him in the media. The financial agreement was also my attempt to mediate between the family, so **GRO-B** needs were recognised.
- 4.14. In 1995, I received a settlement for \$50,000. My **GRO-B** received similar settlements that I negotiated. This was solely in relation to the abuse from Michael and not the neglect that occurred at the Star of the Sea. I was around age 34 at the time.

Refer exhibit WITN0013005 – Settlement agreement Anne Hill

- 4.15. The Police were never notified about Michael and he was never prosecuted.
- 4.16. Between 1998 and 2005, I lived overseas. My son and I lived in Malaysia.
- 4.17. In 2002, my father sent an apology letter to me and my **GRO-B** and outlined that he intended to take legal action.

Refer exhibit WITN0013006 – Apology letter from Anne's father

- 4.18. In 2003, my father died, and his legacy was that he left me some letters. One of the letters was from the Dominican Church and starts off sympathetically but then threatens libel action. I also found Dad's settlement agreement whereby they paid him \$18,000 but only if he agreed to stop talking about Michael. He also had to stop us, **GRO-B**, talking. I was unaware of this.
- 4.19. I also discovered that in 2002, my father had complained to MP Phillida Bunkle about the confidentiality clauses in the settlements. This resulted in a letter from the Archbishop, Tom Williams, stating that no bishop or congregation would ever sue for the return of monies if confidentiality was not kept.

Refer exhibit WITN0013007 – Letter from the Dominicans to Alfred Byrne

Refer exhibit WITN0013008 – Settlement agreement with Alfred Byrne

Refer exhibit WITN0013009 – Letter from Archbishop Tom Williams

Refer exhibit WITN0013010 – Letter from MP Phillida Bunkle

4.20. On 20 July 1995, my father received a letter from Michael saying: "I wish to ask for your forgiveness for all the pain and suffering inflicted upon you and your GRO-B GRO-B by my sexual misconduct with your wife and for my sexually abusing your GRO-B".

Refer exhibit WITN0013011 – Letter from Michael Shirres to my father

Return to New Zealand

- 4.21. I moved back to New Zealand in 2005. Michael had died in 1997. I was standing in Victoria Park in Auckland one day and I picked up a card that had a quote from Michael on it. I was shocked. I then went to the library and discovered that he had published a book. Michael was sent up North after completing the SAFE programme. Then he published his book. He was still a member of the Dominican Order when he died. He was praised for completing his book on the internet. He left a statement that I found galling.
- 4.22. After returning to New Zealand, I attempted to re-engage with the Catholic Church. I completed the Adult Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) programme and was confirmed at St Francis Xavier Parish in Whangārei.
- 4.23. I was conscious of the fragility of my own mental health and so I approached the Superior of the Dominicans in New Zealand, Father Toomey, about getting some further counselling. In that meeting, I told Father Toomey about the abuse I suffered by Michael. He accepted the abuse that my family and I had suffered but denied that there was any evidence of Michael being a serial abuser.
- 4.24. The Dominicans accepted my need for further counselling, and this continued until recently.
- 4.25. In 2015, I came across an article in the New Zealand Catholic magazine about 800 years of the Dominicans. This article praised Michael and the work he had done for Māori spirituality. The article was also on the New Zealand Catholic website. The extent of Michael's abuse was well known by this point, yet he was still being praised within the Church. The article was written by the same Father Toomey who had listened to me a few months earlier.
- 4.26. I set up a Facebook page for survivors of abuse suffered at the Star of the Sea. I had several people contact me about their experiences as well as people wanting to get copies of their records, or the records of their parents who lived there.

- 4.27. In 2018, I set up a meeting with the Auckland Diocese to discuss this, as well as other issues. The meeting was attended by Bishop Dunn, Lyndsay Freer, Father Duffy, my GRO-B and me.
- 4.28. I raised my concerns that nothing had been done to reach out to other victims of Michael, even though he had admitted to being a serial abuser. I also pointed out deficiencies on the diocese website and my inability to get a copy of *A Path to Healing*.
- 4.29. Bishop Dunn explained that *A Path to Healing* was being revised and suggested that I could assist in that process. We also discussed accessing diocesan archives for residents of Star of the Sea. Most of the website issues were subsequently fixed.

Going public

- 4.30. On 25 July 2018, I went public with my story to the *Northern Advocate* and *New Zealand Herald* newspapers.

Refer exhibit WITN0013012 – Media article

- 4.31. After going public, several of Michael's other victims contacted me. The abuse reported by others started as early as 1966, when Michael moved to New Zealand. I also found out that Michael had been transferred to Dunedin for a period. There were multiple complaints made against him there.
- 4.32. I believe that Michael's abuse escalated as he got older and that he used his position as an expert in Māori spirituality to prey on children and vulnerable people. These are all matters I have raised with the Church.
- 4.33. There was then a second meeting with Bishop Dunn, Father Duffy, Lyndsay Freer and Father Walsh, who is the Provincial for the Dominicans in Australia and New Zealand. My travel from Whangārei to Auckland for these meetings was covered by the Church.
- 4.34. I had a Zoom session with Virginia Noonan and asked her what she could offer survivors of abuse that come to me. Virginia said we have got ACC. ACC is not the answer. My experience is that ACC can be a constant source of trauma for survivors. Every three months, I am made to justify why I cannot work, constantly asked to focus on my situation, mental health and other personal questions that

don't change overnight. I have triggers like a Church, or the smell of a pipe like the one Michael used.

4.35. I have experienced several financial setbacks. One of my expenses was travelling from Whangārei Heads to Whangārei for my ongoing counselling. I raised this with the Dominicans, and they set up another meeting during which Father Walsh said they would pay my travel expenses for counselling. I emailed him my bank account details on 31 May 2019, but I still had to push to receive anything six months later.

5. LOOKING FORWARD

5.1 In 2016, I told the Dominican head, Father Toomey, that Michael was responsible for abusing many Māori and had admitted to over 60 people in total. He told me he would only deal with what they had in writing.

5.2 My dealings with the Church didn't cover claims that he molested students at schools he visited. It took me going to the media before the Dominicans and Bishop Pat Dunn 'discovered' other complaints and admitted that they were told in 1966. That's all my life that they knew.

5.3 I later told the Dominicans that I was still affected and mentally unwell because of what Michael did. Rather than help our broken family, the Church groups avoided clear communication and chose to know as little as possible.

5.4 The SAFE programme served no one but Michael. That resulted not in a path to healing but silence.

5.5 I discovered that Michael's photograph was still in a marae up North. He was still called Pā Shirres, quoted extensively in Māori academia, and regarded as an expert in Māori religion and spirituality. I later saw an article that Toomey wrote and published comparing Michael to Thomas Aquinas. No one should be held up as the saviour of the indigenous people when they are a confessed serial abuser.

5.6 Unless the Church puts survivors first, before protecting their priests and reputation, nothing will change. My life has been ruined and even though the Church accept that the abuse is true, they still try to minimise it and keep it hidden, and continue to praise the abuser.

5.7 There is no response to requests to help educate and inform. Many people abused in childhood need ongoing, wraparound care and support for life.

Our childhoods were taken but we must live out our adult lives without achieving our full potential.

- 5.8 Shame keeps people silent. I represent many who will not speak but have written to me because they seek family permission and do not get it or find it too overwhelming to get some conclusion.
- 5.9 The path to healing is a path to silence. I believed all those years that I was gagged, even though a cardinal stated that no church would hold us to those agreements. Yet still the belief is in the Catholic community that things are resolved, improved and changed. They are not hearing us.

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:

26.9.2020