



Royal Commission
into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse

Statement

Name Gerard McDONALD
Address Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation Self-employed - home maintenance
Date 9th 30 August 2016

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. My full name is Gerard James McDONALD. I am 52 years old.
3. I was born in Narrabri, but moved to Newcastle when I was about one year old. I am the youngest of five children, with two older brothers and two older sisters. My parents were devout Catholics. I regularly attended mass on Sundays with my family, especially for celebrations such as Easter and Christmas.
4. During my childhood, my family and I attended St Joseph's Catholic Church, Merewether and, occasionally, St Martin's Catholic Church.

Primary School

5. In 1969, I started kindergarten at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School at The Junction (St Joseph's). I stayed at St Joseph's until I finished primary school in 1976. I took an extra year because I repeated Year 2 in 1972, due to illness.
6. My brother^g and sister^g all went to St Joseph's too and my mother, Phyllis, was the secretary of the school during the years I was there. She has since passed away.

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7. The principal at St Joseph's when I started was Sister Margaret Anne. Sister Margaret Anne left the school at the end of 1975 and Sister Ursula became the new Principal at the beginning of 1976. Although I found the nuns at the school to be harsh in terms of discipline, I generally enjoyed school.
8. In 1975 I was in Year 5. My teacher was a lay teacher, Christopher HALLINAN. Mr HALLINAN was very tall and was a keen basketball player. Mr HALLINAN was the best teacher I ever had and I liked him a lot. He introduced me to basketball as a sport.

Sexual abuse by Father RYAN

9. St Joseph's Church was on the school grounds. At the start of Year 5, I became an altar boy at St Joseph's Church, and I began attending altar boy practice which was conducted after school, twice a week. There were a number of other boys from fifth class who also regularly attended altar boy practice, including Scott HALLETT.
10. The priest who conducted the training was Fr Vincent RYAN. Every day I remember more about what he did to me and to other boys.
11. During 1975, Fr RYAN abused me on multiple occasions. The abuse commenced within the first couple of weeks of altar boy practice, and continued every week, twice a week, for nearly the entire year, occurring after every practice, out the front of my home, in broad daylight. The abuse went on until I told my mother at the end of that year.
12. At the conclusion of altar boy practice, Fr RYAN would drop all of the boys' home in his car. My mother trusted Fr RYAN to bring me home. She would have trusted any priest. We would all pile in his car and he would travel around Merewether, Cooks Hill and

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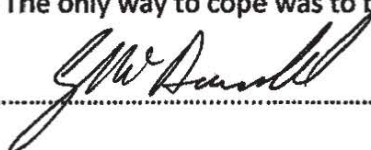
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Merewether Heights, dropping boys off. Even though I lived closest to the Church, Fr RYAN always dropped me off last.

13. The first time Fr RYAN abused me was in his car after an altar boy practice very soon after I became an altar boy. It would have been early in the year, around February 1975. When he had dropped all the others off, he drove to my house and stopped across the road. He then took off his glasses and started fondling my genitals inside my clothes. He asked me 'Does this feel good?' He then took my penis out and performed oral sex on me without saying a word. This lasted for about 5 minutes. When he had finished he said, 'Don't tell anybody about our little secret.'
14. When Fr RYAN took his glasses off he became a completely different person. He was no longer the friendly, charismatic priest who had played games with us and made driving in his car fun. He became intense, focussed and very scary. It was like Jekyll and Hyde. I came to dread him taking his glasses off.
15. After every other altar boy practice in 1975, before dropping me home Fr RYAN would sexually abuse me. Every single time. I was ten years old. I had older parents. Nobody spoke about sex. I didn't know if what was happening was right or wrong but I knew I didn't like it.
16. On one occasion, we were in Fr RYAN's car and he was sucking my penis. I saw my brother walking past the end of the street. I was feeling very emotional and scared and I yelled out, 'There's Tony!' Fr RYAN said, 'Don't yell out, it's our secret, don't tell anybody. They won't believe you anyway because I'm a priest'. This confirmed for me that what Fr RYAN was doing to me was wrong, but what could I say against a Catholic priest? The only way to cope was to block it out when I got out of the car.

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17. I remember the things Fr Ryan would do after altar practice with us boys in the vestry at St Joseph's Church. Father RYAN would lock the doors of the vestry after practice and start a game. It was part of a "fun" routine that he would play with us. He would chase us around the vestry and into a cupboard where our robes and other clothes were kept and lock us in. I would think to myself, 'I know what is going to happen now', but I never say anything as I was too scared.
18. When he let us out he would chase us again. One day Father RYAN caught one of the boys and began tickling him on his genitals on the outside of his clothing. This boy ran to the door of the vestry and unlocked it, and then ran away. Fr RYAN walked over to the door, locked it again and belittled the boy for leaving.
19. I remember one time I was sitting on the bench in the vestry next to Scott HALLETT and other boys. Father RYAN approached me and asked, 'Have you been doing it?' I took him to mean was I masturbating. I said, 'Yes'. He asked the other boys the same question.
20. Father RYAN then undid my pants, took out my penis, and started to play with it. He asked me if it felt good, but I don't know if I said anything. Father RYAN then bent down and put my penis in his mouth and sucked on it. I think the other boys were laughing and thought it was funny, but I was scared. Father RYAN continued to suck my penis for a few minutes, stopping occasionally and asking, 'Does that feel good. Don't tell anybody, any of you'.
21. When Fr RYAN had finished with me, he moved on and did the same thing to Scott HALLETT, sucking on his penis. Again, everyone was laughing. Father RYAN continued, and did the same thing to all of the boys there. He kept saying 'Don't tell anybody' to all of us.

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22. One time in the vestry Fr RYAN took out his penis, which was erect, in front of us. He said, 'I'll show you something if you don't tell anybody'. He asked some boys to come and touch his penis. He said, 'put your hand on it and feel how big it is'. I was one of the boys who did come forward and held his penis. Fr RYAN said, 'It's big isn't it?' and then he kept saying, 'Don't tell anybody'. I did it because Fr RYAN asked me to, and he was a priest, but I didn't understand what was going on. At that time I thought that whatever he did was right and I would never question him, even if I was scared.
23. One time, he encouraged all of us boys to masturbate and make ourselves erect like he was. Fr RYAN then said, 'try and stick it in each other'. I was confused. I thought it was just a game. I got behind Scott HALLETT and tried to penetrate him, but I couldn't get my penis in. Father RYAN then encouraged Scott and me to change places. Scott was behind me and I felt something push against my anus. When Scott backed away I turned around and saw he had poo on the end of his penis. Everyone started to laugh and yell out 'Poo knob, poo knob'. I saw that the other boys were doing the same thing that Scott and I were doing.
24. At that time, Father RYAN came up behind me and said, 'let me have a go'. I bent over and he was behind me. I felt something hard between my bum cheeks and felt it push against my anus, but it was too big to go in. Father RYAN then said, 'I can't get it in'.
25. Father RYAN then took a few steps back from us from us and started to masturbate. In three strokes, he blew everywhere. I saw all this white white stuff come out the end of his penis. I recall he made some of the other boys and me get some towels and clean it up. Father RYAN then put his penis back into his trousers. After that we all got dressed

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and went home. Fr Ryan would always take us all home. That way we didn't get to talk to each other about what had happened.

Disclosing the abuse

26. The day after that time in the vestry, when Fr RYAN tried to penetrate me, was a sports day with my class at National Park. It was during the last couple of weeks of school in 1975. Father RYAN was at the sports ground. One of the other altar boys had a bindi on the crutch area of his shorts. Father RYAN said to him, 'You've got a bindi in your prick'. The boy replied, 'Trust you to notice, you poof'. Father RYAN responded, 'what did you call me?' The boy replied, 'Poof, you're a poof'.
27. Father RYAN then chased the boy around the park but could not catch him. Me and some other boys were all chanting, 'Poofter, poofter, poofter'. Father RYAN then left the area and went over to where the girls were..
28. The mother of one of the other altar boys was at the sports ground and saw the commotion. She asked us what was going on. We told her that Fr RYAN was a poof and had been touching us. She said, 'That's disgusting.'
29. Afterwards, the other altar boys and I started talking about what Fr RYAN had done to us. We had an opportunity to talk about it together and we knew it was wrong. We decided to go home and tell our mothers. I didn't tell them how long it had been happening to me. I was ashamed.
30. I had previously been too scared to tell my mother. Fr RYAN had been abusing me for nearly a year and I had been dealing with the abuse by forgetting about it when it wasn't

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happening. When I got home on those occasions, I didn't tell my mother. I know now I was disassociating myself from the abuse.

31. That night, the mother of one of the other altar boys came to our house. She told my mum that her son had made accusations against Fr RYAN. Mum called me out of my room to the dining area and she and the other boy's mother asked me questions about Fr RYAN. The other boy's mother asked me, 'What did he do to you?' I said, 'He sucked me here' and pointed to my penis. I told them that Fr RYAN had been sucking my penis, but not that he had tried to penetrate me. I also told them that he had done it a lot, but I was too embarrassed and ashamed to tell them that it happened every week. I am not sure what my mother and the other mother did after I told them about Fr RYAN.

32. Sometime shortly afterwards, at school, Mr HALLINAN called me over to his desk and quietly asked me, 'What happened? What did Fr RYAN do?' I told him and he was utterly disgusted. I'll never forget the look in his eyes.

33. While I was talking to Mr Hallinan about it, Sr Margaret Anne came to class and spoke to Mr HALLINAN. I could see from her expression and her tone of voice that she was angry, I could hear some things but I couldn't hear everything she said. She was waving her arms around and saying 'Don't listen to those boys. You will never work in a Catholic school again.'

34. I didn't see Fr RYAN at St Joseph's again after the sports day.

35. I heard rumours around the school as to why Fr RYAN had left, and the rumours were all in relation to Fr RYAN sexually abusing children. It seemed to me that everyone,

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including the kids, the teachers, and parents, was talking about Fr RYAN. I now know that Fr RYAN was sent to Melbourne. I think he was replaced by Monsignor COTTER.

36. After the incident at the sports day, I stopped being an altar boy. I stopped going to church altogether. I also stopped enjoying school because of what Fr RYAN had done to me.

Marist Brothers, Hamilton

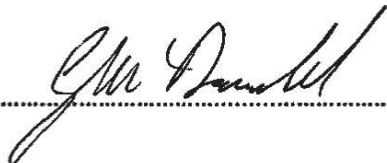
37. After primary school, I attended Marist Brothers High School in Hamilton. I was in year 7 in 1977, and I recall that Br RICHARD was my form teacher. At the beginning of the year, there was a church service for the whole school at the school hall. When I got to the hall I saw that Fr RYAN was taking the service. I couldn't believe it.

38. During the service, all I could think about was running to my mate's parent's place and grabbing the two biggest knives he had and killing Fr RYAN. I didn't do it. I should have. The damage that bastard's done, to my life, my family, my friends and to everybody else. I feel guilty that I didn't do it and he went on to abuse other boys.

39. Some of the boys from St Joseph's who were now at Marist Brothers with me, knew what had happened with Fr RYAN and were ribbing me about it. I remember after Fr RYAN finished giving mass that day, I could easily pick which boys he had touched, because none of them went to communion, and I could just see it in their faces.

40. I remember I went home and told my mother that Fr RYAN had said mass. Mum was furious that Fr RYAN was back. She telephoned the school. I'm pretty sure she spoke to the head honcho, who I think was Brother ALEXIS. I overheard Mum on the phone in the next room yelling something like, 'How dare you have that filthy man there. I don't want

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him at that school, with what he has done to the altar boys.' I did not see Fr RYAN again until he was charged and at court.

41. In 1979, when I was about 15 or 16 years old, I was at a friend's house for a sleepover, with a group of boys. I remember some of the boys asking me, 'is it true, the rumours about Fr RYAN?' I said, 'bloody oath it is. I don't know what you heard, but whatever it is, it's true'. I didn't elaborate.

Life after school

42. I left school in Year 9. I was unable to continue my schooling because of what Fr RYAN did to me. My father knew I hated school. He woke me one morning and said, 'You're not going back to school' and he took me to the railway and I started a job as a junior station assistant.
43. About 1982, I remember being at a friend's place. His younger brother was also there. I had a conversation with the younger brother, and he asked me, 'Oh, did RYAN get you? What did he do? What did he do? What did he do to you?' I told him that Fr RYAN had abused me but didn't go into detail. This happened a couple of times over the next few years where I would see the younger brother and he would ask me about Fr RYAN.
44. In about 1993, the younger brother finally disclosed to me, just before he was admitted to a psych hospital, that Fr RYAN had also sexually abused him. He told me that he had never told anyone else about the abuse. Later he jumped off a cliff and committed suicide.
45. In 1995, I attended a funeral at a church in Waratah. I was outside the church after the service and I suddenly realised that standing beside me was Scott HALLETT. We said

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hello and shook hands. Scott said to me, 'Do you remember the name Vincent RYAN?'

I was shocked for a second, then said, 'Yes'. I turned away and then turned back to him. I

hugged Scott and he hugged me back. I said, 'It's about time we did something'.

Reporting to Police

46. Shortly after the funeral, Scott and I approached several solicitors to help us charge Ryan but could not find one to help us. Scott finally made contact with a solicitor in Newcastle who agreed to assist us. He directed us to the Major Crime Squad at Newcastle Police.

47. In 1995, I attended Newcastle Police Station with Scott HALLETT and one of the other altar boys who was abused at the same time as me. I was interviewed by Senior Constable Troy GRANT. In August 1995, I made a statement to police about what Fr RYAN had done to me.

48. A police investigation was conducted and Fr RYAN was charged with offences against a number of victims. Fr RYAN pleaded guilty. I was not required to give evidence which I was angry about. I wanted to tell the Court what Fr RYAN had done to me.

49. I got the chance to read a Victim Impact Statement at the sentencing hearing. I don't think Fr RYAN was given a sentence anywhere near long enough given what he has done, not only to me, but to all of the other boys that he raped. I feel that he should die in prison. The defence argued that he had done a lot of good work in the community and I think the court took this into account. This seems ridiculous and really upset me.

Civil Litigation

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50. At the same time that I reported to police, I began the process of seeking compensation from the Catholic Church.
51. I recall that I attended a meeting at the Telford Motor Inn in Newcastle with my lawyer and Bishop Michael MALONE and his lawyer. Scott HALLETT and a number of other boys Fr RYAN sexually abused also attended this meeting. I feel I was unfairly treated in the amount of compensation I received.
52. I felt like the Church did not care about us. They did not offer us any counselling or other forms of pastoral care. We were never asked about how the abuse by Fr RYAN had affected us. When I went to the meeting at the Telford Motor Inn, we walked in and Bishop MALONE said, 'Firstly, I'd like to apologise...' He told me he'd been to see my mother. I was furious. I was into him, 'What are you doing apologising? You had nothing to do with it'.
53. Bishop MALONE wasn't the one at fault. What I would like is to hear Fr RYAN say that the Catholic Church, the hierarchy, knew what was going on but covered it up for him.
54. In 2010, I went on a holiday with my family to Bali. When we got back to Sydney I caught the train home alone because we couldn't all fit in the car. I remember reading the Newcastle Herald on the train and seeing an article about Fr RYAN on the front page – he'd been released from jail. I could not believe it. I was so angry. I just started going off on the train. I didn't care who could hear. When I got home, I put two holes in the wall of my shed with my fists.

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Impacts of the abuse

55. I have tried to continue to get on with life since the incidents of abuse, trying to block out what happened. However I have been affected severely by what Fr RYAN did to me in fifth class.
56. I know that what Fr RYAN did affected some of the other boys I went to St Joseph's with. A lot of us have substance abuse problems. some with heavy drugs. One boy killed himself, and I suspect it was because of Fr RYAN. This boy was in sixth class when I was in fifth class. He was also an altar boy, but I don't know if he ever disclosed any sexual abuse.
57. I knew nothing about sex or much about life until Fr RYAN abused me. I used to drink heavily to forget the emotional pain he caused me, and the non-action of the Catholic Church over the matter. I have been in trouble with the Police over incidents that are alcohol related. I have had trouble forming relationships and sexual relationships, and I am at times confused about my sexuality, all as a result of Fr RYAN's abuse.
58. I don't believe in God, and I haven't since I was abused. My family was very devout and the Catholic religion was part of my growing up. I would tell mum that I was going to Church, but then I would go to the beach instead. When I got home, I would just say, 'It was good'. I never go to Church now unless it is for a wedding or a funeral and when I do I feel very agitated and uneasy. My nephew was married at St Joseph's church and I could not bring myself to go into the church for the wedding.
59. The sexual abuse by Fr RYAN and all of the other Catholic clergy in Newcastle has split the community. There are those who believe the abuse and support the survivors. There

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are also those who think we are making it up. I have been called names and called a liar. I have been verbally abused walking down the street, had harassing phone calls, and have been threatened. Recently I received death threats. For some strange reason some people think I have done something wrong.

60. In my eyes, Monsignor COTTER and Bishop Leo CLARKE were responsible for what Fr RYAN did to so many young boys. How they were never charged has got me stuffed. I often think, 'Why did all these people cover it up, sweep it under the carpet and let him keep doing it?'
61. They say talking about it helps, but the only person that I can talk about it directly to is Scott. He understands because he was there. We bounce off each other. We keep each other going. I have tried getting counselling numerous times but it doesn't help. I am currently on medication for pain and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and a panic disorder.
62. I don't go out and socialise. I have a few close mates but usually try to avoid social situations.
63. I can't deal with pressure or confrontation. My wife Sharon is my rock. She gets frustrated because I can't sit down and talk to her about it. I want her to know that I wouldn't be here without her today. Even though I can't talk directly to her about what happened, her love and understanding has kept me alive. It's for her and my son Ben that I keep going.
64. I can never relax and I am always fidgeting, or getting up and moving around. It's really hard for me to sit here today. I go down to my shed a lot and just spend time there by

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myself. I've punched the wall so many times I've broken the bones in my both my hands numerous times.

65. I am hyper-vigilant around my son. I have always been very protective of him and his friends, and there is no way I was ever going to send him to a Catholic school.

66. I never finished school because I hated it. My lack of education, and the other effects of the abuse, means that I have never been able to achieve my full potential or to achieve the things I should have. Ryan and the Catholic Church took all that away from me.

67. Fr Ryan must never be in a situation where he can do this to boys again. I don't believe he has changed or is remorseful. I don't think the Church is truly remorseful about covering up for him and others all these years. They let this happen.

68. I have thought of suicide many times. I have even gone and sat on the edge of the cliff where my friend committed suicide. I have sat there with my legs over the edge and just thought to myself, 'I want to do this, I want to do this, but if I do, he wins'. One of my mates killed himself and I often feel like he's telling me, 'Don't!' The reason I have not jumped is because then Fr RYAN, Cotter, Clarke and all the people who covered up for them win. I will not let them win.

69. I want to thank my wonderful family and the good friends who have been my strength. They've taken calls from me late at night and in the early hours of the morning when I didn't want to go on. They've stayed with me when I've felt overwhelmed with rage, shame and guilt. They supported me before they knew the reasons for me behaving this way and they are supporting me now. I would not still be here without them.

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70. I want to speak for the children of the past present and future. I want this to never happen again to another child. I want the survivors of this abuse to be believed and understood. I want the shame and guilt to be put where it belongs, with the abusers and those who did nothing or lied to protect them.

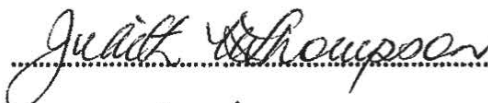
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