

**Witness Name:** Robert Patrick Carl Donaldson

**Statement No.:** WITN0011001

**Exhibits:** WITN0011002 - WITN0011004

**Dated:** 24.08.20

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF ROBERT PATRICK CARL DONALDSON

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I, Robert Patrick Carl Donaldson, state: -

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. My full name is Robert Patrick Carl Donaldson. I was born in 1948 and I am a 71-year-old Pakeha male.

1.2. I was born and raised in South Dunedin, New Zealand. My parents GRO-B and GRO-B Donaldson had five boys. In order they are GRO-B, **GRO-B**, GRO-B, me and GRO-B. We all lived on GRO-B in South Dunedin.

1.3. Our family were very Catholic and attended Church religiously every week at St Bernadette's parish a few hundred metres down our road. The Church was a big part of our family.

1.4.

**Not relevant to the NJ process**

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

*Family life and education*

1.6. As our family all attended St Bernadette's Church my brothers and I all attended our Holy Communion ceremony there and at different time were altar boys.

1.7. Father Murray was the assistant priest at St Bernadette's Church living there at the presbytery with the parish priest and housekeeper. As a young boy I would visit the Church on a regular basis to practise being an altar boy but also to have a shower as we only had a bath at home.

1.8. My parents would never say anything bad about the Church and held Father Murray in very high regard. My mother considered him the sixth son of the family.

1.9. I remember later in life a parishioner told me that the saying was that if you ever wanted to find Father Murray, he would be at the Donaldson's. He loved my mother's cooking and would visit a lot.

1.10. Being Catholic we all attended Catholic schools and I started at St Bernadette's School (St Bernadette's) in 1953 when I turned five years old. St Bernadette's is a Catholic primary school which was affiliated with St Bernadette's Church and situated on the same grounds.

1.11. The St Bernadette's Church building was demolished in 2017 and the congregation merged with St Brigid's (Tainui), St Alphonsus (Waverly) and St Patrick's (Macandrew Road) to become the Mercy Parish.

1.12. After St Bernadette's, I attended St Edmund's School (St Edmund's) from ages nine to 12. St Edmund's closed in 1989. The principal at St Edmund's was Brother Vincent Sullivan.

1.13. In 1963 I went to Christian Brothers High School. In 1964 it changed its name to St Paul's High School (St Paul's) which is the year I left. Years later St Paul's became Kavanagh College in 1989.

1.14. I left school at age 16 to do a carpentry apprenticeship. I never did that well at school and thought it was more practical to learn a trade.

# Not relevant to the NJ process

1.17. I still go to church on Sundays and I read Catholic magazines. I do charity work through St Vincent de Paul. I still have my faith and pray regularly. It was just one bad apple that ruined my life.

## 2. THE ABUSE

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

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

2.2. Father Murray began by touching my head with his hands and putting his fingers through my hair. This then extended to watching me have a shower at the presbytery and then he began to fondle me and touch my penis.

2.3. Father Murray would take me to his bed and start to fondle and play with my genitals in the bed. We were both naked and this then led to him raping me in his bed. At the time I did not know it was abuse. I thought it must be okay as he was a priest and was regarded as a powerful man.

2.4. Father Murray would also come over to my parents' house late at night, around 11pm. My father would let him in.

2.5. Father Murray would then come into my bedroom where I was asleep and get into bed with me and fondle my penis. Sometimes I would push him off and he would leave.

2.6. St Bernadette's Church also had a house at Warrington Beach, and I went there with Father Murray on a few occasions in the mid-1960s. I was about 12 years old at the time. At this house I was taken to the bedroom and again Father Murray would play with my penis.

- 2.7. My father would be in the kitchen and others would be asleep. Father Murray just came to visit me. I think my parents thought I was privileged because a highly regarded priest was interested in me.
- 2.8. This sexual abuse occurred approximately twice a week for a period of ten years. My recollection is that I was raped around four times but only in the presbytery. I remember the offending very clearly but did not understand it for a long time.
- 2.9. I later found out that Father Murray had sexually abused a person known to me at his family home. The person known to me told me this but said he only went to counselling and not the police like I did due to his career at the time.
- 2.10. After complaints arose Father Murray was transferred from St Bernadette's Church to a parish in Mosgiel where there was further offending.
- 2.11. I have been told there was a GRO-C family whose GRO-C sons were all being abused. The parents found out and complained and Father Murray was transferred again.
- 2.12. After Mosgiel, Father Murray was sent to Sydney by Bishop Kavanagh. We were told that Father Murray had been sent to get treatment. I later found out that he was moved to various parishes in Sydney where he committed further offending.
- 2.13. My wife met one woman who was raped by Father Murray as a young girl in Sydney. Her parents had wanted her to go into a convent.
- 2.14. After Sydney, Father Murray was moved to Waihi where further allegations of sexual abuse were made. The police in Waihi advised the Church that he should leave. Father Murray then went to Ngāruawāhia where more abuse was alleged.
- 2.15. A lot of parents would have known what was going on, but nobody spoke out against the Church because it was "up here", and we were "down there".

**Not relevant to the NJ process**

# Not relevant to the NJ proces

## 3. THE IMPACT OF THE ABUSE

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

**Not relevant to the NJ process**

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**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

**GRO-C**Dated: *24.8.20.*