

New South Wales Police

P.190

v2.6

STATEMENT in the matter of:  
 Father Vincent RYAN

Place: St Josephs Convent  
 Lochinvar 2321  
 Date : 30 November 1995

Name: Sister Evelyn Mary WOODWARD

Address: REDACTED

Tel. No.: REDACTED

Occupation: Psychologist

STATES:-

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence which I would be prepared, if necessary, to give in court as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true.

2. I am 60 years of age.

3. I am the Congregation Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph of Lochinvar. I have held this position for the past four years. I have been a sister with the Sisters of St Joseph since 1955. I have held positions in the Hunter Valley for the majority of this time.

4. In 1975, I was a counsellor with the Catholic Education Office in Newcastle. I held this position since 1971 until the end of 1975. In 1976 I set up my own counselling service at Merewether Beach. I remember it being late in 1975, when the Principal of St Josephs Catholic Primary School of Merewether Sister Margaret Anne GEATCHES approached me at St Josephs Convent Merewether. I remember it was late in the day and she had waited for me to come home from work. I remember her telling me something. She said words to the following effect,

REDACTED

Witness

Signature: Evelyn M. Woodward

Page No: 2

P.190A.

STATEMENT (continued) in the matter of: Father Vincent RYAN  
Name: Sister Evelyn Mary WOODWARD

"I'm quite concerned that some boys from the school from fifth grade were being sexually molested, and because it is a Priest that is doing this I don't know how to or to whom to report it."

She also felt rather inhibited in what to say and thought that I being a Psychologist might be able to put it into words. I suggested that the highest authority in the Diocese should hear of this immediately.

5. At this time in late 1975 the Diocese of Maitland was without a Bishop as Bishop TOOHEY had passed away and Bishop Leo CLARKE didn't arrive at his appointment until 1976. Monsignor COTTER who was the Parish Priest of Merewether was the 'caretaker' of the Bishop's position at this time. Monsignor COTTER was therefore in charge of the Diocese at the time and was the decision maker and chief authority of the Diocese.

6. As a result of my discussion with Sister Margaret Anne she named Father Vincent RYAN as the perpetrator of these allegations but did not name any of the victims or the parent from whom she was given the information. She then asked me if I would speak to Monsignor COTTER about this matter.

7. I telephoned for an appointment at the Redemptorist Monastery at Mayfield with Monsignor COTTER who was in residence there away from Merewether Parish. I subsequently saw him the following evening at Mayfield. At the time of our meeting I reported to Monsignor COTTER the details I had received from Sister Margaret Ann and strongly recommended psychiatric help for Father RYAN and suggested also that the alleged victims might well require counselling. I named Doctor Peter EVANS who was at that time a Franciscan Friar in Melbourne. A Franciscan

REDACTED

Witness

Signature:

*Evelyn M. Woodward*

Page No: 3

P.190A.

STATEMENT (continued) in the matter of: Father Vincent RYAN

Name: Sister Evelyn Mary WOODWARD

Friar is a member of a religious order of men. Some of them are priests and some are not ordained. Doctor Peter EVANS at this time was also a Catholic Priest. Monsignor COTTER decided to take this action immediately and stated his intention of confronting Father RYAN as soon as he could. I believe that this happened within the following twenty four hours. There was no discussion of reporting this matter to the Police because the discussion with me as a Psychologist focused on the kind of assistance I could suggest as an expert in the field of welfare, rehabilitation and psychiatric side of this incident. Basically it wasn't my place or position to discuss or advise in relation to the Criminal side of this matter.

8. I had no further input or knowledge of this matter except that Father RYAN left the Parish the next day and to my understanding went to Melbourne to receive treatment. I have had only had minimal contact with Father RYAN during his time as Parish Priest of Cessnock. This contact was from a managerial level through contact with and appointment of Sisters in his Parish.

Witness:

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Signature:

*Evelyn M. Woodward*