

Witness Statement

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| Name | Adrian Francis McInerney |
| Address | 84 Victoria St Ballarat, Victoria |
| Occupation | Parish Priest of St Alipius Parish, Ballarat |
| Date | 26 May 2015 |

- 1 My name is Adrian Francis McInerney. I am the Parish Priest of St Alipius, a parish in the Diocese of Ballarat.
- 2 This is my second statement in this case study. My first statement, signed on 3 May 2015, was in response to a request from the Royal Commission to address six particular matters identified by the Commission, mainly relating to the impact of child sexual abuse on the community in Ballarat. On 21 May 2015 I was provided with a Note from Mr Andrew Collins (Mr **Collins' 21 May Note**), which I was told was further evidence he is proposing to give. In that Note Mr Collins refers to me. I respond briefly in this statement to some parts of Mr Collins' 21 May Note.
- 3 This statement has been prepared with the assistance of Gilbert + Tobin Lawyers, and counsel, in response to and in compliance with a Notice issued by the Royal Commission in connection with a hearing into the Ballarat Case Study. It is produced to the Royal Commission on the basis that it will be tendered and treated as evidence pursuant to the Commonwealth or State legislation applicable to this Royal Commission case study.

Meeting with Mr Collins

- 4 In paragraphs 31 to 40 of his 21 May Note, Mr Collins refers to an occasion when Mr Collins came to see me in 2013 in the St Alipius presbytery.
- 5 In paragraphs 32 and 33 of the Note, Mr Collins says that he said to me that he had heard that in around 1970 I had been told by a student of St Alipius of abuse occurring at the School, and that I had threatened the child not to tell anyone. He then says that I told him that I was aware of the allegation and the person involved, but that it was not me. He says that I said it could have been another priest with blond hair, whose name I did not recall.
- 6 I recall that Mr Collins did raise with me an allegation that a child had told me of abuse, and that I had threatened them not to tell anyone of the abuse. I had never heard such an allegation made about me before and any such allegation is not true. In my conversation with Mr Collins I did not say anything about a priest with blond hair, whose name I did not know. There were three priests at St




Alipius in around 1970 as well as myself, but none of them had blond hair and I knew the names of all three.

- 7 In paragraph 34 of the 21 May Note, Mr Collins says that he recalls me saying that I needed "to confess" a number of matters to him. My recollection is that I may have said "I must confess that I could have been in the photo to which he refers in his paragraph 35". If I did use those words I did not mean them in the sense that I was making a confidential disclosure to him, but I may have used the word "confess" more colloquially, like someone saying that "I confess I forgot to do something."

Ridsdale court appearance

- 8 In paragraphs 35 and 36 of his Note, Mr Collins refers to a discussion we had during our meeting concerning Gerald Ridsdale. I recall that we did discuss Mr Ridsdale at that meeting, and I did tell Mr Collins that I was at court with Ridsdale.
- 9 I knew Gerald Ridsdale when he was a priest of the diocese but I did not know him well. Although I knew him I did not consider him a friend, and we never worked or lived in the same parish together.
- 10 In about 1993 Ridsdale approached me one day and said that he had to go to court for what he said was a "small matter". He did not tell me anything else about the nature of the matter or the reason why he had to go to court. He asked if I could come to court and say something to the court about his character.
- 11 It is difficult for me to think back on this now and understand why I was so naive, but I agreed to do so, without even asking him what the court matter was about. He did not tell me anything about the charges, and I foolishly did not ask. I had no knowledge and had heard nothing at that time about Ridsdale's offences against children. He told me that the court matter was minor and I just accepted that without question. I have no recollection of being aware of any mention of the court case in the press or in discussions with other people prior to that time.
- 12 I travelled to Melbourne to go to the court. I met with his barrister before, and he asked me what I would say, but even then I did not ask about the charges. It was not until I was in the court and I heard the charges read out, that I realised that Ridsdale had been charged with child sexual abuse offences. I had not previously had any knowledge that he had behaved in any such ways.
- 13 When I heard the offences he was charged with read out in the courtroom I was appalled and dismayed and could not believe that I had put myself in the position where I was there to provide character evidence for him. I felt I had no alternative but to speak on his behalf because I had said I would, and I had come there to do so. I can remember I tried to say as little as possible. I remember that I did say something about him assisting the most needy families in the diocese. I later realised that he was probably befriending those families because they were often the most vulnerable, and he could try and take advantage of them. Mr Collins says in paragraph 35 of his 21 May Note that I told him that I was "unwilling to help". I did not say that, because I did attend court as requested.



- 14 I was extremely angry at Ridsdale for what he did to me, as well as very distressed about what I heard in court of his despicable behaviour with children. I felt that he had taken advantage of my naivety, and tricked me into speaking on his behalf. I would never have done so had I been aware of what he had done.
- 15 I felt manipulated and deceived by Ridsdale. I have not spoken to him since that day.
- 16 I have great sympathy for all of his victims, who suffered so profoundly from his behaviour. I apologise to them for my role and for what I did that day.

Cathedral Presbytery

- 17 In paragraph 36 of his Note, Mr Collins says that I told him that sometimes Ridsdale would rest in a room at the Cathedral, and that sometimes he would have children with him. This is not correct and I did not say this to Mr Collins.
- 18 I do recall that in around 1993, when I held the position of Administrator of the Cathedral (which I held from 1990 to 2001) Ridsdale would sometimes ask me if he could use a room in the Cathedral presbytery during the day. The presbytery is a very large house beside the Cathedral. To the best of my recollection in around 1993 three or four priests lived there, and housekeeping and office staff were also normally present in the house there during the day. I did allow Ridsdale to use a room in the presbytery a number of times when he asked, but I never saw him with any children on those occasions. Indeed I do not recall ever seeing Ridsdale with children on any occasions, without their parents or teachers being present.

Consultors' Committee

- 19 At paragraph 37 of Mr Collins, 21 May Note there is a reference to me being a member of the Consultors' Committee during the period when Ridsdale was a priest in the diocese. That is not correct. I was not a member of the Consultors' Committee during the period when Ridsdale was a priest in the diocese. I am a member of the Consultors' Committee today.
- 20 I did hold the position of Secretary to the Bishop from about 1973 to about 1979. I normally attended the meetings of the Consultors' Committee with the Bishop during that period, and I was responsible for taking and keeping the minutes of those meetings.

Other priest

- 21 In paragraphs 38 and 39 of Mr Collins, 21 May Note, Mr Collins refers to our discussion in relation to a priest I was in the seminary with, who has since been convicted of child sexual abuse offences. Mr Collins says that I told him that when I was in Rome with this priest, he was always visiting "a boys home" there, and that looking back, I should have realised that "there could have been more".
- 22 I do recall we had a conversation about this particular priest who was in Rome with me. However, I did not say anything to Mr Collins about visits to boys homes. I do recall commenting that the priest

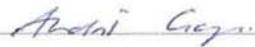
Signature  Witness 

was friendly with some young men in Rome, but those men were fellow seminarians, who would all have been in their mid-20s at the time. I would not see that as something which should be reported to the police.

Correction

23 In my statement dated 3 May 2015 at paragraph 20, I said that I had supported the Moving Towards Justice group from the outreach funding held by the parish. I now realise that the funding I provided was not from the outreach funding but, as Mr Collins says in his 21 May Note, was from a donation the parish had received.

Signature 
 Name Adrian Francis McInerney
 Date 26 May 2015

Witness 
 Name ANDRIS GAJDA
 Date 26 May 2015

Signature  | Witness