Royal Commission
into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse

Statement

Name: Oliver Joseph COSGROVE
Address: REDACTED
Date: 10 April 2014

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. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those which were used, to the best of my recollection.

Background

3. My full name is Oliver Joseph COSGROVE. My birth certificate indicates I was born in London on REDACTED 1949.

4. I was placed in care as a baby. The records I have reveal that I stayed at Guardian Angels’ Home on East Finchley Road in London before being admitted to Nazareth House at Hammersmith on 25 March 1949. The admission register shows that my mother had no occupation. On 16 December 1952 I was examined by a doctor approved by the Department of Immigration at Australia House, after which I was deemed fit to be sent to Australia.

5. On 12 February 1953, I arrived at Fremantle in Western Australia in the ship New Australia and was sent to the Sisters of Mercy at Wembley.

Signature: ........................................ Witness: ........................................
6. On 9 February 1956 I was transferred to Castledare Junior Orphanage.

7. I recall being beaten often during my time at Castledare. I recall the Brothers using the strap indiscriminately. The other boys and I took perverse pride in marking the number of times we were hit by pulling teeth out of our hair combs, but you would still hate being hit.

Sexual abuse at Castledare

8. I remember Castledare as a place where the Brothers used to come to your bed at night time. I don’t know how many times it happened to me. When I was about 8 years old I recall being woken up at night and there was a Brother sitting on my bed, fondling my genitals. This was very disturbing. It was Brother James Randall MURRAY. He asked whether I had ejaculated. His question didn’t make sense to me because I did not know what “ejaculation” meant, other than in the Church context of a small prayer offered to a deity or to a saint.

9. I recall on other occasions awakening at night to find myself away from my bed in random places. On one occasion, I recall waking up in the dining room and seeing the silhouette of somebody in a cassock walking away from me. I never knew who it was. Around that time I started bedwetting. At Castledare bed wetters were known as “sailors”. At least it seemed to stop the night time visits by the Brothers.

10. I started suffering vivid ‘flashbacks’ in the late 1980s of my time at Castledare. I went to the Sexual Assault Referral Centre and was told that it was likely that the bedwetting occurred as a defensive mechanism. I have since also received psychiatric advice that my inability to remember what had happened to me should be described as defensive amnesia. While the
description may be useful clinically, it upsets me as I don’t know how many times it occurred or what happened to me.

Clontarf

11. I was sent to Clontarf Boys' Town at the age of 10.

12. Brother Bruno DOYLE was the principal while I was there. He wasn’t a man noted for his gentleness. Doyle was replaced by Brother O’DOHERTY who transferred from Castledare in 1960.

13. The physical punishment continued at Clontarf.

14. Once a week there was what was jovially called the “Sunday morning roundup” which took place in the hall. The roundup began when we paraded on the quadrangle after breakfast on Sunday, and filed into the hall and awaited the Brother’s entrance. As he went up the aisle to the head of the hall the Brother would read out boys' names from a book, and each boy whose name was called out would follow him up to the head of the hall and wait along the wall. When he had finished calling out the names, the Brother would then approach the first named boy and ask if he knew why he was there. Usually he didn't, and the Brother would inform the assembly of the boy's “offence”. Then, without request or direction, the boy would put out his hand and the Brother would hit him with his strap. I don't recall seeing him hit anyone more than six times. The boy would then return to his seat, hand nursed under the armpit desperately trying not to cry. The roundup continued until the last boy was dealt with. Cruelly, each boy went into that hall each week not knowing if his name was going to be called out. I recall being punished like this at least once.

15. The punishments received at Sunday morning roundups were in addition to those given throughout the week. Rarely, would a week pass when I was not beaten on at least three
occasions. These beatings were sometimes delivered with a cane and sometimes with a strap. The cane was usually reserved for use indoors. Because it was shorter the strap was easier to carry around the institution in a pocket. On one occasion I was beaten on the back of the thighs with a strap. The welts, which were blue and black, showing the details of the stitching of the strap, persisted for several days.

16. The particular genius of the roundup was that it taught us not to talk to outsiders about Clontarf, and the important thing to note about these punishment parades was that there was no offence more than heinous than that of “harming the good name of Clontarf”. I always praised the place because I was afraid to do otherwise.

Sexual abuse at Clontarf

17. I was sexually abused by Brother ANGUS at Clontarf. His full name was Christopher Alonso ANGUS but we used to call him “Pop”. He joined the order very late and so was much older than the other Brothers. I believe he was born in 1900 so he was 58 when I arrived at Clontarf.

18. Brother ANGUS used to come up behind me and would put his hands on my shoulders. He would then utter some kind of instruction or engage in some kind of conversation with me. Then he would rub himself up against my back and buttocks. This would happen anywhere, even in the company of other boys. It was extraordinary nobody would comment on it when it happened. It happened to me about four or five times. After a while I became a bit savvy and when I saw him in my peripheral vision, I would get out of his way.
Reporting abuse

19. I didn't report the sexual abuse to anyone in the institutions. I may have picked it up on the "grapevine" or learnt it from religious doctrine but we were also told that you do not complain as a child. We were taught to be grateful for even being there.

20. It also would have been difficult to speak about it because I assumed I was at fault. For example, when I woke up in the dining room, I was meant to be in the dormitory and so I was out of bounds even though I did not know why I was there. I also didn't know what had happened, and I did not know what sex was, so it would have been remarkable for me to have complained to anybody.

21. I also wasn't aware that anyone else was being sexually abused. It was entirely isolated in perception to me. The boys certainly didn't speak about abuse.

22. Even if I had wanted to complain, I don't know who I could have turned to. I couldn't turn to another Brother, such as Brother O'DOHERTY, to complain about Brother ANGUS.

23. I also couldn't have really reported it to the Child Welfare Department. Although I understand there were officers from the Department who did inspections, we never knew who they were, or when they were coming, and even if we did it would have been impossible to speak to them anyway. It was just a visitor to the classroom who came in with a Brother, said "Good morning" and left.

24. When I was at the institutions I was never interviewed on a one-on-one basis by a government officer or a social worker. I was also never interviewed when I left the Clontarf.
Leaving Clontarf

25. I left Clontarf at the end of the school year in 1963, when I was 14 years old.

26. Before I left Clontarf, I was called into Brother O’DOHERTY’s office for my one-on-one sex education lesson. He asked me, “Do you know about sex?” I responded, “Yes.” He responded, “Yes? Very well, then, off you go.” That was the level of sex education provided at Clontarf.

27. I completed my junior certificate at 14 even though most people did it at age 15. I did this despite the fact that I was the only boy who was ordered to take the subjects of modern history and scripture because O’Doherty said I was useless at technical drawing, woodwork and metal work. This meant that I actually had to teach myself because there was no teacher of history or scripture. I passed my junior, and at a time when most bright children were sent to Aquinas College to do their leaving certificate, I was sent out to be a telegram boy.

Post Clontarf

28. After leaving Clontarf I boarded with a family who treated me well.

29. On 29 January 1964 I commenced employment at the Postmaster General’s Department.

30. In 1970, I was conscripted into the Army. In 1971, I was sent to Vietnam. While I was in Vietnam I completed the Services General Certificate of Education by correspondence. (This was the equivalent of the leaving certificate.) I went to Teachers College after the army.

31. I taught until 2009 with a few gaps due to health issues. I retired due to health problems.
Effects of abuse

32. The abuse I suffered has affected me in a number of ways. The cost of it has been painful and enormous.

33. I have had difficulty trusting people and forming close relationships. I have learnt to be affable and amiable when dealing with people. However, I don't get so close as to cause complication or commitment, only close enough so that I can conduct everyday social interactions.

34. I have found intimate gestures troubling. I was taught to view sex as an instrument of the devil and conditioned to believe that purity was what should be most desired. I have flashbacks to “impure thoughts” which were always drummed into me.

35. I suffered low self-esteem and low self-confidence and have an avoidant personality.

36. I have also experienced depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. I used to drink in an attempt to suppress the memories but when I was in Perth I couldn't do it and the memories kept coming back. I also had secondary impotence and other health problem due to excessive alcohol consumption.

37. In early 1989 I had a breakdown and was referred to a psychiatrist, Dr David LORD. Dr LORD reported that I experienced acute flashbacks after viewing a film on sexual abuse. He said that I was in a marginal hypogonadal state and that the long term impact of sexual abuse was affecting my hormonal system. I was admitted to the Fremantle psychiatric ward on 30 October 1989 according to the inpatient summary and was discharged on 20 November 1989.
VOICES and the Christian Brothers' response

38. I was a member of VOICES for a year. VOICES was a loosely organised group, which was well-intentioned and sought to raise public awareness about the abuses and to lobby politicians for action.

39. In 1989, when VOICES started complaining about the abuse the boys suffered, I recall the WA Provincial of the Christian Brothers, told us that our reports of the cruelty of the Brothers were a sham. Instead, they pointed selectively to the glowing reports of the Child Welfare Department about the institutions. However, the WA Christian Brothers eventually acknowledged the abuse in 1993.

Reporting to police

40. On 16 July 1993, I made a complaint to the Western Australian Police Child Abuse Unit in relation to the sexual assault by Brother MURRAY at Castledare and the occasions when I woke up out of my bed. I made a statement but I don't think I ever signed it. [WA.0007.001.0870]. On 20 July 1994, the Child Abuse Unit rang me to advise that the Adelaide police had interviewed Brother MURRAY and he declined to answer any questions. I was told it was a DPP decision not to prosecute Brother MURRAY because of the lack of corroborating evidence.

CBERS

41. I approached CBERS, a service set up for ex-residents by the Christian Brothers in the wake of response to the allegations of abuse.

42. CBERS arranged for me to see a counsellor. I first met with Michael ANDERSON who seemed to me to be supportive and suggested that I get more counselling. I then saw Patrick HOWARD.
saw him twice, but I refused to see him any more for a number of reasons. First, he told me he had trained as a Christian Brother but later quit. Second, he lived in the next street running parallel to mine in East Fremantle. Third, he told me that I should go to the “Down to Earth Bookshop” in Hay Street to get a counselling book. He had said that the reason he recommended a book was because I was a good reader and it was probably the best approach for me. I thought that it showed an uncaring attitude, an unwillingness to listen and a lack of preparedness to deal with my problems.

43. I also thought that the service provided by CBERS was too close to the Christian Brothers and a waste of time. I started seeing a private psychologist for a while. She was excellent. In particular, she helped me to understand how to interact with women, which I didn’t know. I sent her bills to CBERS and they were not happy with that. I received a letter from Mr HOWARD dated 6 December 1999 that said that I was in breach of the counselling policy because I had stopped seeing him and started seeing another counsellor.

Slater & Gordon class action

44. I was also involved in the Slater & Gordon proceedings which were brought against the Christian Brothers. I wasn’t one of the key plaintiffs and I wasn’t involved in the construction of the case.

45. The Christian Brothers eventually made an offer of $5 million. After taking out Slater & Gordon’s legal costs, the amount to be divided amongst over 200 victims was not significant. On 21 August 1996, Slater and Gordon sent me a letter to confirm my instructions to accept the Christian Brothers’ offer and to settle the claim by signing a Deed of Release [PS.0091.001.0033].

46. I was appalled and wrote to Slater & Gordon objecting to being forced to sign the Deed. It was a joke. I was particularly offended that the recitals to the Deed included an express denial by the
Christian Brothers of any wrongdoing and I advised Peter Gordon by facsimile of my objection to that denial.

47. Despite my objection the denial remained as part of the Deed.

48. I eventually signed the Deed of Release, and I was advised that by signing I was not permitted to make another claim against the Christian Brothers who denied any wrongdoing. I received $25,000 out of the settlement.

Archbishop Barry HICKEY

49. I went to see Archbishop Barry HICKEY, the Archbishop of Perth, four years ago. This meeting occurred after I had made a complaint through the Professional Standards Group. I think it was just me and Archbishop Hickey at the meeting.

50. We didn't speak about sexual abuse in detail at any point. I limited my complaint to the fact that I was brought to Australia as a 3-year-old even though the policy at the time was that nobody under five should be migrated. It was the Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association which brought me to Australia. I thought that Archbishop HICKEY would just laugh at me but he didn't. He listened to me and he offered me a personal cheque for $10,000. I understood that the payment was only in relation to my migration to Australia, contrary to the immigration policy.

51. I didn't pursue other avenues through Towards Healing. The main reason was because I had stayed with a devout Catholic family with six children after I left Clontarf and I had no complaint against them. In addition, their son, REDACTED was involved in the management of Towards Healing and I did not want to get involved.

Signature: ........................................ Witness: ..................................................
Redress WA

52. I made an application to Redress WA. **WA.0010.001.7439**

53. I found the application process to be onerous. I had to complete a book which was 14 pages. I had to provide so much documentary evidence. Fortunately that was not a problem for me. I included information about sexual abuse, emotional abuse and physical abuse. I received $45,000, which was the maximum amount. There were four categories of payments and I was in category 4 which was the highest. I found that the Redress WA process didn't provide justice. It provided an apology with numbers attached to it.

54. My complaint with this program was that it saw the state government on one hand provide an apology to us a victims while on the other hand cutting the maximum compensation available to individuals by almost half.

55. I was very angry about the fact that when a new government was elected it greatly reduced the amount of compensation we were to receive. We all put so much energy into recalling all these events and providing all the correct documents, a process which reopened old wounds.

56. We acted in good faith and then they pulled the rug on us. I found it reprehensible and disgraceful. I wrote to just about every cabinet minister at the time.

57. Subsequently the premier conceded that perhaps the government had cut the compensation too much. I felt that his position was almost calibrated to meet our concerns and criticisms.
Research and advocacy

58. I have been a keen researcher and advocate in relation to child migrants and the treatment of boys by the Christian Brothers.

59. As part of my research, I have studied the records of inspections of the institutions by the Child Welfare Department officers and questions in parliament about them. I have also looked into the deaths of boys at the Christian Brothers institutions in Western Australia.

60. I’ve made submissions to most the relevant inquiries in Australia. In 1996, I gave evidence to the Select Committee into Child Migration. In 1997 I made a submission to the House of Commons Health Committee on the welfare of Former British Child Migrants, and in 2000 I made a submission to the Australian Senate Inquiry into Child Migration. I have also been and continue to be involved with a US class action in which it is claimed that the child migrant scheme constituted child trafficking, slavery and involved various breaches of international law. I spend a lot of time assisting with research on the case. My major concern with is that the Christian Brothers Oceania province denied having run the institutions that I attended.

Signed:  

Date:  

Witness:  

Date:  

Signature: .........................................................  Witness: ..............................................................