



Royal Commission
into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse

Statement

Name Dr Christopher James Hallinan
Address Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation Teacher
Date 18 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 Christopher James HALLINAN and I was born in 1953.
3. I graduated from the Mitchell College of Advanced Education in Bathurst mid-year in 1974. I had a successful interview with the Catholic Education Office of the Diocese of Maitland in Newcastle and recall being offered a number of catholic school positions. I chose to be appointed to St Joseph's Primary School, Merewether (**St Joseph's School**) as the location appealed to me.
4. I started at St Joseph's School on 9 September 1974 teaching a Year 6 class. I recall being somewhat on the outer there as I was the only male teacher on staff and I was not a practising Catholic.

Fr Vincent RYAN

5. Father Vincent RYAN was one of two priests at St Joseph's Parish which was attached to St Joseph's School. I don't recall the name of the other priest. I believe Fr RYAN lived in the Presbytery on the school grounds.

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6. I occasionally saw Fr RYAN at the Church when I was required to attend school functions held there. He was the younger of the two priests and seemed to have more responsibility for engaging with children. For example, I knew he was responsible for the altar boys.
7. I recall seeing Fr RYAN on the St Joseph's School grounds at least once a week. He was usually out in the middle of the playground mingling with the students, both girls and boys. Not being Catholic I never really understood the school hierarchy and I had assumed it was part of his role to do playground duty. I don't recall observing anything untoward about his interactions with the children.
8. I don't recall ever having any personal interactions or conversations with Fr RYAN. He was not particularly friendly towards me. At the time I assumed he was aware I was not religious or that he may have found me intimidating as I was the only male on staff and am physically imposing because I am tall.
9. The principal at the time was Sister Margaret Anne. She was a good principal and a good person. I remember her being generous and kind.

Conversation with Gerard McDONALD and Scott HALLETT

10. In 1975 I taught a Year 5 class. Towards the end of 1975, possibly late in the afternoon, two of my students, Gerard McDONALD and Scott HALLETT approached my desk during class. The boys appeared nervous and fidgety. They told me that they wanted to tell me something and that it had to do with being an altar boy. I don't recall their exact words, but they indicated that Fr RYAN had sexually assaulted them on several occasions while they were attending altar boy practice. Altar boy practice was held at the Church, adjacent to the school.

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11. I remember both boys were very hesitant and somewhat sheepish in telling me this. I don't recall my exact words but I indicated to them to leave it with me and I would see what I could do about it. The conversation would not have lasted more than three to four minutes.
12. I don't know what prompted the boys to confide in me that day. I had built a good relationship with them over that year as their form teacher. They may have looked up to me as I was the only male teacher in the school.
13. I remember feeling out of my depth as I never received any specific training on how to appropriately deal with child sexual assault matters. I was young and inexperienced as a 22 year old teacher in 1975.

Meeting with REDACTED

14. Sometime after this, I don't know whether it was the very next day or a couple of days later, I was approached by REDACTED, the mother of one of my students, REDACTED. I believe I had just arrived at St Joseph's School in the morning and she met me in the middle of the playground between the Primary and Secondary School buildings. I don't recall her exact words but I understood from her that REDACTED had also been sexually assaulted by Fr RYAN. The conversation would have lasted about 5 minutes or so.
15. REDACTED was often at the school so it wasn't uncommon to see her there and we were on friendly terms. I believe she told me because she was concerned for REDACTED's welfare and wanted me to keep a close eye on him as his form teacher.
16. I got the impression I was one of the first people she had told and she was using me as a sounding board because I was not in the inner circle of the Catholic community. I don't

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recall her asking me to do anything with the information or that she intended to do something about it. I don't recall doing so but it is possible I told her I was aware that two other students had said they were assaulted by Fr RYAN.

17. Hearing that Fr RYAN had assaulted another student made me realise the magnitude and seriousness of the matter. I decided it needed to be handled in a proper way and that there needed to be an investigation or a written record. I thought I would start by interviewing the three boys to determine what had happened so the matter could be dealt with.

First conversation with Sister Margaret Anne

18. That day, after the class had begun their morning activities, I started to discreetly interview the boys. Shortly thereafter, if not immediately, Sister Margaret Anne appeared at the glass panel of the classroom door. She knocked, opened the door and requested that I see her outside the classroom. I remember being surprised to see her as it was unusual for class to be interrupted.
19. Outside the classroom in the hallway, Sister Margaret Anne asked me if I had been talking to the boys about their dealings with Fr RYAN. When I indicated I had, she directed me to stop talking to the children and their parents. I don't recall her exact words but she said something like it was a church matter and I was not to take any further part in it.
20. I don't know how Sister Margaret Anne knew I had been talking to the boys about Fr RYAN. I don't know how she knew I had talked to a parent, but I assumed she saw me talking to REDACTED in the playground or that REDACTE told her we had spoken.

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21. I recall feeling relieved that Sister Margaret Anne had taken responsibility for the situation as I felt out of my depth. I had a lot of faith in Sister Margaret Anne and I trusted that the matter would be dealt with and the Church would deal with Fr RYAN.
22. Shortly after this my parents were visiting Newcastle and we met for dinner at my Aunt's house. During dinner I told my father what had happened at St Joseph's School. I don't recall my exact words but I would have told him that a number of boys had said they were sexually assaulted by the parish priest and that the Principal had told me not to do anything as the Church was handling it. I remember my father was appalled by the Diocesan response and was concerned they would not deal with the matter effectively. He said something like 'this is a police matter'.
23. Soon after this, I recall running into two teachers from the St Joseph's Girls Secondary School. They seemed to be aware that there was some sort of incident between Fr RYAN and students at the school and that I had gotten involved.
24. I think I told them I was considering reporting the matter to police, which they were very cynical about. They left me with the impression it would be a waste of time because the Catholic Church was too powerful and influential. They were more experienced teachers than I was and had a better understanding of school and church politics.

Second Conversation with Sister Margaret Anne

25. Sometime after this, it could have been a couple of days or even weeks, Sister Margaret Anne asked to see me. She told me that the matter had been taken care of and Fr RYAN had been transferred to an administrative position. It was a very brief conversation and she made it clear I was to take no further action.

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26. I got the impression she had contacted me as a courtesy, and to reassure me the Church was doing the right thing so that I didn't take the matter any further. At the time I had no reason to believe this wasn't the case and I was comforted by the conversation.
27. At the end of the school year I chose to resign from St Joseph's School as I had the opportunity to travel to the UK and Europe.

Return to Newcastle in 1976

28. I returned to Newcastle in 1976 as my overseas trip was cut short. I sought to re-enter teaching with the Catholic Education Office, but was informed that it was not possible because there were no vacancies and none were anticipated. I was surprised because I had a number of offers from them when I first graduated. I recall wondering whether it had something to do with my time at St Joseph's School. In the end I secured employment with the NSW Public School system at Toronto West Primary School, now Biraban Primary School. By 1978 I resumed travel and was away from Australia for most of the period from 1980 until 1996.

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29. In 1997 I was working at Victoria University in Melbourne when I was contacted by lawyers representing the victims of Fr RYAN. I told them I was willing to provide confirmation of disclosures made to me in 1975 by students, however, I was never asked to make a formal statement or appear at Fr RYAN's trial.

Signed: 

Date: 18 August 2016

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