

Witness Statement

Name	Margaret Anne Geatches
Address	An address known to the Commission
Occupation	Congregational Archivist
Date	26 August 2016

- 1 My name is Margaret Anne Geatches.
- 2 I am a member of an Australian order of Catholic nuns, the Sisters of St Joseph of Lochinvar. The Sisters of St Joseph of Lochinvar are based in the Hunter Valley with the congregational offices currently at Lochinvar. There are also sisters in the Sydney Archdiocese, the Lismore Diocese, and elsewhere in Australia.
- 3 In 1995, I became the Assistant Archivist for the Sisters of St Joseph Lochinvar. In 2001 I became the Congregational Archivist, and I continue in that role today.
- 4 I make this statement in response to a request from the Royal Commission dated 12 August 2016 in connection with a hearing into Case Study 43. It has been prepared with the assistance of Gilbert + Tobin and counsel.
- 5 This statement is produced to the Royal Commission on the basis that it will be tendered and received in evidence by the Royal Commission pursuant to a Summons or Notice, and on the basis that the statement will be treated as evidence pursuant to the Commonwealth or State legislation applicable to the Royal Commission case study.

Background

- 6 I hold the following qualifications:
 - (a) Teachers Certificate from St Joseph's Novitiate, Lochinvar, 1957;
 - (b) Certificate in Liturgy from the Institute of Pastoral Liturgy, Brisbane, 1980; and
 - (c) Diploma of Teaching from SIGNADOU Teachers College, ACT, 1982.
- 7 From 1958 to 2016, I held the following positions:
 - (a) St Francis Xavier School, Belmont, Primary Teacher, Years 4/5, 1958;
 - (b) St Joseph's School, Carrington, Principal and Teacher, Years 5/6, 1959;

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- (c) St Joseph's School, Wauchope, Principal and Teacher, Years 5/6, 1960;
- (d) St Pius X School, Windale, Principal and Teacher, Years 5/6, 1961-1962;
- (e) Holy Family School, Merewether Beach, Teacher, Years 5/6, 1963;
- (f) St Pius X School, Windale, Principal and Teacher, Years 5/6, May 1963;
- (g) St Joseph's School, Gloucester, Principal and Teacher, Years 4/5/6, 1964-1966;
- (h) St Joseph's School, Denman, Principal and Teacher, Years 4/5/6, 1967-1969;
- (i) St Joseph's Primary School, Aberdeen, Principal and Teacher, Year 6, 1970;
- (j) St Joseph's Primary School, Lochinvar, Teacher Years 4/5, 1971-1973;
- (k) St Joseph's School, Merewether, Principal and Teacher, Year 6, 1973;
- (l) St Joseph's School, Merewether, Principal and Teacher, Year 5, 1974-1975;
- (m) St James' School, Muswellbrook, Principal, Teacher (Year 6) and Committee Member for development of a new school, 1976-1981;
- (n) St Joseph's School, Port Macquarie, Principal, 1984-1986;
- (o) St Joseph's Convent, Cardiff, Casual Teacher, 1987-1988;
- (p) Eastlakes Schools, Volunteer Librarian, 1987-1988;
- (q) St Joseph's Convent, Summer Hill, Superior, 1991-1992;
- (r) St Joseph's Convent, Morisset, House Duties, 1992-1993;
- (s) St Joseph's Convent, Bulahdelah, Parish Visitation, Nursing Home, Day and Pastoral Care, 1994-1995;
- (t) MacKillop House, Carrington, Public Officer, 1995;
- (u) St Joseph's Convent, Carrington, Assistant Archivist and later Parish Assistant, 1995-2001; and
- (v) Sisters of St Joseph's at Lochinvar, Congregational Archivist, 2001- present .

B During my career I have also served on the following educational and religious committees:

- (a) St Joseph's Primary School, Lochinvar, Representative on the Josephite Committee, 1971-1973;

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- (b) Catholic State Schools In Service Committee, Representative, 1976-1981;
- (c) Upper Hunter Sports Committee, Chairperson, 1976-1981;
- (d) National Centre for Religious, Annandale, Executive Secretary, 1988-1992;
- (e) MacKillop House, Secretary and Public Officer for the Board, 1995-1999; and
- (f) NSW Archivists of Religious Institutes, Committee Member, 2006.

Request for Statement

- 9 The Commission has requested that I provide a statement addressing complaints allegations, reports, suspicions or concerns of child sexual abuse concerning Father Vincent Ryan (Ryan), received by or known to me, including:
- (a) My recollection, if any, of conversations with the following persons in or around December 1975, in relation to complaints in respect of Ryan:
 - (i) Gerard McDonald;
 - (ii) Scott Hallett;
 - (iii) **CNC**
 - (iv) Mr Christopher Hallinan;
 - (v) Mrs Phyllis McDonald;
 - (vi) Sister Evelyn Woodward; or
 - (vii) any other person.
 - (b) The response, if any, to these complaints.
- 10 I have seen two previous accounts of my involvement with the matters raised by the Royal Commission:
- (a) a police statement I have given, dated 29 November 1995 (my 1995 statement); and
 - (b) an interview which I gave on 26 November 1997, which was transcribed (my 1997 interview).
- 11 I have reviewed my 1995 statement and my 1997 interview in the course of preparing this statement.

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1975 Reports regarding Ryan's Conduct

- 12 In 1975, I was the principal at St Joseph's Primary School at Merewether. At that time, Sister Patricia Jackson was my deputy, and Mrs Phyllis McDonald was my secretary. Mrs McDonald also had a child at the school. The Parish Priest at the time was Monsignor Patrick Cotter, and Ryan was the assistant priest.
- 13 In December 1975, on the second last day of the school year, St Joseph's had a sports day organised at a park which had sporting fields near the school. The excursion ran for the whole day, and it is my recollection that the students returned late in the afternoon. I did not attend the excursion with the students.
- 14 At around 3pm that afternoon, I heard the students returning to the school, and I heard a commotion at the top of the stairs. The source of the commotion was the students who had arrived back from the outing, who were very agitated and noisy.
- 15 I remember **CNC** the mother of one of the students, and Mrs McDonald, were also at the top of the stairs. Mrs McDonald told me that I should listen to what **CNC** had to say. I have a vague recollection that there were also other mothers present there who had returned to the school with the students, present also returning to the school with the children, but I do not remember their names.
- 16 Although I recall speaking to **CNC** I do not now have a clear recollection of what she said, but I do remember that she told me that Ryan had been touching some boys down at the park, and I believe she also mentioned that this had occurred in the sacristy as well.
- 17 I then spoke to the group of boys from year five who were near the stairs. Both Scott Hallett and Gerard McDonald were in that group. I do not recollect now exactly what the boys said, but they also told me that Ryan had been touching boys at the park, and that he had been touching boys for some time. Again I did not get a clear account of what had happened, but it was very clear to me from what they said and how they spoke to me that it was sexual in nature. I assured the children, and Mrs McDonald and **CNC** that I would do something about what they had told me, and that I would report it, to ensure that it did not happen again.
- 18 The boys then went back to their classroom, but I could hear that there continued to be some disturbance in the classroom. I then went to the year five classroom where the boys were, with their teacher, Chris Hallinan. My recollection is that when I came into the classroom, a group of boys were talking loudly, and they appeared to be trying to tell Mr Hallinan what they had told me. I then spoke further with the boys, who continued to talk about Ryan's conduct. It is my recollection that Mr Hallinan and I tried to settle the class down. The bell rang soon afterwards ending the school day and the students were dismissed.

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- 19 I believe I spoke further with Mr Hallinan about the issue after the students were dismissed, and I told him that I would look after it and do something about the issue. He seemed to me to be relieved that I was going to deal with the matter.
- 20 I also spoke to the deputy, Sister Patricia Jackson. I told her what the children had said, as well as what CNC and Mrs McDonald had said to me.
- 21 I recall that at that time I decided that I would speak to Sr Evelyn Woodward, another member of my congregation, about how to go about reporting what I had been told. Sister Woodward was a trained counsellor, and I thought that with her training and experience, she would have greater knowledge and skill to deal with the matter than I felt I had.
- 22 I recall telling Sr Jackson that I planned to speak with Sr Woodward, and she also thought that was a good idea.
- 23 That afternoon, I tried to reach Sr Woodward by telephone, but was unable to reach her. At that time Sr Woodward and I lived in the same convent in Merewether, and I spoke to her that evening about the matter.
- 24 I told Sr Woodward what I had heard at school that day. I recall that she said that she thought it best to notify Mons. Cotter, and she said that she would take the responsibility for doing this.
- 25 My recollection is that Mons. Cotter was away from the Merewether Parish that evening, and that Sr Woodward went to see him the following day.
- 26 Looking back on it now, I am very conscious that there was nothing in place at that time to provide me with any guidance about what I should do in those circumstances. Today I would be much better equipped to respond, and I would take any such report to the police as well as to Church authorities.

The Final Day of School

- 27 The next day, I attended St Joseph's Merewether for the last day of the school year. It is my recollection that the staff met at 8:30am that morning, as we did each morning for a meeting. I cannot recall the full conversation at the meeting that morning, but I seem to recall that I told the staff to let me know if Ryan appeared on the playground.
- 28 At around 2pm, Ryan celebrated the final benediction of the year. I recall noticing that there were no altar boys at that service. I remember feeling alarmed that he was still at the presbytery.
- 29 When I returned home after school that day, Sr Woodward told me that she had seen Mons. Cotter, that he had seen to the situation, and that Ryan had left the Parish.
- 30 Early in the following year, I was transferred to a different school, and I left the Parish in January 1976, to work in Muswellbrook. I did not see Ryan again before I left the parish.

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- 31 In January 1976, Sister Ursula Kauter replaced me as principal at St Joseph's Merewether. I did not speak to her about what I knew of Ryan because I understood that Mons. Cotter had taken action and Ryan had already left the Diocese. It is my recollection that I did not find out that Ryan had returned to the Diocese at the end of 1976 until many years later.
- 32 I understood that Ryan was going to Melbourne to get assistance with his problem. At that time I had no idea or understanding that paedophilia was a continuing condition. I thought then that someone would stop that behaviour once they had been caught and challenged about their conduct, or once they had received treatment.
- 33 I was aware that some of the parents, who had been there on the day of the school excursion, knew about what Ryan had done. I was later told that some parents knew about it before it was reported to me, but I cannot recall who told me that or exactly what they said.
- 34 Looking back, I regret that I did not take any further action in relation to the children in the school. I did not think then about getting counselling for the children who were involved, or talking further with the parents about what had occurred. I would do both those things today. Counselling was not available at our schools at that time.

Other Conversations

- 35 I have set out above all of the people I recall speaking to about Ryan on the day of the school excursion and the following day.
- 36 I have no recollection of speaking to ^{CND} as he was not present at the school on that day.
- 37 I have no recollection of speaking to any other parents or staff members at that time about Ryan and what the boys had said.
- 38 I do recall disclosing what I had been told about Ryan to the Congregational Leader at the St Joseph's Convent, Mother Cletus. I told her that I had had to report Ryan for a matter of sexual nature with some children in the school, and that Sister Evelyn had spoken to Mons. Cotter. I felt I had an obligation to tell her as the Superior of the congregation.
- 39 I have no recollection of having any conversation or discussion about Ryan with Mons. Cotter, Bishop Clarke or Bishop Malone. I had thought that Mons. Cotter would want to see me to ask for more detail, but I never heard from him.
- 40 I have read police statements provided by Mrs McDonald dated 31 August 1995 and by ^{CNC} dated 6 January 1990. I do not recall ^{CNC} Mrs Walters as she describes, but I may have done so.

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- 41 I understand that Mrs McDonald has said that I told her not to talk about the incident. I do not recall telling her or anyone else that they should keep what had happened to themselves. I was not working with Mrs McDonald after I changed schools in January 1976, but I would see her from time to time in the parish. She would often want to talk about Ryan with me. I would talk to her, but I had no further information about Ryan or what had occurred.
- 42 As far as I can recall, apart from Mrs McDonald, none of the parents of the children in the school ever raised the issue of Ryan's conduct with me again, after the day of the school excursion.

Further Information about Ryan arising in 1995

- 43 I did not see Ryan again until early 1995, when by chance he called in at a house where I was in Bulahdelah, as he was looking for the Parish Priest, Father Michael Malone. I hardly recognised him. He told me that he was in the process of transferring from Cessnock to Taree. He did not recognise me, and I did not remind him who I was.
- 44 A few weeks prior to Ryan's arrest in 1995, when I was talking to Sr Woodward about another matter, she told me that a complaint had been made concerning Ryan's conduct in 1975. I was not sure who the complaint had been made to.
- 45 Some time later in 1995 I was contacted by the police. On 29 November 1995, I met with Senior Constable Troy Grant, and I made a police statement setting out my knowledge of events surrounding Ryan in 1975.
- 46 I cannot recall having any further involvement with the police about this matter.

My 1995 Statement and my 1997 Interview

- 47 I have reviewed my 1995 statement.
- 48 I note that in my 1995 statement I recalled the order of events and the details of conversations around these events slightly differently. I have no reason to believe that the account I gave in 1995 to the police was inaccurate, or did not reflect my recollection of events then.
- 49 I have also reviewed a transcript of my 1997 interview, with Paul Firman, on 26 November 1997.
- 50 I note that in that interview I said that on the day of the excursion I tried to call Mons. Cotter. I do not now recall that, but I have no reason to think that what I said in that 1997 interview did not accurately reflect my recollection of events then.

Chris Hallinan Statement

- 51 I have read the statement of Christopher James Hallinan dated 18 August 2016 prepared in relation to Case Study 43 of the Royal Commission.

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- 52 I can see that his recollection of the events at the school differs from mine in some respects. I make the following comments in relation to his statement:
- (a) It was never my intention to suggest that Chris Hallinan could not take the matter further if he wanted to. I told him that I was going to take action myself and report the matter, which meant he did not have to;
 - (b) If I said anything to Chris Hallinan about not discussing Ryan, it would have been that he should stop discussing Ryan with the children in his classroom that day, because I was trying to settle the class down. I do not believe I told him that he should not discuss the matter otherwise; and
 - (c) Chris Hallinan never told me that he had received earlier complaints about Ryan abusing children. As the Principal, I should have been told about any complaints of that nature, which might have enabled me to take earlier action.

Signature	<u>M. A. Geatches</u>	Witness	<u>G. David Williams</u>
Name	<u>MARGARET ANNE GEATCHES</u>	Name	<u>GARETH DAVID WILLIAMS</u>
Date	<u>26 August 2016</u>	Date	<u>26 August 2016</u>

Signature	<u>M. A. Geatches</u>	Witness	<u>G. David Williams</u>
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