

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MNO

Support person present: No

1. My name is MNO My date of birth is 1969. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going to St Columba's College

2. I have a younger brother who is twenty-two months my junior. Prior to attending St Columba's in Largs our family stayed in Glasgow We later moved to rented accommodation when my father bought a pub. All the money my parents had was spent buying the pub. We subsequently moved to in Glasgow. I attended Notre Dame primary school.

St Columba's College, Largs

3. I went to St Columba's College approximately six weeks before my tenth birthday. I remained there for around a year and a half and was eleven when I left. There was a family connection with the Marist brothers as my father attended St Joseph's and I understand this was the reason for my brother and I attending St Columba's.
4. My mum and dad were separated and this was one of the primary reasons for my brother and I being put into boarding school. It was difficult at home up until they were divorced. It was deemed beneficial for all for us to attend there. At the time of us going to the College my dad had moved out of the family house and was living with a new

partner, who subsequently became his second wife. My brother and I were informed we were going to the school about four or five weeks beforehand.

5. Prior to going to St Columba's there was no predetermined examination and our attendance was paid for by my father. [REDACTED] and I started at the College together and left on the same day.

Routine at St Columba's College, Largs

First day

6. The first day I arrived I found it an alien experience. I did not want to be there, I just wanted to be at home. I tried not to go but there was no choice in the matter. I was trying to get used to the layout of the building, what the school was about and getting used to the other people there.
7. The building was made up of two separate houses. The partitioning wall between the houses was knocked down. One building was used for the dormitories, eating, watching television in the evenings and tuck shop. The other building is where the other brothers resided in the upper floor and the ground floor was where the three separate class rooms were situated.
8. As you walked into our building from the main entrance there was a television room on the ground floor to the right. This room, apart from the television, had some couches. On the left side of the entrance was an open room with a series of chairs around the room. This was where we said our prayers. The room behind that was the dining room, used occasionally by the brothers and apart from eating there it was rarely used.
9. There was a set of stairs facing the main entrance. Those stairs led you up the next two floors. The first floor consisted of dormitories one, two and three, along with Brother Germanus's room and a shower room. The next flight up consisted of

dormitories four and five. There was a sixth dormitory but it was not in use during my stay at the college. I think this was used when there were perhaps larger numbers of boys in residence in the past. The dormitories varied in size. Dormitory one had six beds, two had five beds and three had three beds. They were the main dormitories and four with three beds and five with six beds and were smaller and for younger boys. I started in dormitory four upstairs and then dormitory one on the first floor. [REDACTED] spent most of his time in dormitory two.

10. I got on well with the other boys in the College and I am still friends with one of the boys from my time there. I did not see any issues between the boys in the College, other than this normal boy behaviour.
11. Also on the upper floor was a washroom, a toilet, a larger room with sinks on the perimeter of two walls and a large bath in the other portion of the room. This was where we washed in the mornings and evenings.
12. There were eighteen boarders when we arrived and it was all boys. There were also day boys who attended the College from the local area, around six in numbers.
13. The Brothers that were at St Columba's when I was there were Brother Germanus, who was in charge of the boarders. He lived in the same building and had his own room on the first floor. At any time that I was at the College there were anything up to five Marist Brothers there, some came and others went. The remaining four during my time were Brother [REDACTED] MFW Brother [REDACTED] MNQ and Brother Arthur. There was Brother Robert who was younger, probably around twenty five years. Old. They resided in the second building.
14. It was a very strict regime at the College and you learned as you went along the rights and wrongs of life there. I do not recall any rule book or induction being available for new boys. My younger brother got into trouble one time by calling someone a pig and was sent to his room. This was quite early on during our stay.

Mornings and bedtime

15. We were woken in the morning by Brother Germanus coming into the dormitory and opening the storm shuttered windows. He would make his way from one dormitory to the next and then go upstairs to the dormitories there.
16. You would make your way upstairs to the washroom, get cleaned, brush your teeth and then back to your dormitory to get dressed. When dressed it was downstairs to the dining room for breakfast. After breakfast we had a short period before making our way through to the classes for school. We would be in class until lunchtime, around twelve thirty. All the pupils including day boys would make their way back to the dining room where Frank the chef would make us lunch.
17. After lunch there was a short break then back into the classroom. There was a break in the afternoon, before being back in the class until about 4:00 pm. Then there was some free time to do your own thing. We were given the freedom to be wherever we wished within the grounds. We ate dinner between 6:00 pm and 6:30 pm.
18. In the early evening there was time to watch some television and sometimes Brother Germanus would join us there. Around 8:00 pm there was prayer time and we would make our way to the room on the ground floor with seating around the room perimeter. Brother Germanus would lead us in the prayers.
19. After this there was some tuck time where we could have some of the sweets into the College. After this it was time to head to the dormitory to get ready for bed.
20. During the night Brother Germanus would be in his room but he would also supervise any issues at night. During the night the toilets were accessible but it was not always clear whether we were permitted to use the bathroom or not. His approach towards the boys was changeable. It all depended on his mood. Sometimes if you passed him

in the corridor he would say nothing. On other occasions as you passed it would be like a Spanish Inquisition as to why you were up, why you needed the bathroom at that time of the night. So it was all very confusing about bathroom access at night.

21. Brother Germanus mood swings meant you were always unsure. He was very strict as to what was acceptable during our time at St Columba's College. But even any rules you thought you understood would change as his mood changed. This left you with a fear of the consequences and a fear of the unknown. You never knew what the boundaries were.

Mealtimes/Food

22. For breakfast we were given porridge or corn flakes but you did have the option of bringing in your own cereal if you wished. This started when one of the boys started bringing in Shredded Wheat. This allowed the rest of the boys the freedom to bring what they preferred. This made it a bit more personal and you could have what you liked.
23. The lunches and dinners provided by the College were quite good. There was a cook available who made the meals. If you did not like anything that was put in front of you were able to leave it but you did without until the next meal time.

Washing/bathing

24. Apart from the washroom there was a room on the first floor between dormitories one and two in which there were a series of showers. There was an expectation that you would have a shower often, but boys being boys this was not as regular as it perhaps should have been.
25. When we did have showers Brother Germanus was very involved. He was the person that would supervise us showering. He would be checking who was in the showers, how long we were in the showers and who was replacing us in the showers. His idea

of supervision was to stand in the room and watch us. There were some shower curtains but it did not stop him standing there.

Trips and holidays

26. Other than being taken to what were called charismatic meetings, the only time we were out of the College was when Aldo Moroni died. The school organised a minibus and we travelled to his mum and dad's house for the funeral. On Sundays we would attend church on the sea front.

School

27. The class rooms at the College were made up of mixed ages. One was made up of primary seven in one room, six and five in another and four in the first class room. School usually started around nine o'clock.
28. Brother ^{MFW} who left the College during my time, was the teacher. Even as a young boy I could see that the man had a problem with heavy drinking. He was never angry, abrasive, abrupt or physically violent. He was just not fit for purpose.
29. Brother Arthur was our music teacher. He was very good and you learned a lot from him. He would take us to a weekly charismatic night in Greenock in the car. On occasions a lady with blonde hair would also travel in her car with the boys in the back seat. We were just happy getting out of the College for an evening. We would take our guitars and play some songs. I think he was true to the beliefs of the Marist Brothers.
30. Then there was Brother ^{MNQ} who was ^{SNR} for a time. He was the teacher and sometimes filled in for . If you were in class and he thought you were not paying attention or doing anything he saw as being wrong, you would have the chalk board duster thrown at your head. There were a couple of occasions he wanted me to go to Largs with him as he wanted to buy me some sweets. I did not know why he was buying me sweets or singled out for this treatment. I did not enjoy this and felt that there was something wrong with it. After the first couple of times, whenever he asked me to go back into town I declined and made excuses not to go.

31. There was another younger man there called Brother Robert. He would teach us boxing and some other sports. He would sometimes come up to the dormitory and play board games with us, like Monopoly. There was a sports hall to the right of the dormitory building, which we used for putting on plays at the College. This was also the room he would use for sparring. I never got to know him very well, I think it was because we arrived at different times.
32. Apart from the boxing we did take part in some other sporting activities. There was some football that we took part in but that was not in the College grounds. We did that at Largs and it was very sporadic. At the end of term there was a sports day for us to show our parents. This involved different activities including cross country relay, three legged race and the bean bag race. During the terms sporting activities was on a random basis and only increased in activity as the terms were coming to an end.
33. Then there was Brother Germanus. In the beginning he was not the official headmaster but that was the role that he took on in the College. He was the person who was running the place.
34. Without being too critical, on a curriculum basis I was taught very little while I was at the College. I learned how to play marbles and how to protect myself, but nothing to do with education. Brother MFW may as well not been there. Brother MNQ just put the fear of god into you that you were too scared to learn anything.
35. On some occasions if I was in trouble for perhaps talking in the classroom there was a room where you would be sent. This a former bedroom being used as a storeroom and was in the school building on the first floor where the Brother's rooms were situated. If I was punished and sent to the room the door was locked and I was left for a long time in the room. One of the occasions I was sent there I knew I was going to be there for some time and decided to have a look around. In the room I found a bottle of whisky, Teachers brand, which at that age I thought was one just for the teachers. Also in the room were more bottles of spirits hidden at different sites within the room.

Healthcare

36. During our time there we never met any doctors or dentists. Like a lot of young boys there were lots of cuts and scrapes. Even then there was no one with any training in first aid. I had an infection on my nose and there was something wrong with another one of the boys. We were taken by car to the local GP practice for treatment.
37. There was one gentleman who came to the home on a few occasions, I think his name was MFZ I am not sure if this was his first or surname. He was known to the staff and in particular Brother Germanus. Although he was known to the staff he did not dress the same, I would say he was dressed in normal day clothes in a suit. When he visited his interest was with Aldo Moroni. I am not sure what that interest was. He would ask to see Aldo up in his dormitory and on one occasion I recall Brother Germanus asking Aldo to leave the television room to go to the dormitory. MFZ was a young man with red hair. Aldo was not happy when this man visited, but I am not sure of the reasons why.

Religious instruction

38. On a Sunday the boarders who were left at the College at the weekend would all go to church. We would all assemble and be dressed for church. There were probably about six or seven of us who were there at the weekend and have to go to church.
39. There was an expectation that we would have to say prayers in front of your bed. This would be done in the evening prior to going to bed.

Work

40. After each of the meals we had responsibility to clear the dining area, including the washing of the dishes, to prepare everything for the next meal. We did not have to do any general cleaning as cleaners were employed, but we were expected to keep our sleeping area tidy. Each group would take turns in doing this chore, usually for a week at a time.

Birthdays and Christmas

41. The only thing we did at the school for Christmas was we put on a play for the parents. After the play was finished we were all off with our parents back home for the holiday period. I don't recall anything special being done for our birthdays. There might have been cards sent by family but there was no party or other celebration.

Visits/Inspections/Review of Detention

42. During my time at the College there were no visits from any social workers, medical or education authority. It seemed there were no checks made on Brother Germanus. It was as if the school had dropped off the radar of all relevant authorities. Even the other Brothers did nothing to check on Brother Germanus. If anyone did visit the College one of us would have been aware of it. Everyone in the College knew someone was visiting as the atmosphere always changed.

Family contact

43. When I first arrived at St Columba's I was really home sick, but initially I was not allowed to visit my parents at home. This eventually changed where we were allowed home perhaps every second weekend and as things progressed we were allowed home each weekend.
44. Mum sometimes came to visit us on a Sunday and we were allowed out with her. Sometimes we would go for ice cream at Nardini's and other times we would go for a drive in the car. If mums and dads visited they were not allowed in the dormitory rooms in our building. One time when my dad came to visit he went upstairs to the dormitory. When Brother Germanus found out he took me aside and told me that parents were not allowed up the stairs. He expected me to pass this message to my father. He felt this was his jurisdiction and did not like anyone being in his area of control.

45. There was another occasion when I was suffering from a heavy cold and was in bed quite ill. Some of the cleaners were aware of this and they rubbed some Vic's onto my chest to help with the cold. Brother Germanus got really angry with this. His anger was obvious and made it clear no one, including the cleaners, were to be in his domain.

Personal possessions

46. During my time within dormitory one there was a large fireplace in the room with a mantle on top. My bed was directly in front of the fireplace. At that time I had a small collection of toy cars. I placed a car on top of the mantle and nothing was said. I later put a second car and again nothing said. When I got to the stage I had several cars there and I came back to the room I found the cars were scattered on my bed. It was made clear then that the mantle was not my property and I was not to use it as my property and not to put my toys there again.
47. There were other times where my brother and I both collected Action Men. Brother Germanus was not happy with this and he would ask us why we brought in dolls. We tried to tell him they were action figures, but he would be derogatory in the manner of his reply and continue calling them dolls.
48. As far as our clothing was concerned. We would bring our own clothing to the College and we kept it in a wardrobe beside our bed area. We were asked to keep this area tidy. With regard to any uniform there was a school tie and a blazer. We used them when we ventured out of the College, perhaps to the charismatic nights. Our parents would buy these items along with many other things we were given on a list of requirements by the College.
49. We didn't take anything to the laundry. There was a system in place, but I can't remember what it was, but the clothes were laundered by staff.

Abuse at St Columba's College, Largs

50. The first time there was an issue with Brother Germanus was when I was in the dormitory. I was shaking my duvet and Brother Germanus came in and physically threw me aside. He told me he was upset as I was causing dust to form in the room.
51. At night time Brother Germanus would walk around the dormitories. One night I was lying awake. As he came to my bed he asked if I was sleeping. When I told him I wasn't he told me to go with him to his room. I got out of bed and followed him. There was a bed in the corner, a wooden desk, a wardrobe, rug, electric fire and an old chair in the centre of the room.
52. He was wearing his dressing gown and I was wearing my pyjamas. He sat on the chair and asked me to sit on him. He put his arms round in a cuddling motion. He then took his arms away from holding me and opened his dressing gown. I could see he wasn't wearing anything else. I was extremely uncomfortable at this time. He began moving his hips underneath me. He was erect and he was moving me around his penis. This went on for a long time, probably around ten minutes. Almost every two minutes I would tell him I was tired and wanted to go to my own bed. He refused and would say "just a little bit longer". This was repeated time and again. After several times of repeating this request he let go of my hips. As soon as he let go I got off him. I noticed when I got off, his head was against the back of the chair and his eyes were shut, his head was to the side and his mouth was wide open. I left him and returned to my bed. I promised myself I would never go back to his room ever again.
53. There were probably two perhaps three other occasions when he came into the dormitory and asked me to go with him to his room. I would tell him I was fine and just about to fall asleep. This was spread over the following four weeks or thereabouts. I knew I was never going back to that room. I knew this behaviour was not right. Sometimes when he came and asked if I was awake, although I was, I pretended to be asleep. I am not sure how often he asked this question as there were nights when I was actually sleeping. I think he eventually realised I was not going to back into the room.

54. I was aware that he was still walking around the dormitory but I am not clear if he took any other boys to his room. I could not talk about it to anyone as I did not fully understand what happened to me. The other boys if it happened to them, would feel the same as me and not want to discuss it. We just wanted to talk about cars and play games, all the natural things boys would talk about.
55. There was one night I was lying in bed and my friend who was in the bed next to me. We were throwing sweets to each other. As we did this Brother Germanus burst into the room, switched on the lights and was really angry saying something like "That's it". He then left and returned to his room. I knew instinctively that something was wrong and followed him to his room. I tried to plead with him but his answer to me was I was to return to my dormitory, remove my pyjama bottoms and lie across the bed. I returned to my bed and did as I was instructed. Brother Germanus followed me and was carrying a belt. He instructed my friend to remove his bottoms as well and lie on his bed. The other boys in the dormitory were aware and had their duvets right up to their head in fear. Brother Germanus proceeded to give me several strokes with the belt across my bottom. He was using his full adult strength in administering this. When he finished hitting me he repeated this with my friend. He then switched off the lights, slammed the door and stormed out of the room. When he left the atmosphere was like you could hear a pin drop.
56. Brother Germanus told me on several occasions that he was aware of where to hit a boy and that there would be no later bruising showing. It was his way of letting me know that he knew how to inflict pain without it showing. This was another example of how intimidating he was.
57. Brother Germanus also had an interest in how long and often I was using the toilet. Some of his questions was asking how many times I would wipe myself after being to the toilet. I would just tell him enough to make sure I was clean. He would reply that my bottom does not have to be completely clean. I would just move on. This was not on every occasion I used the toilet but quite often.

58. There were numerous times when you opened the door to leave the toilet Brother Germanus would be standing there. Sometimes he made it feel like you did not have permission to go to the toilet.

Aldo Moroni

59. There was a boarder at the school at the same time I was there who died. His name was Aldo Moroni. When he was there he stayed in dormitory five. At the weekends all of the other boys in his dormitory would be home and he was left in the dormitory on his own. He was a young boy, younger than the other boys, about seven or eight. There was no one in dormitory four next door, so during the weekend he was on that floor on his own.
60. This was the time when I was unable to be at home at the weekends and I went to Brother Germanus and said as he was on his own I was happy to go upstairs and spend the weekend with him. At first it was refused, but eventually he agreed to this. Aldo and I would play and throw things back and forward to each other. Aldo would smile and was really happy to have some company.
61. Aldo was a slight boy and one day he died very suddenly. He was a very lonely boy and as such I believe that the way Brother Germanus behaved, he would have homed in on him. I think this was part of the reason for me asking to go upstairs as I did not believe it was a good place for him to be on his own. Even at my young age I wanted to try and protect him in any way I could.
62. I am not aware of the reasons for his death. I was away one weekend and when I returned Brother Germanus was at the front of the building to greet me. He did not do this on any previous or later occasions when I returned. He walked me into the building and told me of Aldo's death. He then just walked off and left me with no further explanation. We all went to his family home following Aldo's death.

Reporting of abuse at St Columba's College

63. I could not understand myself what happened to me and did not know at that time how I would be able to tell anyone in an understandable manner. It was also such a close knit community I did not feel I was free to tell the other Brothers what happened and whether I would be believed. I felt if I spoke out I would be in trouble.
64. The first time I spoke about was only recently when I told my mother what happened. It was such a difficult thing to try and articulate what happened and how it affected you. The reason for telling her was because she was reading articles in newspapers about other incidents at institutions and she asked if anything like that happened to me. I did not go into details but did tell her something about it. I gave her as honest answer as I could. I did this about two years ago. Before this I could not bring myself to discuss or share anything to do with the school.

Leaving St Columba's College

65. When I left the College and returned home I was about eleven years old. When I was back home I went to the private day school at Dean House School, Great Western Road, Glasgow, where it was obvious I was so far behind. My father even tried to get me help there to bring me back up to the standard I should have been at. The rest of my primary and secondary education at Hyndland Secondary, I was always trying to climb a hill to catch up on everyone else. St Columba's stayed with me during my remaining years of education, in a very negative way.

Life after being at St Columba's

66. I left school at sixteen with no O-Levels. I did not know where I was going to go career wise. I worked for Stakis Hotels, which were taken over by Hilton Group. I started in the kitchen and progressed up the ladder to being in charge of [REDACTED]. I travelled throughout the UK with this career until I left and [REDACTED].

joined Tesco's. When I worked there I worked my way up to lead roles within the company.

Impact

67. I locked the incident away in a box in my mind. It was my way of dealing with it. I could not change what happened to me, but my outlook was to focus on what was coming. It had a profound effect on me. That along with learning nothing at the College followed where I was having difficulties in my subsequent education. I did not believe I had the ability to make anything of my life. It impacted on my self-confidence but I have since grown in stature and confidence as an adult.
68. I met my wife in August 1996 and we now have two children. My time in St Columba's affected my family life. I am very protective of my children. There is no possibility they will be exposed to any scenarios I found myself in.
69. I have been for counselling because I did suffer from some mental health issues. It did not really work for me I could not relate to the counsellor. I know that those problems did stem from my time at St Columba's, but have managed it as best as I can over the years which have passed.
70. I think that my time in St Columba's did have an effect on my religion. I was brought up with the Catholic faith and my experience dented those beliefs and my belief in myself.

Reporting of Abuse

71. My friend reported some things that he suffered to the police. He suggested that I do the same. This was during the first quarter of 2016. When they were coming to see me I told my wife about what happened to me. I am not aware of the current state of the inquiry and I have received no contact from them. I cannot recall at this time the

or the name of the officers involved. I do feel let down by the police investigation. They came to the house however, no update, nothing from them.

Lessons to be Learned

- 72. I think the single most important thing for the Inquiry to achieve is to reveal the truth. It should be about the culture and about the events. It should be factual as opposed to speculative. If this can be achieved it would be a great thing. There has to be acknowledgement of the failings, before, during and after my time in their care. The failings of those who should have been showing responsibility.
- 73. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed..... MNO

Dated..... 28/5/19