

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MGT

Support person present: No

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

**Life before boarding school**

2. I was born in [REDACTED] in Renfrewshire. My parents were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and we were what you would call a dysfunctional family. My dad was not an alcoholic but often had a drink in him and rarely at home and, when he was, there was a lot of fighting and arguing between them. Mum and dad often separated and when they did mum wasn't capable of looking after me.
3. I know now that my mum had issues and suffered from depression and would go to bed for days at a time. I loved my mum but she had issues and since my dad wasn't about I would be left on my own and would just wander about on my own. I was about five years old.
4. My dad met another woman who had a daughter and she made my dad adopt the girl. They then had a son of their own who is my half-brother.
5. I was at a nice primary school, St Anthony's in Elderslie. I was doing great there and I got on great with the other children. My grandparents often picked me up at school and it was basically them who brought me up. I used to also stay with aunts and cousins because of my mum's depression.

6. However, at the age of eight I was suddenly taken out of school and sent to the cesspit that was St Columba's in Largs. My dad had two brothers who had been there in the 60's and who had also gone to St Joseph's in Dumfries. I believe that may be why I was sent to St Columba's.
7. Also, my mum loved horse riding but fell off and ended up in hospital for six months. I remember visiting her and she couldn't walk. That may have been another reason I went to St Columba's. I had to get a special school uniform for St Columba's from a shop called Paisley's in Glasgow. I have no recollection of any social work involvement with our family at the time.
8. I was taken to St Columba's by, I think, my aunt and my mum. I remember that my mum was crying and I was upset and they left me with Brother Germanus. He told me he knew my uncles and my family and said he knew of my family who owned a [REDACTED] in Glasgow.
9. I think I had just turned eight when I went to St Columba's because I recall it was about a month or so after I had a wee party for my birthday so it would have been [REDACTED] 1977. A lot of other boys arrived at the same time as me and, as I recall, many of them were also new to the place.
10. St Columba's was run by the Marist Brothers though the only ones I recall are Brother Germanus, Brother Arthur, Brother <sup>MLS</sup>[REDACTED], Brother <sup>MNQ</sup>[REDACTED] and Brother <sup>MFW</sup>[REDACTED]. There was also a [REDACTED] Brother called <sup>MJZ</sup>[REDACTED] but he was only there for a short period.
11. There were fifteen boys there between eight and ten and the boys I recall being there were Aldo Moroni, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] who was from the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from Annan, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and <sup>MNO</sup>[REDACTED] who were brothers, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and <sup>MGQ</sup>[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] whose father was in the RAF.

**St Columba's, Largs**

12. I was taken upstairs and shown where I would be sleeping. It was a dorm with four or five beds. The beds were metal framed with a mattress and it was horrible. Brother Germanus had a room to the left of the dorm the door of which was always closed and he was what was called a dormitory brother. During the day he was always walking around with a hip-flask and you would often see him sipping from it. From the smell on him it was obviously alcohol he was drinking. The fact his bedroom door was always closed suggests to me he was always drinking at night as well.
13. Next to his room was a room with five or six beds while upstairs was a single room where a boy called Aldo Moroni slept on his own. Germanus never let any of the parents up to the dorms to see them as they would have seen how bad it was. The beds were like you would get in a prison and if you know the film "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" then that's what it was like that. He once went mad at a boy who did show his parents upstairs. I don't recall that boy's name and, while I don't remember seeing Germanus slap that boy it was his habit to do so as he slapped boys regularly.
14. St Columba's was a big mansion where all the boys slept. In a house next door was the place we went to school. There was lots of land there and the boys used to run around in the woods playing, kick a ball about or play at being Starsky and Hutch.

**Routine at St Columba's, Largs**

15. We got up about 7:30 or 8:00 am by a bell being rung. We then got washed and dressed then went down for breakfast. I recall that we had to pray to Marceline Champagne who founded the Marist Brothers but I don't recall if we did that in the morning.
16. We would then go to school then stop for lunch and then back to school though I don't recall what time we finished school at as we were always in the same building. We would play after school and lights out were at 9:00 pm.

*Mealtimes / Food*

17. As far as food was concerned you got what you got. Breakfast would be porridge with tea and toast but the main meal was a big bowl of cottage pie or whatever which would be put in the middle of the table. If you didn't like it then tough and if you complained then Germanus slapped you. You learned not to complain.
18. Germanus knew how to slap a boy without leaving bruises. He was a master at it. You learned to eat what was put in front of you because if you didn't you starved or got slapped. It was always Germanus who slapped you for this. He wouldn't say anything to you, he just slapped you. It happened to me two or three times over the years but I saw it happening to others at least once a month. Everybody ate together in the dining room on the ground floor though the Brothers didn't eat with us. I think Germanus would join us for breakfast.

*Washing / bathing*

19. Getting washed at St Columba's was a disgrace. There were no showers. All there was was a single normal size bath for fifteen boys and one wee toilet. There was also four small sinks next to the bath. You would have three or four boys in the bath at the same time with one of the Brothers, normally Germanus, standing over them. He would be telling them to rub soap over each other but he himself didn't actually touch them. It just seemed seedy looking back on it.
20. The boys in the bath would be seven or eight years old and would be scrubbing each other's back. Looking back, it was obviously a strange set up that should never have been. The place should have been fitted with showers. I think we bathed once a week. There was also a series of tiny sinks that we used each morning for a quick wash with cold water.



*Clothing / uniform*

21. We wore a uniform of cap, shirt, shorts and socks. If we went out anywhere we would also wear a blazer.

*School*

22. Brother **MFW** was the teacher and was always drunk with a fag hanging out of his mouth. You could smell the drink off his breath. I had dyslexia though it wasn't known at the time. I was behind with my school work because of it but they didn't understand that and thought I was just being lazy.
23. On one occasion Brother **MFW** thought I was being lazy and called me out of the class and gave me three strokes of the cane on the hand though caning was probably common in schools in those days. Boys would be caned for any wee thing in the school like laughing or talking in class. When Brother **MFW** caned me he thought it was funny and said "That's you got the cane **MGT**".
24. Brother **MNQ** was one of the teachers though I have no recollection of him teaching me anything. He used to use the big old-fashioned wooden dusters which he would throw at you for no reason. It was like being hit with a brick. It happened to me several times and regularly to others.
25. I have no recollection of learning anything there and I don't recall learning to read and write. I think I was eleven before I learned to read and write. Brother Arthur, who was a very gentle man, would teach us music and tried to teach us how to play the recorder.
26. There were a few Italian boys who would come in for school during the day. They were boys from Gourock and Largs.

*Trips / Holidays*

27. The only trip I recall is that we once all went to St Joseph's in Dumfries which was also run by the Marist Brothers. We didn't have a school bus but Brother Arthur had a Morris Minor Traveller and used to take us to Charismatic Meetings in either Greenock or Gourock.
28. There were fifteen of us in the traveller and we used to love going to these meetings simply because it got us out of the school. There was a really nice girl there in her twenties who used to meet us. She would play the guitar and sing songs for us about God loving us.

*Birthdays and Christmas*

29. Birthdays and Christmas weren't celebrated as far as I recall

*Visits / Inspections/ Review of Detention*

30. We didn't get visits from anybody. If any parents dropped their kids off after a weekend at home Germanus would never let the parents in to look at the place and see that there was only one wee bath with four small sinks and one toilet. Germanus went mad at the one boy who did bring his parents in though I'm not sure what happened to him.
31. I think one of the reasons we didn't get visitors was that we went home most weekends. I went home sometimes and would travel alone on a bus. These days you simply wouldn't allow children of that age to travel alone on such a long distance.
32. I would get the bus from Largs to Glasgow and I just hoped there would be somebody there to meet me whether it was a cousin, aunt or maybe even a neighbour. That would be on the Friday night and I would have to go back to the school on the Sunday afternoon. Some boys never went home as they had nowhere to go.

*Healthcare*

33. There was no health care for us. For example, my pal MNO took a cold or a flu one afternoon and went to his bed. Cleaners used to come in and clean the place and one of them saw MNO in his bed coughing and rubbed Vic into his chest to help his breathing. Many years later MNO told me about that incident and said Germanus had gone mental that the girl had tried to help because he wanted full control. MNO didn't say exactly how Germanus went mental.

*Running away*

34. A lot of the boys were home-sick and crying. I would be crying at times as well but I had nowhere to run away to and nothing to run away to.

**Abuse at St Columba's, Largs**

35. There was a play hall where you played sports. Germanus or one of the other Brothers would put boxing gloves on us and make us box in the ring. I seriously doubt that they had a licence to teach boxing or knew how to do it.
36. There was a boy called [REDACTED] and Brother Germanus got him and me to start fighting. [REDACTED] knocked me out and I was lying flat on the ground. I recall being slapped by Germanus to wake me up and boxing in the place was abandoned after that. There was no doctor or anybody who knew what to do when a child had been knocked out.
37. There was a young boy in the school called Aldo Moroni. He was actually too young to have been there in the first place. He was born [REDACTED] 1972 and on [REDACTED] 1980 he died at the age of seven. In my opinion that was much too young to be in a place like St Columba's.
38. One night at about 11:00 pm I needed to go to the toilet which you got to by leaving the dorm and going up two flights of stairs. It was the only toilet in the building. As I

ran upstairs I could hear screaming and shouting. It was Aldo Moroni shouting "Let me in. Let me in". He was crying so much.

39. I put my head round the corner, looked around the corner along the corridor to the wee toilet and saw Germanus with Aldo. It was clear that somebody had locked themselves in the toilet and Aldo was kicking the door trying to get in. I do not know who was in the toilet. Aldo was a small, weak boy with glasses and Germanus had a hold of the back of Aldo's pyjamas. I don't think either of them knew I was there.
40. Germanus started shaking Aldo like a rag doll and Aldo was screaming "Leave me alone. Leave me alone". Germanus started smacking Aldo as hard as he could on the backside and continued to shake him like a rag doll shouting "Stop it. Shut up".
41. Aldo's glasses came flying off and he continued screaming. He was kicking the toilet door and shouting "Please let me in. Please let me in". Germanus continued shaking and slapping Aldo as hard as he could on his backside shouting "Behave yourself".
42. I was only a wee boy myself and I was terrified and ran back to my bed where I wet myself. Either later that night, or maybe the next night, there was a commotion in the middle off the night that got everybody's attention. Everybody was out of their beds and all the Brothers seemed to be there.
43. They were telling us to get back into our beds and then we saw one of the Brothers carrying what we all assumed was Aldo. It was difficult to say for sure it was him as he was all wrapped up in a blanket with a towel over his face. However, whoever was being carried was Aldo's size and they were coming down from the area where Aldo was the only person who slept.
44. Germanus was three steps behind and his face was ashen. I next heard that Aldo was in hospital where he consequently died. It may be that it was a couple of nights after Germanus assaulted Aldo that I saw him being carried down the stairs but it was within that time line. I don't know which hospital he was taken to but my own opinion was that he likely died of shock.

45. Aldo was weaker than the other boys and was very vulnerable. While the rest of us boys had our dorms downstairs with five boys in each, Aldo was in a room upstairs on his own. I don't know why that was but I've always thought it suspicious that a vulnerable wee boy had a room to himself in a place with such predators.
46. Another thing about Aldo is that he didn't go home at the weekend and would be on his own, a wee boy in that room, while Brother Germanus would still be there. It is my belief that during those weekends Germanus was abusing Aldo, either sexually or physically, though I can't actually prove that. Aldo came from Dunoon which was just across the water and there was no reason why he could not have gone home. I'm sure that animal Germanus made sure Aldo stayed there.
47. There was a man, early twenties, tall skinny with [REDACTED] hair who I saw come to visit Aldo on at least two occasions though I know from talking to others he was there more often. When I saw him, one of the other boys asked Aldo if it was his dad but Aldo said "that's not my dad. I hate that man and I hate my mother too". This man was supposed to have something to do with the Marist Brothers but didn't wear a robe. I say this because it was only them who were allowed in the place.
48. Germanus had a big buckled belt that he used to put the fear of God into us wee boys. One night, after lights out, we were carrying on throwing paper aeroplanes about. Germanus must have heard us laughing and came in, turned on the light and shouted "What's going on".
49. MNO [REDACTED] was in the bed next to me and Germanus pulled him out of his bed, pulled his pyjama bottoms down, bent him over the bed and hit him about fifteen times on the bottom with the belt. MNO [REDACTED] was screaming. He then grabbed me, pulled my pyjamas down and did the same thing to me.
50. It was agony. He could have killed us. A wee boy getting that sort of punishment could have suffered a heart attack. This happened long before the incident with Aldo.

51. On another occasion we were out on a walk and I said something, Germanus shouted "That's the wrong word" then punched me full force on the face sending me flying. I was sparked, absolutely stunned. Why would a grown man do such a thing to a wee boy.
52. There was another occasion which I didn't realise what it was about till years later. I had a rash between my legs and went to Brother Germanus and told him. He told me he would fix it and told me to come into his room.
53. Instead of just giving me some cream he told me to take all my clothes off and lie on his bed. He then gave me some cream and told me to rub it on the inside of my legs. So there I was, a wee boy, lying naked with my legs open while rubbing cream on to the inside of my legs.
54. As I was doing this he was clearly masturbating under his cassock as he watched me saying "Just keep doing that". When he finished what he was doing he said "That's enough". It was only a few years later that I truly understood what had happened. Germanus was a beast, an animal. That was the only time he sexually abused me even though he didn't actually lay his hands on me.
55. I'm aware that not long after I left the school Germanus also left, going to another Marist place in Irvine Road, and was replaced by Brother <sup>AKU</sup> who was there for about the last two months of my time at St Columba's. The impression I was left with was that Germanus was phased out by the other Brothers who were probably sickened by his behaviour, especially to Aldo.
56. When I was in my twenties I was at a party and met an Italian guy who was from Greenock. I don't recall if he gave me his name. He was about nine years older than me. We got talking and I told him that I had gone to a school that was near where he grew up. When I told him where it was he said "I went to that school as well. That Germanus was a paedophile". I hadn't said anything to him about Germanus and the conversation didn't go any further.

57. Apart from the physical and sexual abuse the mental abuse was awful. I felt I was never the same after I left that school. I had no confidence and my education got worse. I had been an only child, a quiet child, but I was okay before I went to St Columba's. There was nobody I could talk to about it. Germanus had the run of the place.

### **Leaving St Columba's, Largs**

58. Shortly after Aldo Moroni died, about 1980, I started at another school at the end of that term in the West end of Glasgow. That was a dump as well. It was before December 1980 because John Lennon was shot then so I started the school in the [REDACTED] of that year.
59. I can't recall how I left St Columba's that summer in 1980 but I probably just got a bus home. My mum stayed in a flat in Pollokshields but she kept moving about and I mainly stayed with my grandmother. She moved to [REDACTED] which is near [REDACTED] and my grandparents had a farm nearby. My mum was in a cottage about ten miles from them.
60. The local school was St Cuthbert's in Johnstone or Elderslie which is where I would have gone had I not gone to St Columba's. I had already gone to three other schools by then including Holyrood Secondary in Glasgow when I stayed with my dad and his young wife.

### **Life after school**

61. I went to work in the fruit market loading vans in Glasgow [REDACTED], I was a porter. I couldn't go to college because of my dyslexia though it hadn't been diagnosed at that time. Letters and numbers were all jumbled up to me and my spelling is still poor.
62. I bought a burger van that I ran in [REDACTED] in Glasgow before going back to the fruit market. Then my mum sold her house and moved to Ireland on her own. However,



she became ill with cancer so I moved there as well and looked after her on and off for four or five years.

63. My mum got better and I went back to Scotland after that and got a job in a real estate agents as I knew about buying and selling. My mum fell ill again and I then had to go back to Ireland to look after my mum's ten horses and three dogs. I was told my mum only had three months to live
64. When my mum died I ended up in hospital with a Crone's Disease flare up. I lost about two stone and I had to have two blood transfusions in Hairmyres Hospital. I then returned to Ireland but after a week again ended up in hospital for another blood transfusion.
65. I sold up my mum's place and went to Spain where I worked for a while. I bought a house in England to do up and sell but when I went to sell it last year I had to get a pace-maker fitted so that's on hold for just now.

### **Impact**

66. The beatings and what happened to me in St Columba's certainly affected my life. I can't blame St Columba's for my parents' behaviour that put me in there but all that happened was that I went from one fire to a bigger fire. It knocked my confidence and affected my life. If the school had recognised my dyslexia and done something about it I could have gone to college or got a degree instead of loading vans.

### **Reporting of Abuse**

67. I have an uncle who my dad doesn't get on with. I was living down near where he lived and went for a drink with him one night to try and keep the family peace. We got talking and he started talking about The Marist Brothers. He told me he had gone to St Columba's and said he had been abused by Brother Germanus.



68. When I told him I had also gone to St Columba's he acted as if he had not previously known that but I knew that he did know it. He said he didn't want to talk about what had happened to him. I told him I understood that as things had also happened to me. I then told him about Aldo Moroni.
69. What I didn't know while talking to my uncle was that he had already spoken to the Marist Brothers and was trying to get compensation from them. Without my permission or knowledge he told the police about Aldo Moroni. He didn't tell them anything about what had happened to him, just what I told him about Aldo Moroni.
70. Two police constables, one of whom was called Lyndsay Watters from Kilmarnock Police Office, flew down to Cambridge and interviewed me. Lyndsay Watters also spoke to MNO at his house in Peebles but I don't know what he said to her. This was about 2016 and I contacted MNO before I actually gave his name to the police. I didn't want to do so without his permission.
71. I later got an e-mail from Lyndsay Watters saying Aldo had died from blood poisoning and that she had spoken to his parents who said they didn't want the past dragged up. I e-mailed Lyndsay Watters a couple of months ago saying I wasn't happy about her investigations but haven't had a reply. I no longer have copies of those e-mails after changing my e-mail address last year.

### **Records**

72. I have never known how to get hold of my records but my own belief is that St Columba's will have destroyed any records they have to cover the tracks of what they did.

### *Counselling*

73. Everybody has their own problems and so many things have happened to me because of my family and I've always felt that if I went for some sort of counselling they just

wouldn't believe me. I would love to have somebody to talk to about what's happened to me in my life but I just think everybody has family problems and things going on in their life.

### **Lessons to be Learned**

74. St Columba's was a cesspit. It should never have been allowed to exist. There should have been inspections but Brother Germanus would never have allowed that to happen. For a place to have fifteen boys and only have four small sinks, one wee bath and one small toilet was a disgrace. In fact a portaloo would have been bigger.

### **Aldo Moroni**

75. Somebody has to be made to explain what happened to Aldo Moroni. It's a disgrace that it was just swept under the carpet. I've always had it in my mind that I didn't want to talk about what happened to Aldo. I didn't want officials going to his parents' door telling them that their son had been abused in St Columba's. I didn't feel I could put anybody through that.
76. It was only years later that I could get my head round what had happened and realised it was my duty to try and get to the bottom of what happened. I felt that people knew what had happened but had chosen to ignore it. Somebody has to explain exactly how Aldo died and why the investigation into his death was never taken any further.

We need to know if there was an investigation into his death in 1980 and is there evidence of that investigation. If so then that evidence should be revisited with perhaps today's technology being put to use. We need to know why Germanus was phased out so soon after Aldo died.

77. 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.

MGT

Signed

Dated

28/5/2019