

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MLK

Support person present: No

1. My name is MLK. My date of birth is 1939. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. I am providing a statement in relation to my nephew's experiences at Fort Augustus Abbey.
2. Many of my recollections are based on information given to me by my nephew and his family.

Background

3. I am a Nursing Sister in an order dedicated to the care of the sick and dying. I was a nursing sister up until twelve years ago. I retired from nursing when I was 61 and went into administration as a provincial superior over the sisters in the UK. In the last six years, I was on the congregational leadership team. I was the assistant congregational leader.
4. In the late 1970s, my sister and her husband were working in Brussels. Her husband was with the Scottish Commission for Agriculture and Fisheries. He was travelling a lot at that time. Their son, MLL, was at school in Brussels but wasn't coping very well. He was at the European School, which was huge. He then went to the French School to try and help him. He didn't manage well there either. After a lot of discussion with MLL, my sister and her husband decided that he would go to boarding school at Fort Augustus to give him a better chance.

5. I think my sister and brother-in-law decided on Fort Augustus because it was in Scotland and it was a Catholic school. They had been to visit, but I don't think they'd seen the dormitories. I don't think they would have sent MLL there if they'd seen the dormitories. They were like an army boot camp.
6. It was a big thing for MLL and his family. He has three sisters. There is about a year between each of them. One of his sisters wasn't coping with the European School at the same time. She went to a school in Perthshire. The parents were still in Brussels. The father couldn't just up sticks and come home. At that stage, I was living and working in Edinburgh. I was the contact person for the children at half term. My sister always tried to come back to Edinburgh for the summer holidays. She and her husband kept a house in Edinburgh, so that the children would have it for the holidays. I left in 1986. I don't know the specific dates when MLL was at Fort Augustus.

Fort Augustus Abbey, Inverness-shire

7. MLL started at Fort Augustus when he was about thirteen. He was there for about four years. Father MMF was SNR the whole time that MLL was there. I think there must have been around four hundred pupils in the school. There were a lot of secular staff in teaching roles. I went there for the first time when MLL was fifteen. He showed me around the school. That was the only time I went to the school.

Routine at Fort Augustus

Mornings and bedtime

8. MLL used to grumble about getting up early. I suppose they had to go to Mass before school. The dormitory was just horrific. I saw them myself when MLL showed me around. MLL came from a fairly comfortable family, although I wouldn't say they were well off. Being the only boy, he always had his own bedroom. He had everything. I remember commenting to my sister that she was paying money for those dormitories..

The dormitories were terrible. They were so basic. There was nothing. Just an iron bedstead and a little locker. There wasn't even a chair. There were at least twenty beds in the dormitory. It was a long room, just like a corridor. The bedsheets looked horrible. They were just little cotton blankets and it was a cold place, Fort Augustus.

9. I remember asking my nephew how he felt after all of the abuse came up a few years after he left school. He said he used to cry himself to sleep at night under the covers. I can understand why he did that, having left home with three sisters who just thought he was wonderful. They thought the world of him. I entered religious life when it was very strict, but we didn't have anything like that. We had nice accommodation.

Mealtimes/food

10. To this day, MLL won't eat anything unless my sister has prepared it. That's how this has affected him. Recently, MLL told me that other boys used to put things into his soup and his meals.

Washing/bathing

11. The showers were all communal. There was no privacy. I saw them when I visited the school. For a public school, it was just horrendous. I don't know whether parents didn't see it. I think the whole lack of privacy must have been very hard. The showers were terrible.

Schooling

12. MLL didn't really describe how a day at Fort Augustus might pass. He never spoke much about the academic side of things. He didn't do well academically. I would've expected him to do well, given the start he had at primary school. The junior school he attended in Brussels was a good school and he did okay there. MLL was good at languages. He was very good at art and they encouraged his art. From Fort Augustus, he went on to the art college in Edinburgh.

Sport

13. MLL was into sports. He was in one of the cadets, I think it was the Air Force. They did a lot of things on the lake. Loch Ness was nearby. They did a lot of water sports. Outdoor activities and sport were very much encouraged. They played rugby mostly.

Religious instruction

14. I think religion was a big part of the daily routine. They had Mass every morning. I think MLL in Scotland before the family moved to Brussels MEV.

Healthcare

15. I met the matron when I visited the school, but I think she's dead now. I can't remember her name. I think her role was the physical health of the boys, making sure they were healthy. If a boy was ill or injured, he would go to her. The cane was used a lot. After he left the school, MLL told me about a boy whose hands were bleeding after getting the cane. I asked whether he went to the matron and MLL said that he did, but she just bandaged his hands and nothing further was done. MLL also told me that another boy ended up in hospital with injuries from the abuse, from the cane. MLL didn't know whether the boy's parents were informed. MLL thought it was all covered up.

Visits/inspections

16. There was no problem with me going to visit. MLL showed me around everywhere. I was with him on my own. He took me down to the lake. At that stage, he seemed quite happy. I didn't pick up on anything. That must have been within months of MLL having reported the abuse to his sisters, which he did when he was fifteen. I don't know whether there were inspections of the school, but MLL used to tell us that bishops used to visit a lot. He named Bishop Conti, for example.

Abuse at Fort Augustus

Bullying

17. Last year, [MLL] told me about the bullying that went on amongst the boys. The masters must've known. That was awful. It involved putting things in food, stealing from other boys. They'd cough things up and put it in food. They'd put urine in the food. It was all kinds of things. I suppose it was considered as pranks in those days. It was terrible.
18. A long time after he left the school, I realised that it hadn't been a happy time for [MLL]. He didn't speak to me about it at the time. I can't understand how the matron there didn't pick up on a lot of the issues. Some of it was very violent and students had injuries. That should have put up a red flag to whoever was in charge. There was terrible behaviour. Parents were paying thousands of pounds to get the best education and it was disastrous really.

Physical abuse

19. Last year, [MLL] spoke about physical abuse by the cane on the hands, bottom and back. There was a boy who ended up in hospital with injuries to his back. Maybe the parents weren't informed, but all these records should have been kept. I don't know where the records went from Fort Augustus, but they must be somewhere.

Father [MEV]

20. Father [MEV] was [MLL]'s housemaster. At that time, priests weren't allowed to concelebrate Mass together. They had to do it on their own. A few years ago, [MLL] told me that Father [MEV] asked him to [REDACTED] every morning. Afterwards, they used to have breakfast together and that's when the abuse started. [MLL] was a very attractive young man, so I can see how it happened.

21. I don't know what time of day Father [MEV] tended to abuse [MLL]. He seemed to have breakfast with him after they [REDACTED] and I got the feeling from [MLL] it happened then but I never asked him for more details.
22. [MLL] didn't name anybody else who was abused by Father [MEV]. He knew other boys who had injuries from physical abuse. [MLL] told me that he knew other boys that were sexually abused as well. I think he became aware of them when the television documentary was made. There were two brothers attending the school who [MLL] seemed to be close to after the programme was made.

Reporting of abuse at Fort Augustus

23. [MLL] had been at Fort Augustus for a few years before he mentioned the abuse to anybody. He was fifteen when he told his sisters, who were attending another school in Scotland. They were horrified about what was happening. They told their mother. The parents came home. Obviously, they were very distressed. My sister told me this when she got back to Scotland. She said that there had been an incident at Fort Augustus.
24. When my sister came home to investigate it she said they [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] It needed to be somebody he was okay with. My parents were still alive and they had a very good GP, who I knew as a friend. My sister spoke to her and she agreed to see [MLL], if [MLL] wanted it. [MLL] knew her from visiting my parents. She was based in South Edinburgh. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] My sister and her husband were happy that there was a doctor doing this. The medical practice has since closed down. When the documentary was made, I think the producers tried to obtain [MLL] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] but without success.
25. I didn't speak to [MLL] about the abuse at that time. It came to my attention when my sister asked me to travel up to Fort Augustus with them. She told me the reason why they were going. I was very shocked. She didn't go into any detail. I think she just told

me that he had been physically and sexually abused by Father [MEV]. I went with my sister, brother-in-law and [MLL]. They had made an appointment to see the [SNR], Father [MMF].

26. They went up to Fort Augustus to meet the [SNR]. They asked me to go with them so I could have time with [MLL] whilst they were with [SNR]. I had never been there before. [MLL] showed me around the school and the dormitories whilst his parents were in the meeting. I was horrified by the dormitories. They were terrible, they were like a prison camp.
27. I think they discussed what had happened to [MLL] with Father [MMF], but I wasn't present they were obviously very upset about it, especially his dad. His dad took it worse. We must've gone up during the summer holidays because there were no other students around. It was a matter of weeks after [MLL] had told his sisters about the abuse. His parents had to come over from Brussels.
28. [SNR] was Father [MMF] who I gather has died since. He denied ever meeting us. I was there as a witness and I can still see him saying goodbye to us and that it would never happen again. When he was interviewed on the television years later, he completely denied that he had ever met us. That upsets me too, the denial. I didn't speak to Father [MMF] myself. The only time I saw him was when we were leaving and he came to see us off. At that time, I was still wearing a religious habit. I didn't meet any other monks or staff members.
29. [MLL]'s abuser was Father [MEV]. At the interview with Father [MMF], his parents were told that he was being moved to Australia and he would have no more contact with the school. My sister told me that at the time. There was no further follow-up with the parents and no external agencies were involved. [MLL] only had a year remaining so he went back and finished his time there after the summer holidays. I was surprised he was going back, but my sister said they'd assured him that Father [MEV] wasn't there any longer. Father [MFF] must've told them that. My sister told me that he had been moved to Australia.

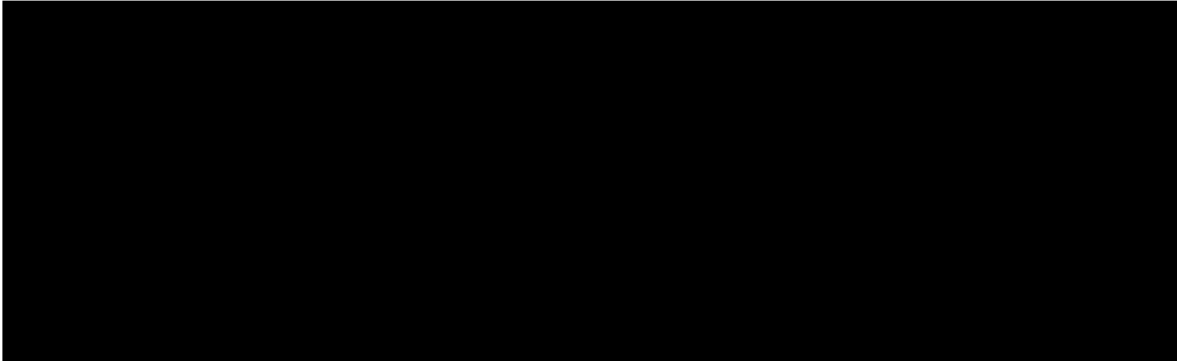
30. I wasn't happy about MLL going back for his final year. The dormitories had really upset me. My sister said they didn't have much option and he only had a year to go. MLL seemed okay about going back. I think he was reassured that Father MEV was gone. It hadn't happened with any of the other monks. When he showed me around whilst his parents were with Father MMF, he seemed happy enough. During that time, he didn't speak to me about the abuse. I didn't know much about what had happened at that time. My sister had just told me it was an incident. I suppose I was a bit naïve at the time. I've learned a lot over the years, working with people. It's just horrible. Every time you open the newspapers, it's there. I've stopped buying the Catholic newspapers because every time you open them, there's something else about abuse.
31. There was no discussion about reporting it to the police when MLL was still at school. My sister did speak to the bishop at that time, LRM. He was a bishop at the time, then he went on to become a cardinal. Cardinal O'Brien and Archbishop Conti were very involved in Fort Augustus. They must've known what was going on.
32. Not long after MLL disclosed the abuse, my sister requested a meeting with LRM at his residence in Edinburgh. She spoke to him. She said that from the way she spoke to him, he knew what was going on at Fort Augustus. We've no proof of that. MLL told me that the bishops did used to visit a lot. I don't think they could have gone into the school and not known. They were visiting so regularly and in recent years MLL told me that the abuse was so rife. MLL also told me that he wasn't the only boy being sexually abused.

MEV Father MEV

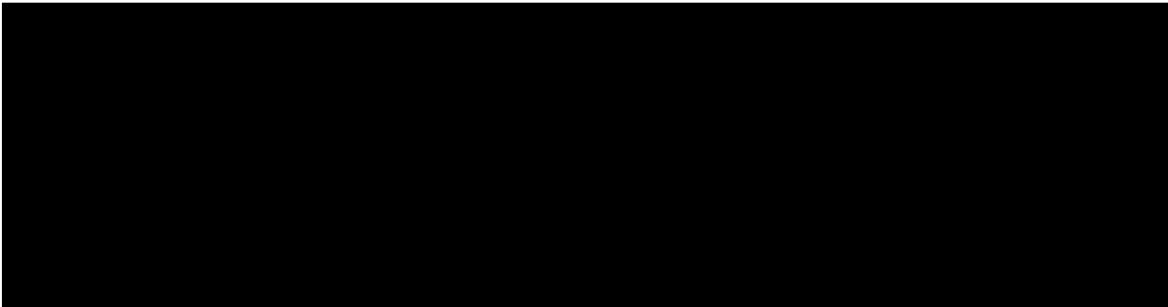
33. Father MEV [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. It was some time in the year after MLL reported the abuse. He said he was going through a breakdown and all sorts of nonsense. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] MLL [REDACTED] [REDACTED]



34.



35.



Life after leaving school

36. **MLL** went back for one last year after the abuse was reported. He must've left when he was about seventeen. He didn't stay on for his sixth year. I think **MLL** did Highers. He studied at the art college in Edinburgh for two years. He's a painter now. Art is the thing that's keeping him going. He does oil and watercolour. He's had a few exhibitions in Edinburgh. His parents are funding it all because money-wise, he's hopeless.

Impact

37. **MLL** went to the art college in Edinburgh straight after he left school. He didn't finish his course. I don't know why he left. He started to do a few strange things. He started gambling. He stole his dad's credit card at one point. Eventually, he was diagnosed as being a schizophrenic. That diagnosis took quite a while. He was in and out of

psychiatric hospitals at that time, before they got the proper diagnosis. Once he was on the right medication, he did well. He got his own flat. He has flips sometimes when he starts gambling. The gambling is a big issue and my brother-in-law has bailed him out a few times. My sister keeps his bank cards now and he just gets so much out at a time.

38. My sister maintains that the schizophrenia and the gambling are because of what happened to him at Fort Augustus. I wouldn't know. I think you'd need a lot of proof for that, medically. It could be. It very often happens to youngsters in their second or third year of university. MLL's had quite a difficult life since leaving Fort Augustus. He's had the odd relationship, but they've never lasted.
39. MLL had an operation last year. They took out a section of a tumour on his bladder. He has to wait to find out whether it's cancerous. I'm hoping it can be dealt with by radiotherapy because I can't see him going through chemotherapy. He's already had treatment for cancer. He had one of his testicles removed and he had chemotherapy that time. He didn't cope well, although the people at the Maggie's Centre in Edinburgh have been very good to him and he still goes there a lot. He's a diabetic and sometimes he doesn't take care of himself. I keep trying to scare him about my cousin who had a leg amputated because of diabetes. I'm hoping he's got the message now.
40. Because of the bullying at Fort Augustus and boys putting things in his food, MLL still won't eat anything unless my sister prepares it. He has a flat in Edinburgh, but he spends most of his time with his parents. It's not easy for them, especially as they're getting on in years. My sister does his washing and one of MLL's sisters does his ironing. She knows what he went through. He talks to his sisters.
41. We're a close-knit family. I sent them the brochure for a new house I've put an offer in for. MLL rang me recently, telling me I should go ahead. When I was sick, MLL used to ring me to check how I was and that I was being cared for. I had four brothers, but only myself and my sister are left now. My sister is older than me. She's 85. She's had a lot of illness in the last year.

42. I think the abuse at Fort Augustus has a lot to do with where MLL is in life now. I think it ruined his life, particularly the fact he was never able to hold down a relationship. To my knowledge, he's never been in employment. He knows he has to take his tablets every day, otherwise he'll slip back. He's lucky that he has his parents supporting him. I think he's found it difficult to grow up and I think what happened in Fort Augustus has a lot to do with that. He was let down by people high up in the Church who he respected.
43. There's a ripple effect and it's had an impact on the whole family. When MLL left for boarding school, his father told him to look on his houseparent as his father, that the houseparent had taken his place and would look after him. I think that's what hurts his parents the most. That's the thing that, to this day, my brother-in-law still feels guilty about. He's turned away from the Church completely as a result and I don't blame him. It was a terrible thing to happen.
44. Supporting MLL hasn't been easy for my sister and her husband. He has a nice flat now, but he's up every day at my sister's for his lunch and his supper and to get his washing done. It's a horrible situation. I don't know if they'll ever get justice for it. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] MEV [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
45. Being a religious Sister myself, I know a lot about religious orders. The Benedictines were held very highly in our regard. When I was living in London, I lived very near St. Benedict's School. I had a lot of contact with the Benedictines there. I had no reason to think badly of them, but then a lot happened at St. Benedict's involving people we held in great esteem. In a lot of ways, it's shaken my faith. A couple of the Benedictine priests at Ealing were held up to us as examples of wonderful religious. It's sometimes very hard to hold onto the faith and believe that there are good people out there.
46. I find it so hard because there has been so much cover-up in the Catholic Church. I don't know how I'm still here, in the Church. It tests my faith a lot, but I have very good friends who help me. There are only a couple of Sisters in the order who I've shared

MLL's experiences with. I just felt it was so personal that I didn't feel able to share it with anybody else.

47. I think I've managed to keep my faith because of my prayer life. The prayer life of a religious is very personal. I don't think you could go along with that, hiding any deceit. I think that's kept me going. I've had very bad days, particularly when I was ill and I first moved to Nottingham. Everything gets tested when you're ill. Even though I'm semi-retired, I'm still bound by the rules of my Order. We take vows. So do the Benedictines. That's what's so upsetting. You profess these vows in front of a congregation. It's not something private. That's your rule of life, really.

Reporting of abuse

To the BBC and Police

48. The BBC made a programme about abuse at Fort Augusts called *Sins of Our Fathers*. I don't know how the BBC journalist got my sister and brother-in-law's details, but he contacted them. Father MEV was on the BBC film. He shut the door on the reporter in Australia.
49. I thought the documentary was good, but it was horrific. I got a shock when I watched it. Although they gave MLL I could see from the outline it was him. They didn't disguise his voice, although they said it was an actor. I knew straight away it was him. I watched it on my own in London. I was terribly upset when I saw it. I know his parents saw it and they were very upset.
50. As a consequence of the BBC's involvement, the police became involved. My sister and her husband both agreed to be interviewed by the police. I was surprised her husband agreed to be interviewed. It was a video interview. MLL did an interview too.
51. I was contacted by the police in Tooting Bec, London. I lived there from 2011 until 2016, so it would've been after 2011. The police came to see me first and then I had

to go down to Tooting Bec Police Station and make a statement. I didn't get a copy of that, unfortunately. I made my statement to a uniformed officer about what I knew about MLL's time at Fort Augustus.

52. I don't know what happened to the investigation after that. It all seemed to die down. I can't understand why it just quietened down. It didn't go anywhere after that. MLL abuser is in Australia now. They're trying to extradite him. He's changed his name. I think he's going under MEV now.

[REDACTED]

53. I'm still in contact with the BBC journalist, Murdoch Rodgers, although he's not with the BBC anymore. He's been a tremendous support to me. He's also been a great support to MLL. The programme had a big impact on him.

To the Church

54. MLL's sister, MLW, started to get me involved in his case. I think we got talking about it because there was so much about abuse in the media. She spoke to me about MLL. I said I knew a little bit about it, but I didn't know much. She started writing to people before I started writing to them.

55. MLW did a lot of digging before I came on the scene. She wrote to Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Keith O'Brien, as he was then. She wrote to Bishop Conti. She knows more than I do because she was the one that MLL told the most. I spoke to her about it and she said I'd no idea what happened to him. I don't know the half of it.

56. There were a lot of things covered up that could have been dealt with at the time. I suppose a lot of things were covered up to keep the name of the school. It was quite

a well-known public school. If parents knew what was going on, they wouldn't send their boys there.

57. It really upsets me that Father [MMF] denied we went to Fort Augustus for the meeting. I'm sorry that he's dead. I know a little bit about canon law. Anybody in his position has to keep his diaries for six years. I've been in that position myself. He said he had no record of the visit, but he must have had a record in his diary. It really upset me that somebody of his standing in the Church and with his education would deny it. If we're in any kind of leadership in our orders, we're supposed to keep our diaries. That was very hard.
58. We were given to believe that Father [MEV] was dismissed from the Benedictine Order when he was moved to Australia. My brother-in-law's mother was in Australia for a visit. I think it was in the early 1980s. She didn't know anything about the abuse of [MLL] and my sister and her husband never enlightened her. She came back and said she had met the priest that taught [MLL] at Fort Augustus. It was extraordinary, of all the people in Sydney for her to meet. He was in a parish in Australia, working as a priest. My brother-in-law nearly went berserk.
59. In 2013, I was out in Australia on visitation of my order. I made an appointment to meet with Bishop Peter Comensoli, who was the administrator of the Diocese of Sydney. I knew him because he lived in Edinburgh for a year when he was studying for a degree. I'd met him several times in Edinburgh so he knew me. I asked him if he was aware of what had happened to [MLL] and he said he was and that my sister had told him about it. I told him that the priest responsible was actually working in his diocese. He nearly fell off the chair. He had no idea, he was horrified. I can still see the shock in his face when I told him. That evening, Father [MEV] was taken out of the parish.
60. When I was in Australia and realised Father [MEV] was still working in a parish, I couldn't believe it. That was when I really started to get involved in writing letters. I told Bishop Comensoli that *Sins of Our Fathers* was coming out. He didn't know about it. It was shown in Australia.

61. Seemingly, there was another Benedictine from Fort Augustus working out there as well and they didn't know. I can't understand how they didn't know. Cardinal Pell was away at the time in Buenos Aires. He couldn't be contacted. Cardinal Pell knew about Father [MEV]. When a priest is moved, even from within the diocese, he has to present his credentials before he is allowed to say Mass. It's a little resume of his background and who he is. It's written credentials. My niece, [MLW] had also written to Cardinal Pell about [MLL]. That's another way that it was covered up. He shouldn't have allowed him to work as a priest, especially in a parish where you have altar boys and young people. Bishop Comensoli was a huge support to us because he got things moving.
62. Father [MMF] is dead now. I traced him to Oxford University, where he was teaching young students. I wrote to them and complained because he shouldn't have been with young men. That was wrong because the policy of the Church was that anybody who had been involved in abuse was not allowed to work with children or young adults. He was removed from there.
63. I wrote to the person who I was told was the head of the Benedictines in the UK, Abbot Cuthbert Madden of Ampleforth. I also wrote to Dom Richard Yeo, who came to see me in London. I didn't get anywhere with him. He denied everything too. He was supposed to be the representative for the UK on a Child Safeguarding Commission for the Catholic Church in England and Wales which I thought was ridiculous. I find it very difficult now. I find it very difficult because I've met him a few times since at religious meetings and I just steer away from him.
64. I also wrote to a Mrs Booth, who was the advisory protection for children and vulnerable adults for the local authority in Aberdeen. She confirmed in a letter to my niece, [MLW] that she knew what was going on at Fort Augustus. I also wrote to Helen Darroch. She was a Sister based in Glasgow, who was supposed to be supporting victims and families of victims who had suffered abuse in the Church. She helped me a bit at the time because I was terribly upset about it all. All of this was around the same time as the BBC getting in touch.

65. Following all the correspondence, my overall experience was of complete denial from every angle. It wasn't just from the Benedictines but from the Church as a whole. We were quite friendly with Cardinal O'Brien. He knew MLL's situation and yet he never let on that he was aware of what had gone on at Fort Augustus. The abuse had already started to surface then and he never mentioned it.
66. I think if MLL and his family had got an official letter of apology from the church or from the Benedictines, it might have helped them. There's been no apology and no support offered to them at all. After the TV programme, the Catholic Church in Edinburgh held meetings in different parishes for people whose relatives had been abused. My sister went to one such meeting. She said it was just horrible. They weren't addressing the issue at all. They were just making excuses for the abuser. She walked out. It was insulting.

Hopes for the Inquiry

67. I contacted the Inquiry because I still feel that that the abuse has been covered up all the time. The Benedictines certainly haven't taken any responsibility at all. MLL is only one of the boys who were abused. There must have been quite a few others. So why haven't they come out and said that they apologise or done something?
68. My hope is that the Church will acknowledge that what went on was abuse and perhaps that they knew about it. The Benedictines were certainly aware of it. I suppose it's a bit late now, to offer support to these people, but there must be others, worse off than MLL, who don't have support. Murdoch told me that one of the boys has died.
69. I think that those in authority need to be more vigilant. From my own experience, I've been round our Congregation. I've visited our Sisters and listened to them. It's up to those in authority. They need to be vigilant. You can see signs when people are being intimidated and abused. It's the ones in authority who have the power to do something.

70. When I was provincial of my order, I had to attend meetings about safeguarding. We're trustees so we have to be aware of these things and attend updates. We were very well trained in abuse.
71. We have an home for our elderly Sisters. When I was in the provincial leadership, I knew one of the Sisters was being bullied, but she wouldn't admit it. In the end, I took her out of that situation and she stayed with me for a year. Eventually, I got help for her. There's a very good counselling service in Manchester. She was able to acknowledge it and we were able to stop it. Because I was prepared to do something about it, I was able to confront the other person about what she was doing. Bullying can destroy people.
72. I think the Church needs to ensure there is more training and those in authority need to be more vigilant. That's where it lies. Those in authority need to be prepared to stand up. My sister and her family had no contact from [REDACTED] SNR [REDACTED] after [REDACTED] MLL [REDACTED] was abused. All they got was the bill from the bursar.
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..... [REDACTED] MLK

Dated..... 13th March 2019.
