

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Sister Margaret RIORDAN

Support person present: No

Others present: Megan Lafferty, Clyde and Co Solicitor for Sisters of Nazareth

1. My full name at birth was Margaret Riordan. The religious name I am known by is Sister Gabriel Joseph. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1938. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I was born in Mallow in County cork, Ireland. I had two sisters and one brother. I was the youngest. I grew up in Dromahane, just outside Mallow. I stayed there until I finished secondary school.

Sisters of Nazareth

3. I went to Hammersmith in London when I was eighteen years old and began my novitiate with the Sisters of Nazareth, on 7 February 1957. I stayed in London until I was professed on 21 November 1958.
4. My first placement was at Nazareth House in Birmingham. I stayed there for about three months. I was collecting while I was there. I then went to Manchester for six months and was also collecting there.
5. I returned to Birmingham and worked in the parish school for a year. I had a class of first grade children. I helped there until the permanent teacher arrived.

6. I went back to Finchley in London for two months, before going to Lancaster for ten weeks. I was collecting in both places. I then went back to Hammersmith for two months, and prepared to go to Australia.
7. In Feb 1961, I went to Australia and stayed there for twenty years. I lived in Ballarat in Victoria where I did my teacher training. Then I taught in a school in Ballarat. I taught the children who were in residential care, within the house.
8. The first home I worked in, in Australia was a boys and babies one. There were eighty babies ranging from a couple of days old to five years old. When the boys turned five years old, they came to the section I worked in.
9. I moved around in Australia and also lived in Geraldton, Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and Launceston. I taught in primary schools in all of these places. I mainly taught in parish schools. In Geraldton, I taught children who were in residential care, but they came out to the parish school with us. The parish school was the public school.
10. I came back to the UK in 1981. I spent a couple of days in Hammersmith, then went up to Lasswade in Scotland from February 1981 until August 1981. I was collecting while I was there and I didn't work anywhere else while I was in Scotland.
11. I was recalled to Hammersmith, and helped the junior sisters and novices. I did that for a year. Then in 1982, I was elected onto the General Counsel and held that position for twelve years.
12. I was appointed Superior in the Nazareth House in Mallow in 1994, so I went back home. I stayed there for eleven years.
13. I went back to Hammersmith in 2006 and was appointed Superior there. I stayed there for seven years, and before coming up to Nazareth House, Lasswade.
14. I now live in [REDACTED] I am semi-retired and do pastoral ministry and other odd bits where I can help out. There are no children in Nazareth house in Lasswade now.

Childcare qualifications and training

15. I didn't have much childcare training in my first teaching post in Birmingham, but I had helped out a little with the children when I was first training in Hammersmith.
16. I trained to be a primary school teacher in Aquinas college in Ballarat, Australia. It was a two year course.

Nazareth House, Lasswade

17. I was based in Nazareth House, Lasswade. Within the grounds of Nazareth House, there was a building called Holycot and also a main building. The children stayed in the main block in the main building and in Holycot.
18. The convent was in a separate part of the main building. I lived in the convent which was separate from the main block and Holycot.
19. The kitchen was just behind the main block but was closer to the convent than the main block. That was where all the meals for the sisters and the children were prepared. The meals would then be transported in a heated trolley to the main block, Holy Cot and the convent. Everybody got good meals.

The children at Nazareth House

20. The children were in Holycot, which was a building just inside of the main entrance. It is no longer there now. There were two groups of children there when I was there. There was also a group of children in the main block, which was a separate building from Holycot.
21. Holycot and the main block would have had their own dining room with a kitchenette just off it. This meant that as well as getting meals from the main kitchen, they had

their own facilities to prepare snacks as well. I didn't see this happening but I know what the layout of the building was.

22. The only contact I had with the children was to see them outside playing, or seeing them come in and out of their buildings. I would say hello to them if I passed but that was all the interaction I had. I would also see them at mass on Sundays.
23. I was asked to go and help with the children in the evening time, after they had their dinner. I was never with them during mealtimes. I think I was only with the children about four times during my six months there, and it was only for about an hour at a time. I think I went to Holycot about three times and the main block only once.
24. I am not sure what the reason was for me being asked to go and help. Maybe the Sister there was out or at a meeting. It would have been the Mother Superior who would have asked me to go over and help the children.
25. I am not clear what I did with the children during the few times I went over to the main block or Holycot. I maybe just chatted or helped with their homework, but I don't remember the details. I don't know if time was set out for homework.
26. I sat with the children in the sitting room in Holycot and the main block when I went over. I found the children to be happy, relaxed, well behaved, friendly and welcoming.
27. I didn't have any other interaction with the children. I don't know what their routine or sleeping arrangements were.

My role at Nazareth House, Lasswade

28. I got up and went for prayer in the morning. I am not sure what time morning prayer was at that time, but it is at 7.10 am now and mass is at 7.30 am. I would have my breakfast after morning prayers. I would have breakfast in the Sister's refectory in the convent. The children would probably pray and have breakfast in their own building.
29. My role was collecting and I always did that with another Sister. I started collecting with Sister **LPY**, then Sister Raphael, and Sister Karl. Sister **LPY** is now in America. Sister Raphael is now dead.
30. We would collect from Mondays to Saturdays. We would normally start after morning mass, and if we wanted to go earlier, we would go to the Poor Claire Convent for early mass. We would collect all day and then usually return before dark. The time we returned depended on whether it was summer or winter.
31. The area we covered for collecting went as far as St Andrews and the borders of Glasgow. We also went all over Fife. We mainly collected in shops and offices. We didn't go to peoples' homes.

Sisters at Nazareth House, Lasswade

32. Sister **LQD** and Sister Joan of Arc worked with the children in Holycot. Sister Joan of Arc is dead now. Sister **LQC** worked in the main block. She is also deceased.
33. The sisters who worked with the children would have had staff, but I don't know how many or who they were.

Discharge from Nazaerth House, Lasswade

34. During my six months at Lasswade in 1981. The children were gradually being phased out of the main house and being transferred to Holycot. The main house was being renovated for the care of the elderly. My collecting was to get funds for the renovations.
35. By the time I left Lasswade in August 1981, there were no children left in the main block. There were a few elderly residents there by that time.
36. I am not sure how it worked out with the children that were moved out of the main building. Maybe they went to other homes but I don't know.

Inspections of the General Counsel

37. The Superior General and her counsel are the governing body of the congregation in the order. They are based in Hammersmith, London.
38. There is what we call the General Chapter, which is held every six years, and it is during the General Chapter that the Superior General is elected or re-elected. The members of the Chapter also elect the General Counsel, who are also known as the Generalate, at the same time. They do this by holding a vote. I was elected twice and held my position on the Counsel for twelve years, from 1982 to 1994.
39. Being a member of the Generalate involved doing a lot of things, including visiting all the houses in the congregation. This was something that I also did, either with the Superior General or another counsellor.

40. Each house would get a visit from the Generalate in Hammersmith every six years, but they would also get a visit from their own Regional Superior every year.
41. I carried out Generalate visits during the twelve years I worked on the General Counsel, and went to different countries. I think I would have inspected near to forty houses, but I am not sure because some houses closed.
42. We would get instructions from London on what to look for during the visits. There would have been a list of things to look at but I don't remember what was on it.
43. The purpose of the visits was to see that everything was going according to plan and that everybody was happy in the house. We would check on the sisters to see if they had any problems or wanted to feedback any issues. We would then feedback to London. It was like a support for the Sisters. We would also check on the work that was being done within the house, for instance the care that the elderly or children in the house were receiving.
44. We would give notice that we were visiting and then stay at each house for about a week. During that time, we would walk around and observe, and talk to people. We would speak to lots of people in each house about how things were there. We would speak to the staff and the Sisters, as well as any elderly residents or children who used the facilities.

Inspection of Nazareth House, Lasswade

45. During my visits, I also visited the four Nazareth Houses in Scotland. They were Aberdeen, Lasswade, Cardonald and Kilmarnock. I don't remember when I would have visited them. The only one that was still caring for children during my visits was Lasswade, so the visit must have been before 1984. The other three houses were caring for the elderly.
46. During our visits, we would do checks on admission registers, which had the children's names, names of their parents and dates of arrival. We also did checks on

the discharge register, which was a separate book, and also the accounts during the visits. I would have done this at Lasswade.

47. There was also an inventory of their clothing which would record what they brought with them. I imagine this would have been recorded when the children were admitted. I don't know if these things would have been returned to them when they left. Any clothes would maybe be worn out or wouldn't have fit them anymore.
48. I don't have a recollection of whether there were any other daily or weekly books kept. I think there was an observations book but I don't remember what was in it. I wouldn't have looked at any social work contact.
49. I would usually talk to children during visits so I imagine I probably spoke to the children in Lasswade when I visited, but I can't remember specifically. The purpose of speaking to the children would have been to see how they were and if they were happy. I don't remember ever speaking to any child on any of my visits who said they weren't happy. They didn't appear to be unhappy.
50. Any comments about the welfare of children would have been recorded in the visitation report. A copy of the visitation reports would have been kept in the local counsel book in the local house. Every house had a local counsel book, which held the minutes of monthly counsel meetings that took place in every house. A copy of the visitation report would also be sent to Hammersmith.
51. I don't remember anybody ever feeding anything negative back to me. If anybody had told me of abuse or anything like that, I would have listened to what the child had to say. Then I would have spoken to the other Sister from the Generalate who was with me, and we would have tried to sort it out.
52. We would probably try to sort it out on site by talking to the people involved, and if we dealt with it then we probably wouldn't report it back to London. We would report it back to London if we felt we needed to take it further.

53. A note would definitely have been made of any allegation if it was made, but I don't know where it would have been recorded because I never had to do it. It might not go into the general report on the house but it would be recorded somewhere. I don't remember anything like this happening so I have never had the issue to deal with.
54. I would have done a report after each visit and there would have been certain points that we would have to report on. We wouldn't write down the names of the specific people we spoke to during the visits because we spoke to them more on a friendly basis. That report would have been filed with London. There should be a report on my visit to Lasswade.
55. They also would have gotten a visit from their Regional Superior every year. I imagine they also would have kept records of their visits.

Closing thoughts

56. I have no experience of the childcare in Nazareth House in Scotland. I can only speak from my experiences, and from my time working in Nazareth House in Australia, I looked after children who still keep in touch with me. I received a letter from a social worker in Australia saying one child that I had cared for was looking for me, because she thought of me as her mother, and she is now in touch with me.
57. I visited Australia in 2014 and had the privilege of meeting some of the children I had cared for when I lived there. Some of them still phone me to wish me happy birthday. I know from my own experience that the children appreciated what was done for them in Nazareth House.

58. In terms of the children who speak of not having had positive experiences in Nazareth House, you have to think about where the children came from. Some came into care because their mum died or because of their own family circumstances. I have heard what is being said by some of the children in care and that they did not have happy memories. I have never seen abuse of children. I have never seen children being slapped or humiliated for wetting the bed. I did not observe any abuse and have no experience of that.

59. 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... 

Dated..... 01.06.2018.....