

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

**Colin CHALMERS**

1. My name is Colin Joseph Chalmers. My confirmation name is Paul. Within the Institute of Marist Brothers I am known as Brother Colin Chalmers. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1948. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Background and employment history**

#### *Postings and roles*

2. I began my Postulancy with the Marist Brothers in October 1972 and became a novice at the end of July 1973. My First Profession in the Institute of Marist Brothers took place at the end of July 1974.
3. Since I had qualified as a teacher prior to my beginning the novitiate, I was sent to St Columba's College, Largs after my First Profession. I taught there from September 1974 to December 1975.
4. I studied and taught in London from January 1976 to December 1980. Then I went to Rome and did a Formation Course in the General House from January to July 1981. From August 1981 until mid-1984, I did retreat work and counselling at Kinharvie House, New Abbey, Dumfries and Galloway. From mid-1984 until June 1985, I did counselling work at Marist House, Glasgow.
5. In September 1985, I formally left the Institute of the Marist Brothers. While I was out of the Institute, I lived and worked in London.

6. I was formally readmitted to the Institute in June 1993. From January to June 1994, I undertook a course of preparation for profession at the Formation House of the Institute of the Marist Brothers in Manziana, Italy, making First Profession (for the second time) at the end of May 1994.
7. Between my return to the UK in June 1994 and July 2002, I lived in various communities of Marist Brothers in London. During this period, I worked as the Communications Officer at Providence Row Charity for homeless people.
8. From August 2002 to August 2003, I was in Habay-La Vielle, Belgium doing community ministry. I was the Superior of Community in Dublin and carried out youth ministry there from August 2003 to January 2007. I was a student at St Benet's, Glasgow from January 2007 to February 2008. I did an English-language Patrimony course in Rome from February to June 2008.
9. I was the Superior of Community at Marist House, Glasgow from July 2008 to December 2013. During this time, I did parish work and was a committee member of the Conference of Religious of Scotland, holding the post of President from 2010 to 2013.
10. From January 2014, I have held the position of General Archivist of the Institute of Marist Brothers at the General House in Rome.

*Training/qualifications*

11. I was awarded the Diploma in Primary Education from Notre Dame College of Education, Glasgow in 1973. I obtained a BSc (Hons) in Psychology from the University of London in 1980, and an MA with Distinction in Christian Spirituality from the University of Wales in 2009. I have no qualifications in archival work.
12. The hand over from the previous General Archivist was around two weeks in length and covered the layout of the General Archive space and how to conduct group visits

to the Archives. I received no specific information on the history of the General Archives.

### Teaching role at St Columba's College, Largs

13. During my time as a teacher in St Columba's College, September 1974 to December 1975, I taught the P 3/4 class, 7 – 8-year olds. There were only about 8 children in the class, a mixture of boarders and day-pupils. At this stage, I am unable to be exact with regard to the numbers or to say how many children were at each stage. My classroom was on the ground floor of Northfields House.
14. I also had responsibilities for looking after the two dormitories at the top of Landour House. My bedroom was across the hallway from the dormitories. In the absence of the SNR [REDACTED], Brother MLA [REDACTED], I was also responsible for supervising the other dormitories in the house. Brother MLA [REDACTED] and I shared responsibility for supervising the children during breaks and at mealtimes.
15. My recollection is that, until the arrival of Brother Robert Lee in August 1975, Brother Eustace taught P 5, while Brother MLA [REDACTED] taught the combined P6/7 and supervised the dormitories for the boarders of that stage. The other Brothers of the community were Nilus and MFN [REDACTED]. Brother Nilus occasionally helped out with remedial teaching or taking a class if one or other of the teaching Brothers was absent.
16. The atmosphere in the school was relaxed and there seemed to be good relations between the boarders and day-boys. It seemed to me that the parents of the boys were very supportive of the school. The death of Brother MFN [REDACTED] at the beginning of [REDACTED] 1975 was obviously extremely upsetting for the boys as he had been very popular. Brothers Eustace and Nilus helped by filling in for Brother MLA [REDACTED] who, as SNR [REDACTED], had the burden of business to conduct at that time.

17. There were no inspections during my time at St Columba's College. I do not remember having to complete any records. I think that Brother <sup>MLA</sup> filled out report cards at the end of the year. At this stage, I am unable to recall whether the end-of-year testing was done formally or informally. Punishments consisted mainly of reprimands, sometimes the giving of lines. As far as I am aware none of the teaching Brothers had a strap (tawse or Lochgelly). I do not think punishments were recorded. I do not recall anyone making allegations of abuse during my time at the College.
18. In December 1974 my father became seriously ill. Brother <sup>MLA</sup> allowed me to go up to Glasgow almost every weekend after that to stay with my parents. I would leave St Columba's after school on the Friday and return on the Sunday evening. My father's health improved over the course of 1975. Brother <sup>MLA</sup> occasionally took a mid-week evening off, leaving me to look after the boarders.
19. Although I very much enjoyed working in the school, the community-life lacked a great deal. I was the youngest member of the community by some twenty years. While Brother <sup>MLA</sup> and the other Brothers were always very kind to me, the lack of a community life took its toll on me and I had to ask the then Provincial, Brother John Ogilvie, for a change of community.

### **Role of the General Archivist**

20. I have been General Archivist since January 2014. My duties are primarily to ensure the safekeeping of the archives and to conduct visits by groups and individuals to the Archives. I also respond to queries for information on the history of the Institute of the Marist Brothers and of its various Provinces. A number of enquiries come from lay people researching their family history and finding a Marist Brother in that history. I am usually able to furnish information about the Brother's training and work.



21. I am also responsible for the management of the Archive Library in the General House which contains over 6,800 volumes for reference and internal lending. The library contains a very large number of books written by or about the Marist Brothers. Journals, magazines, dissertations and occasional publications are also stored. There are also many books related to the history, spirituality and geographical environment in the early days of the Institute.

### **The General Archives of the Institute of Marist Brothers**

22. The General Archives goes back to the very earliest days of the Institute. There is no specific written information giving a date of establishment, but since the present Archives contain copies and originals of letters sent and received by the Founder, Saint Marcellin Champagnat, it is presumed that an archive was established in the very early days of the Institute. The present space was constructed in the General House in the 1980s specifically to hold the General Archives.
23. The Holdings of the General Archives are classified as follows:
24. *Founder*  
Material covering the personal life of Father Champagnat before and after ordination to the priesthood as well as material related to the founding of the Institute of Marist Brothers.
25. *History of the Institute of Marist Brothers*  
Material related to the early days of the Institute and to some of the first Brothers.
26. *General Administration*  
Material related to the various organs and offices of the central administration of the Institute. This area includes *External Relations* which contains material related to the Institute's dealings with external agencies, such as the various administrative departments of the Roman Catholic Church, with other Religious Orders and other bodies.

27. *Personnel*  
Records and other documents related to members of the Institute. There are over 38,600 individual files, dating from 1820.
28. *Provinces*  
Material related to the various administrative units which make up, or have made up, the Institute. This includes material related to the founding of the units and their subsequent history. This area also holds copies and originals of correspondence from the General Administration to the Provincial Administrations and vice-versa.
29. Most documents are held in numbered archive boxes of different colours, according to the classification. Copies of the Founder's correspondence are held in bound volumes. Also held in bound volumes are the Minutes of the meetings of the General Council, the Institute's leadership body.

### **Records**

30. Apart from some records in large ledger books of schools of the early days of the Institute in France, the General Archives does not hold records of schools of the individual Provinces.
31. There are no records in the General Archives of the schools, St Joseph's College and St Columba's College. The only records of these two establishments held in the General Archives pertain to the communities or individual Brothers. The General Archivist of the Institute has no authority over Archivists of the individual Provinces and therefore has no knowledge of what records are stored in the Provinces or how they are stored.

*St Columba's College, Largs*

32. The General Archives of the Institute of Marist Brothers does not hold and has never held records pertaining to St Columba's College, Largs. I can only presume that school records were held within the school itself.
33. The General Archives of the Institute of Marist Brothers hold records which pertain to the lives of the communities and the individual Brothers of St Columba's College, Largs. Administration records pertaining to the communities of St Columba's College date from 1920 to 1990.
34. As General Archivist, I have no knowledge of what records were kept by the school as no returns were made by the school to the General Council. The only records existing today in the General Archives pertain to the communities and the individual Brothers in those communities. As General Archivist I have no knowledge of what happened to St Columba's College's records.

*St Joseph's College, Dumfries*

35. The General Archives of Marist Brothers does not hold and has never held records pertaining to St Joseph's College, Dumfries. I can only presume that school records were held in St Joseph's College itself.
36. The General Archives of the Institute of Marist Brothers hold records which pertain to the lives of the communities and the individual Brothers of St Joseph's College communities. Administration records pertaining to the communities of St Joseph's College date from 1874 to 1988.
37. As General Archivist, I have no knowledge of what records were kept by St Joseph's college as no returns were made by the school to the General Council.
38. The majority of records existing today in the General Archives pertain to the communities and the individual Brothers in those communities. There are some

copies of correspondence between Provincial authorities and/or advisers and Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council from the 1980s concerning negotiations for the handover of the school. These were sent to the then Vicar General of the Institute, Brother Quentin Duffy, to keep him informed of progress. As General Archivist, I have no knowledge of what happened to the school records.

### **Section 21 responses to the Inquiry**

39. I have been asked what has been my role in relation to searching the archives in response to section 21 notices, including those dated 25 January 2017; 12 September 2018 (requesting documents); 15 November 2018 (requesting details of complaints); and 13 February 2019 (requesting a supplementary Part D Report). In relation to both St Columba's College, Largs, and St Joseph's College, Dumfries, in general terms, I have responded to requests from Brother Geary and from Ms Angela Ferrier, Administrator for the Marist Brothers in Scotland, for information from the General Archives.
40. In relation to the Section 21 Notice dated 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017, I received a copy of this from Brother Brendan Geary and he requested my help in completing the questionnaire.
41. In relation to the Section 21 Notice dated 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019, I received a copy from Brother Brendan Geary and he requested any help that the General Archives could provide in supplying the documents requested.
42. In relation to the Section 21 Notices dated 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018 and 13<sup>th</sup> February 2019, I have no knowledge of either of these Notices.



43. 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...

16<sup>th</sup> October 2019.