

Witness Name: SR 281

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922-1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SR 281 RGS

Respondent Witness Statement to Statement of HIA 359 - HIA/359

I SR 281 will say as follows:-

1. I make this Statement in response to the above named Applicant's Statement to the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse 1922-1995 (the inquiry).
2. The Applicant refers to having been resident in "Good Shepherd Newry". The institution at that time was referred to as "St Mary's, Newry". To avoid confusion, I refer to it as "St Mary's" in this Statement.

I will say as follows:

3. I was born in 1931. I joined the Good Shepherd Sisters and made my final vows in 1957.
4. My name is SR 281 but I was known by my name in religion, SR 281 until around 1971 when we started moving away from using names in religion. I am now known as SR 281
5. I started working in St Mary's Newry on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1957. I worked there for 13 years until 1969 when I went to Shropshire to undertake a course in Residential social work. That was a 2 year course (one year in academic work in College, and one year working in Newry). I returned to St Mary's Newry in 1970, and continued there until October 1971.
6. I worked in the packing room of the laundry in St Mary's Newry with a number of the ladies and the other Sisters.

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7. In response to the Applicant's Statement I would like to say the following:
- (i) I arrived in St Mary's Newry in June 1957. Our records show that the Applicant arrived in St Mary's Newry on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1955 when she was 17½ years old. I note that the Applicant left St Mary's on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1961 to go to employment in [REDACTED]. I left in 1971. Our years in St Mary's Newry would have overlapped.
  - (ii) It is my impression that the Applicant may be attributing details to St Mary's Newry that may in fact relate to her time in St George's home in Pennywell Road, Limerick. For example:
    - (a) At paragraph (4) GSC-059 and paragraph (7) GSC-060, the Applicant refers to St Mary's Newry having a bakery, and to her working in the bakery. There was no bakery in St Mary's Newry. There was however a small bakery in the Good Shepherd Convent in Limerick.
    - (b) At paragraph (5) GSC-059, the Applicant refers to there being "about 80 girls in the Good Shepherd in Newry". St Mary's Newry was relatively small, and could not hold that capacity. It is my recollection that there would have been approximately 30 to 50 ladies in St Mary's Newry at any one time. However, the laundry in Limerick was larger, so perhaps the Applicant is referring to Limerick.
    - (c) At paragraph (6) GSC-059, the Applicant refers to Mother Good Shepherd teaching in the classroom. Mother Good Shepherd worked in St George's in Limerick, never in Newry. Perhaps the Applicant is referring to the school room in Limerick. The Applicant also refers to getting "a ruler across [her] knuckles" in class for getting a mathematics question wrong. Firstly, there was no corporal punishment in St Mary's Newry. It is against our ethos to strike any person. Secondly, I do not recall mathematics lessons being given by the Sisters in St Mary's Newry. We clearly felt that it was part of our ministry to ensure that the ladies received life skills training. In our Book of Conferences (which is a collection of advices and

guidance handed down by the Congregation's foundress St Mary Euphrasia, Sisters are advised: *"One important recommendation with regard to our orphans, preservation children and others, is to give them regularly lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic and so on. If they are well taught and know how to work well, they will be able not only to earn their own living but also to help their parents"*. However, our community in Newry was relatively small. From my recollection, the lessons which were given by the Sisters to the ladies in St Mary's Newry related mostly to cooking and crafting skills such as knitting, crochet, cane work. I taught the ladies these skills during crafting class. There were also Irish dancing lessons, and drama classes. I also took the ladies for cookery classes in the kitchen. Our focus was to ensure that the ladies acquired the necessary domestic and life skills to ensure they would be independent and self-sufficient when they left St Mary's Newry.

- (d) In paragraph 7 (GSC-1003) the Applicant refers to having cleaning duties before class. I think this may refer to Limerick where the children would have had some cleaning duties before class, such as sweeping the floor or cleaning their dormitory. I expect many children in the 1950s would have been expected to make their bed, or to help their mother sweep the kitchen floor before going to school.
- (e) At paragraph (6), GSC-059, the Applicant refers to wearing a uniform which was dyed pink. There may have been a school uniform worn in Limerick, but there was no uniform in St Mary's Newry. There were aprons given to those Sisters and ladies who worked in the wash-room of the laundry to protect their clothing.
- (f) At paragraph (17) GSC-063, the Applicant refers to a nun called Sister [REDACTED] of the Sacred Heart who was *"like a doctor"* and who was *"understanding and kind. I remember she gave me a sweet from her pocket"*. I believe that the Applicant is

referring to Sister **SR 304** **SR 304**  
 was a nurse and a midwife. She worked in Limerick, never in  
 Newry. **SR 304** is still alive, and is now 95 years  
 old.

8. At paragraph 7 (GSC-060) and paragraph 16 (GSC-062) the Applicant refers to the daily routine in place in St Mary's Newry. Her recollections do not accord with my recollections of St Mary's Newry, and I note that we were in St Mary's at the same time. I would like to set out my recollection of the general daily routine in St Mary's Newry during that time:

- (i) Everyone got up at around 7am.
- (ii) Mass was at 7:30am. It should be noted however that St Mary's Newry had a very relaxed atmosphere. It is my recollection that the ladies were not required to go to Mass. They could go if they wanted, but they were not forced. There was a general expectation that they would attend mass two or three times a week, but they were not required to go every day. If the ladies did not go to mass they would have been supervised by one of the auxiliaries.
- (iii) Breakfast was served at around 8am. For breakfast, there was porridge, or bread and butter with a cup of tea. All meals were prepared in the Convent Kitchen by **SR 306** who cooked for all the Sisters and the ladies.
- (iv) We usually started work at around 9am, except for Monday which generally started later at around 10am.
- (v) We stopped work mid-morning for a tea break. Work resumed and continued until lunch-time which was generally between 12noon and 12:30pm.
- (vi) After lunch, there was recreation time. If it was a fine day, the Sisters and the ladies would sit outside.
- (vii) We resumed work at around 2pm or 2:30pm. We stopped for a tea-break at around 3:30pm and then continued until around 6pm when the ladies had their evening meal.
- (viii) From time to time, we might have to work later in the evening if there had been a breakdown of machinery or some other misadventure.
- (ix) After evening meal there was recreation time. There were lessons (craft skills, cooking etc) which I have referred to above, and entertainment (singing and music) referred to below.

- (x) I recall with fondness **SR 338** would have something prepared for the Sisters and the ladies e.g. cocoa or Ovaltine together with ginger nut biscuits or a bun before going to bed.

St Mary's Newry felt more like a family home. It was cosy and small, and we tried to ensure that the atmosphere was welcoming.

9. At paragraph 7 (GSC-060) the Applicant refers to picking potatoes in the "Portadown field". There was a small-holding farm attached to the Convent. The Potato harvest was usually in October or November time each year. Some of the Sisters and some of the ladies worked together to pick the potatoes. The potatoes were dug out by the farm men, and the ladies and Sisters had to pick them up and put them in a sack. This took place over one or two Saturdays during harvest time. The produce which was grown on the farm was used by **SR 306** in the kitchen to feed the ladies and the Sisters. I recall potato-picking as being a special occasion each year and there would have been a special meal put on afterwards to celebrate its being completed. **SR 306** was a good cook, and she made a particular cake called Russian Cake which was a real favourite. It was a Madeira marble cake containing raspberry jam, soaked in brandy, and covered in marzipan and icing. I remember that being a real treat.
10. At paragraph 7 (GSC-1003) the Applicant also refers to the farm. I can confirm that there was a farm on the property which was a small-holding of a few acres. The milk from the cows was used in the kitchens in recipes for the ladies and Sisters' food, and any produce grown on the farm was used in the kitchen. **SR 306** was responsible for the farm, and there were a number of male farm-hands who were also employed to work on the farm.
11. During my time in St Mary's Newry, there was a great tradition of music, singing and dancing. **SR 229** was in St Mary's Newry at the same time as I was. She was a great musician. She would take the ladies for music and singing after the evening meal. I remember concerts and other social functions when the local community would be invited in for concerts, music and dancing.
12. **SR 229** and I both worked in the packing room in the laundry. I was very fond of her. She was good fun. I remember there used to be singing in the packing room while we worked. I had the sense that there was a great spirit of camaraderie between the Sisters and the ladies.
13. **SR 229** also took us for choir practice in the Church because there was an organ there which was used as accompaniment to the singing.

14. At paragraph (8) GSC-060 the applicant refers to the food as being "ok", but complains about being given liver stew for dinner and it being "horrible". All food was prepared by **SR 306** assisted by **SR 307** and a lady called **GSC 283SR 306** was a lovely woman. She prepared the food for all the ladies and the Sisters. To my recollection, **SR 306** was a very good cook. She was also a very practical woman. It is to be recalled that the Applicant was in St Mary's Newry from 1955 – 1961, and that it is my understanding that meat rationing in the United Kingdom which had been imposed during the Second World War and the years following only ended in 1954. I remember **SR 306** making stew, or serving meat and vegetables for dinner. I appreciate that a teenager may not like to eat liver stew, but I imagine that **SR 306** was trying to ensure that everyone was served food which was healthy and nutritious. The Sisters got the same food as the ladies, and it is my recollection that the food was good.
15. At paragraph (8) GSC-060, the Applicant refers to herself as being "always hungry". It is my recollection that dinners were made in the convent kitchen by **SR 306** and were then put on a heated trolley and wheeled down to the refectory to be served. There would be large containers of food, and each lady would be served the same as one is served in a canteen. Food was scooped out on to a plate, and served. Every lady could ask for more if they wanted more. The Good Shepherd Sisters saw it as part of their core ministry to ensure that everyone in their care is well fed and cared for physically. In the Book of Conferences (referred to above) it contains the following advice (see page 158): "Let me remind you once again never to give your children cold, badly prepared meals. Use your judgement and don't make one portion of bread do for three people." We therefore saw it as a core part of our ministry to serve healthy food and ensure that everyone had enough.
16. At paragraph (8) GSC-060, the Applicant refers to Sisters supervising meal times by sitting in the refectory reading a book. This is correct – the Sisters had a rota where they would supervise meals in the refectory and entertain the ladies by reading to them. We would try to find something light and funny to read to them, something they could laugh at or be amused by. Sometimes we read from novels, sometimes we read an article from the local newspaper.
17. At paragraph 8 (GSC-060) the Applicant refers to being made to "kneel on the floor" at mealtimes as a form of punishment, or not being allowed milk or sugar in her cocoa as a punishment. I do not recall ever seeing such a thing happen.

18. At paragraph 9 (GSC-060) the Applicant refers to there being 4 dormitories in St Mary's Newry. Initially when St Mary's Newry opened in or around 1946, it was post-World War two, and there were limited building materials available. These dormitories were in barn-shaped prefabricated buildings. I recall there being 4 such prefabricated buildings which were used as dormitories. In that post-war period, there was very little money to undertake capital works on the buildings. In the early 1960s, renovation works were carried out and a new wing opened in St Mary's Newry.
19. At paragraph 9 (GSC-060) the Applicant also refers to the ladies' names being changed. That is correct. I confirm that in most cases, ladies' names were changed when they came to St. Mary's Newry. The rationale was to protect her privacy. At that time, there was huge importance placed on an individual's right to privacy. One would not ask a lady what her surname was, and we only referred to people by their Christian names. We did not pry into the circumstances of a lady's past or try to find out why she had been brought to us. The ethos at the time was that by changing their name, they were provided with some degree of protection and confidentiality. There was no judgment as to what had gone before, or why she had ended up with us. It was our charism to deal with the person as we found them, and not to ask questions. Many of the ladies came to us from complex and distressing backgrounds. Some had been sexually or physically abused by a parent or some other family member, or had survived some other childhood trauma. Some were brought to us by the police or by social workers. For example, I recall the police finding one young lady alone in the train station at 2am in the morning, and she had nowhere else to go, so they brought her to us.
20. At paragraph 9 (GSC-060) the Applicant also refers to the ladies' each being given a number. The number related to their laundry, to ensure that each person's laundry was given back to her after it has been washed, dried and ironed. The same system is in place in most boarding schools. We did not refer to a lady by a number. Everyone was referred to by name.
21. At paragraph 9 (GSC-061) the Applicant refers to being allowed watch TV on a Saturday night for 2 hours. I confirm this is correct – the ladies watched TV after evening meal. It is my recollection that the Sisters first bought a television in 1956. It was bought so that we could all watch the marriage of the Hollywood actress Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier of Monaco, and was installed in the Mother and Baby Home called "Marianvale". There was tremendous excitement among the ladies and the

Sisters at being able to watch the marriage on television. Shortly after that, a second television was bought and installed in St Mary's Newry. The atmosphere in St Mary's Newry was progressive and relaxed, and it would have been quite a novelty to have a TV in 1956. I remember that the ladies watched the TV during the week as well as on weekends.

22. At paragraph (1) GSC-061, the Applicant refers to the girls dancing in the recreation room on a Sunday night. That is my recollection too. As stated at above, there was a great musical tradition in St Mary's Newry.
23. The Applicant refers to a lady called GSC 29 at paragraph 11 GSC-061. I remember GSC 29 and her beautiful red hair. GSC 29 had a great way with the girls, and was especially kind with those girls who were exhibiting challenging behaviour. GSC 29 could always bring them round. She was younger and we would often ask her to act as a mentor when a new lady arrived. GSC 29 would be asked to look out for her, and make sure she was settling in well. GSC 29 worked in the laundry with us. The Applicant states: "She would go away to Clifton for months and then come back again". This is correct. GSC 29 suffered from cancer and was often sent to the Good Shepherd Sisters' convalescent home was in Clifton, Cork for rest and recuperation. GSC 29 eventually passed away from cancer, and died in St Mary's Newry in 1973.
24. At paragraph 12 (GSC-061) the Applicant refers to a person called GSC 31 and recites a number of occurrences by that lady. I do not recall this resident. However, I confirm that I have reviewed the records and there was a resident in St Mary's Newry called GSC 31 who stayed with us for a brief period at the same time as the Applicant was there, and who was referred to a Psychiatric Hospital. That lady did not return to us after that. I do not recall that lady attacking anyone. In particular I have no recollection of such a lady catching a nun by the throat and tearing the nun's veil, as is alleged. I expect such a dramatic occurrence would have stood out in one's memory. I have no recollection of it.
25. At paragraph 13 (GSC-062) the Applicant refers to going to the sea side at Warrenpoint. It is my recollection that the trips to the sea side at Warrenpoint were day-trips. In addition to this, the ladies were also brought on week-long holiday each summer year to Cranfield beach, County Down, and the Sisters rented a holiday house there for that purpose.



26. At paragraph 13 (GSC-062) the Applicant refers to being made to do gardening work including weeding and raking in silence. I have no recollection of anyone being asked to undertake any work in silence.
27. The Applicant states at paragraph 14 (GSC-062) that while watching TV, that an advertisement for a box of chocolates came on television and that when she made a comment about it "*the TV was turned off and a cloth put over it*". While I agree that if something came on the television which was considered (at the time) to be "*inappropriate*", a Sister would have covered it with a cloth, I do not believe that an advertisements for chocolates would have been considered inappropriate. However the next section of the Applicant's statement surprised me, when she says that following the chocolate advertisement, "*everyone was told to leave the room and I was put in the corner in the darkness*" and that she was locked into the TV room that night. I was very surprised to read this. I find it hard to believe that punishment of any sort would have been given out for such an innocent remark. This allegation is not in-keeping with the system I experienced in St Mary's Newry during my time there.
28. I read with surprise the Applicant's statement at paragraph 15 (GSC-062) that they were "*slapped with a cane on the hands for giggling*". During my time in St Mary's Newry, which overlapped with that of the Applicant, I did not see anyone being slapped or hit in any manner. In particular, I do not recall a cane being used or being threatened to be used. As stated above at 7(ii)(c), there was no corporal punishment in St Mary's Newry.
29. The Applicant states at paragraph 16 (GSC-062) that she was 16 years old when she started work in the Laundry. Our record shows that she arrived in St Mary's Newry when she was 17½ years old. In accordance with section 33 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1947, which I understand came into force in Northern Ireland in 1957, the school-going age was from 5 years to 15 years. After leaving school, it would not have been uncommon for a person to start work if employment could be found. At that time, there would have been an expectation that younger people would take up vocational training or employment upon leaving school. The Applicant sets out the working day as starting at 9am, and working until 7pm or sometimes until 10pm. I do not recall this as being the general daily routine, and as stated above I have set out my recollection of the general daily routine.
30. At paragraph 16 (GSC-062 and GSC-063) the Applicant refers to being "whacked" for tearing a garment and being "punished" for mixing up orders while working in the

packing room. She also refers to being beaten with a cane for falling over a bundle of ironing. I was surprised to read these allegations because as stated above I do not recall seeing anyone being struck or "whacked" as is alleged. I do not recall a cane being used or threatened. I worked in the packing room. There were around 4 or 5 Sisters working in the packing room, and each would have a lady working with her. We would chat while carrying out our tasks, and I remember there was always singing in the packing room and in the ironing room. As I have noted above the atmosphere in Newry was relaxed and progressive. It was much newer than a number of the other Good Shepherd institutions as it had only been opened in 1945.

31. The Applicant also refers to crashing a bicycle into a nun and being beaten with a strap, and not being allowed to watch television as a punishment. I do not recall anyone being hit, either with a hand, or a fist, or any other implement like a cane or a strap.
32. The most upsetting parts of the Applicant's statement for me were contained in paragraph 18 (GSC-063) where the Applicant says she suffered "emotional abuse" and also where she said: *"the nuns would have told you were useless one hundred times a day and that nobody wanted you"*. I find it very difficult to believe that this occurred. As a Good Shepherd Sister, it is our mission to be compassionate and treat our ladies with love and respect. We view the core of our ministry to uphold the dignity and rights of women. In the Conferences to which I have referred above, our foundress advises us in the following terms: *"I beg you for the love of God never say anything to your children which could wound them; that would be doing the devil's work. You would discourage these already & wavering souls, and you would not be daughters of the Good Shepherd who takes the lost sheep on his shoulders, and is all tenderness toward it."* Our charism is one of nurturing, support and love. I find it particularly difficult to read the Applicant's memories of St Mary's Newry in this regard. I cannot accept that this is correct, as it would go against everything the Sisters worked for.
33. At paragraph 20 (GSC-064) the Applicant refers to having her appendix removed at Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry. I confirm that the ladies and Sisters would have gone to the local hospital for medical treatment, when required.
34. At paragraph 22 (GSC-064), the Applicant refers to a swimming pool being beside the dormitory building, and complaining that she couldn't swim there because *"there was nobody there to teach you"*. I recall this being an outdoor pool at the end of a field. I do not believe this was ever a functioning swimming pool - it is my recollection that it

was not used for two reasons: firstly, the structure was unsound and we were afraid of it caving in. Secondly, the water was dirty – there was no outlet to allow the water to circulate and be replaced with fresh water, and in consequence the water became stagnant. We were afraid that if someone swam in it that it could affect their health. During my time in St Mary's Newry, no one allowed to swim in it. I cannot imagine anyone wanting to swim in it even if it had been a functioning outdoor pool, as I imagine the water temperature would have been unpleasantly cold. It is my understanding that the structure was eventually dismantled.

35. At paragraph 21 (GSC-064) the Applicant refers to climbing up on the roof to watch the Orange Order parades on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July. I must confess that the Sisters and ladies all enjoyed watching the 12<sup>th</sup> July parades going past, and we would all go out onto the flat roof for this purpose.
36. At paragraph 24 (GSC-065) the applicant refers to leaving St Mary's Newry when she was 17 or 18 and being "*sent to work in St Joseph's Hospital in Clonmel*". Our record shows that the Applicant arrived with us when she was 17½ years old and left on [REDACTED] 1961 when she was 23 years old. This work placement would have been found for the Applicant through the Good Shepherd Sisters network, as it was our objective to ensure that the ladies leaving us had stable and decent jobs to go to. The Applicant refers to arriving in [REDACTED] in "*a pink dress made out of flour bags*". I do not recall anything of this nature; ladies wore their ordinary clothes. I find it difficult to understand the Applicant's references to clothing made from flour bags as I do not recall clothes being handmade for the ladies.
37. At paragraph 24 (GSC-065) the applicant also refers to being driven from Newry to Dublin by SR 305 and that SR 305 wore the "Magdalene clothes, the black robe and rosary beads". It is a small detail, but I wish to state that SR 305 was an auxiliary, and her clothing would have been a blue smock, not a black robe.
38. At paragraph 24 (GS-065) the Applicant refers to keeping in touch with GSC 36 and saying "she was lovely". I am glad that the Applicant has fond recollections of her bond with the Sister.
39. I must admit that the Applicant's description of Newry is not consistent with my own recollections of St Mary's Newry at the same time. St Mary's Newry was very much a progressive house. We were struck by its warmth, openness, and charm. It was my feeling that it had a lovely atmosphere. I had the sense that there was a great spirit of camaraderie between the Sisters and the ladies.

40. Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true

Signed:

**SR 281**

Dated the 5<sup>th</sup> day of February 2016

Witness Name: **SR 281**

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922-1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **SR 281** RGSRespondent Witness Statement to Statement of **HIA 202**  
HIAI 202I **SR 281** will say as follows:-

1. I make this Statement in response to the above named Applicant's Statement to the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse 1922-1995 (the Inquiry).
2. The Applicant refers to having been resident in "Good Shepherd Newry". The institution at that time was referred to as "St Mary's, Newry". To avoid confusion, I refer to it as "St Mary's" in this Statement.

I will say as follows:

3. I was born in 1931. I joined the Good Shepherd Sisters and made my final vows in 1957.
4. My name is **SR 281** but I was known by my name in religion, **SR 281** until around 1971 when we started moving away from using names in religion. I am now known as **SR 281**
5. I started working in St Mary's Newry on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1957. I worked there for 13 years until 1969 when I went to Shropshire to undertake a course in Residential social work. That was a 2 year course (one year in academic work in College, and one year working in Newry). I returned to St Mary's Newry in 1970, and continued there until October 1971.

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6. I worked in the packing room of the laundry in St Mary's Newry with a number of the ladies and the other Sisters.
7. In response to the Applicant's Statement I would like to say the following:
- (i) I arrived in St Mary's Newry in June 1957, and left in 1971. Our records show that the Applicant arrived in St Mary's Newry on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1973, [REDACTED] 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.
  - (ii) Our years in St Mary's Newry did not overlap. I did not know the Applicant, and I do not recall the Applicant. However, I was familiar with the routine and structure of St Mary's Newry, as I was resident there for 14 years.
  - (iii) Having read the Applicant's statement, I note the terrible abuse which she suffered in her family home. I read with sadness her statement that she "didn't have a loving home" (paragraph (1) GSC-052). Girls came to us from all sorts of backgrounds. It was our role to accept them with love, and not pass any judgment on their background.
8. At paragraph 5 (GSC-053) the Applicant refers to the daily routine in place in St Mary's Newry. I would like to set out my recollection of the general daily routine in St Mary's Newry up until I left in 1971:
- (i) Everyone got up at around 7am.
  - (ii) Mass was at 7:30am. It should be noted however that St Mary's Newry had a very relaxed atmosphere. It is my recollection that the ladies were not required to go to Mass. They could go if they wanted, but they were not forced. There was a general expectation that they would attend mass two or three times a week, but they were not required to go every day. If the ladies did not go to mass they would have been supervised by one of the auxiliaries.
  - (iii) Breakfast was served at around 8am. For breakfast, there was porridge, or bread and butter with a cup of tea. All meals were prepared in the Convent Kitchen by SR 306 who cooked for all the Sisters and the ladies.
  - (iv) We usually started work at around 9am, except for Monday which generally started later at around 10am.
  - (v) We stopped work mid-morning for a tea break. Work resumed and continued until lunch-time which was generally between 12noon and 12:30pm.
  - (vi) After lunch, there was recreation time. If it was a fine day, the Sisters and the ladies would sit outside.

- (vii) We resumed work at around 2pm or 2:30pm. We stopped for a tea-break at around 3:30pm and then continued until around 6pm when the ladies had their evening meal.
- (viii) From time to time, we might have to work later in the evening if there had been a breakdown of machinery or some other misadventure.
- (ix) After evening meal there was recreation time. There were lessons (craft skills, cooking etc), and entertainment (singing and music) referred to below. The lessons which were given by the Sisters to the ladies in St Mary's Newry related mostly to cooking and crafting skills. During my time in St Mary's Newry, I taught the ladies knitting, crotchet, and cane work. There were also Irish dancing lessons, and drama classes. There were also cookery classes in the kitchen. Our focus was to ensure that the ladies acquired the necessary domestic and life skills to ensure they would be independent and self-sufficient when they left St Mary's Newry.
- (x) I recall with fondness **SR 338** would have something prepared for the Sisters and the ladies e.g. cocoa or Ovaltine together with gingernut biscuits or a bun before going to bed.

St Mary's Newry felt more like a family home. It was cosy and small, and we tried to ensure that the atmosphere was welcoming. St Mary's Newry was very much a progressive house. We were struck by its warmth, openness, and charm. It was my feeling that it had a lovely atmosphere. I had the sense that there was a great spirit of camaraderie between the Sisters and the ladies.

9. At paragraph (5) (GSC-053) the Applicant states that she worked in the laundry. In accordance with section 33 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1947, which I understand came into force in Northern Ireland in 1957, the school-going age was from 5 years to 15 years. After leaving school, it would not have been uncommon for a person to start work if employment could be found. At that time, there would have been an expectation that younger people would take up vocational training or employment upon leaving school. The laundry in St Mary's Newry was modern. The work was mechanised. There had been a significant investment in machinery to reduce the burden on the ladies and the Sisters. I worked in the packing room of the laundry. The Sisters and the ladies all worked together.

10. At paragraph (5), GSC-053, the Applicant says that she did not wear a uniform, "*just the clothes [she] wore at home*". That is correct. There was no uniform in St Mary's Newry.
11. At paragraph (6) (GSC-053) the Applicant says that "Newry was more relaxed than Good Shepherd in Derry". I agree that the atmosphere in Newry was very free and warm. I think this was because it was a smaller place. The Sisters in all houses worked hard to ensure that every house had its own homely, warm atmosphere.
12. At paragraph (6) (GSC-053) the Applicant says '*I do not recall being allowed out in Newry*'. The ladies were allowed to go to Newry town to spend their pocket money, go for walks, etc. However, no one was allowed out late at night. The time of which the Applicant is writing was Newry in 1973. She had just turned 16 years old. The Troubles had started in 1969. We were always hearing news reports of bombings, shootings, riots, marches. It was a time of political and social unrest. We felt we could not let the teenagers out late at night, as those were dangerous and unpredictable times in Northern Ireland. We were doing our best to ensure that those in our care were not put in a situation of danger. It should be appreciated that the Applicant was 16 years old at the time, and I expect that a responsible parent may have taken the same approach with their daughter's safety. It is important to acknowledge that we were doing our utmost to protect the girls given the context of the times.
13. I note that the Applicant learned to play the guitar when she was with us (paragraph 6 GSC-053). I was delighted to hear that. There was a great tradition of music in St Mary's Newry. One of the Sisters, [REDACTED] would often work with the girls to teach them singing and music. [REDACTED] was a great musician, as was SR 229 SR 229 She took the girls for choir practice. SR 229 was great fun. To ensure that the ladies were not bored, and had plenty of entertainment, the convent became a focal point for the local community. I hope that the Applicant has some happy memories of those times.
14. The Applicant states at paragraph 6 (GSC-053) that "*the nuns would turn [the TV] off when there was kissing*". I agree that this would have happened, even though it sounds silly in modern times.
15. I note that the Applicant states at paragraph 6 (GSC-053) that the "*food was alright*". I was pleased to hear this. The preparation of meals with care and love was a core



- part of the Sisters' work. SR 306 was in charge of the kitchen. She was a sensible, practical woman and a great cook. SR 306 was assisted by SR 307 and a lady called GSC 28 SR 306 was a lovely woman. There was one kitchen which prepared the food for all the ladies and the Sisters. SR 306 ensured that everyone was served food which was healthy and nutritious. The Sisters got the same food as the ladies, and it is my recollection that the food was good. The Good Shepherd Sisters saw it as part of their core ministry to ensure that everyone in their care is well fed and cared for physically. In the Book of Conferences (referred to above) it contains the following advice (see page 158): *"Let me remind you once again never to give your children cold, badly prepared meals. Use your judgement and don't make one portion of bread do for three people."* We therefore saw it as a core part of our ministry to serve healthy food and ensure that everyone had enough.
16. The Applicant confirms (at paragraph 5 GSC-053) that she was never physically abused in St Mary's Newry. That is correct. There was no corporal punishment in St Mary's Newry. I had been there since 1957 and I never saw anyone being slapped or hit in any manner. We all engaged on the basis of mutual respect for each other. It would have been totally contrary to our ethos for a Sister to hit any other person.
17. I read the Applicant's story of her romance with the delivery driver, [REDACTED] and of her dancing with him at the Christmas dance in St Mary's Newry. The Sisters organised dances and concerts for the ladies, and the local community was invited in. I read the Applicant's statement of [REDACTED] death on [REDACTED] four months after the Applicant arrived in St Mary's Newry and got to know him during that time. That must have been very upsetting for the Applicant. It is a great comfort to know that GSC 36 provided such emotional support to the Applicant during that difficult time (paragraph 8 GSC-054). I am glad that the Applicant has fond recollections of her bond with GSC 36. It saddened me to read that the Applicant continues to grieve over the loss of [REDACTED]. I hope that by engaging in this process with the Inquiry, that the Applicant finds some healing in knowing that her story has been heard and believed.
18. At paragraph (10) (GSC-054) the Applicant says: *"My mother didn't want me before so I felt what was the point in going home"*. This statement saddened me greatly. For any child to feel that she was not wanted at home by her mother is a source of great sadness.

**19. Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true

Signed:

**SR 281**

Dated the 5<sup>th</sup> day of February 2016

Witness Name: **SR 281**

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922-1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **SR 281** RGSRespondent Witness Statement to Statement of **HIA 387** HIAI 387**SR 281** will say as follows:-

1. I make this Statement in response to the above named Applicant's Statement to the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse 1922-1995 (the Inquiry).
2. The Applicant refers to having been resident in "Good Shepherd Newry". The institution at that time was referred to as "St Mary's, Newry". To avoid confusion, I refer to it as "St Mary's" in this Statement.

I will say as follows:

3. I was born in 1931. I joined the Good Shepherd Sisters and made my final vows in 1957.
4. My name is **SR 281** but I was known by my name in religion, **SR 281** until around 1971 when we started moving away from using names in religion. I am now known as **SR 281**
5. I started working in St Mary's Newry on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1957. I worked there for 13 years until 1969 when I went to Shropshire to undertake a course in Residential social work. That was a 2 year course (one year in academic work in College, and one year working in Newry). I returned to St Mary's Newry in 1970, and continued there until October 1971.
6. I worked in the packing room of the laundry in St Mary's Newry with a number of the ladies and the other Sisters.

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Witness Statement **SR 281** Applicant: **HIA 387** HIA ref 387  
DocNo.110485001

7. My recollection of the general daily routine in St Mary's Newry from 1957 up until the time I left in 1971 was as follows:

- (i) Everyone got up at around 7am.
- (ii) Mass was at 7:30am. It should be noted however that St Mary's Newry had a very relaxed atmosphere. It is my recollection that the ladies were not required to go to Mass. They could go if they wanted, but they were not forced. There was a general expectation that they would attend mass two or three times a week, but they were not required to go every day. If the ladies did not go to mass they would have been supervised by one of the auxiliaries.
- (iii) Breakfast was served at around 8am. For breakfast, there was porridge, or bread and butter with a cup of tea. All meals were prepared in the Convent Kitchen by SR 306 who cooked for all the Sisters and the ladies.
- (iv) We usually started work at around 9am, except for Monday which generally started later at around 10am.
- (v) We stopped work mid-morning for a tea break. Work resumed and continued until lunch-time which was generally between 12noon and 12:30pm.
- (vi) After lunch, there was recreation time. If it was a fine day, the Sisters and the ladies would sit outside.
- (vii) We resumed work at around 2pm or 2:30pm. We stopped for a tea-break at around 3:30pm and then continued until around 6pm when the ladies had their evening meal.
- (viii) From time to time, we might have to work later in the evening if there had been a breakdown of machinery or some other misadventure.
- (ix) After evening meal there was recreation time. There were lessons (craft skills, cooking etc) which I have referred to above, and entertainment (singing and music) referred to below.
- (x) I recall with fondness SR 338 would have something prepared for the Sisters and the ladies e.g. cocoa or Ovaltine together with gingemut biscuits or a bun before going to bed.

St Mary's Newry felt more like a family home. It was cosy and small, and we tried to ensure that the atmosphere was welcoming. St Mary's Newry was very much a progressive house. We were struck by its warmth, openness, and charm. It was my feeling that it had a lovely atmosphere. I had the sense that there was a great spirit of camaraderie between the Sisters and the ladies.

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8. In response to the Applicant's Statement I would like to say the following:
- (i) I arrived in St Mary's Newry in June 1957, and left in 1971. I was in St Mary's Newry at the same time as the Applicant.
  - (ii) I do not remember the Applicant.
  - (iii) In paragraph 24 (GSC- 075) the Applicant states that she was in St Mary's Newry from the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1963 to the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1964. Our records show that she arrived in St Mary's Newry on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1964 and stayed there until the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1964 whereupon she left us to take up employment in the [REDACTED] in Belfast.
  - (v) At paragraph (24) (GSC-075) the Applicant states that she "*there were unmarried girls in there who had babies*". I think the Applicant may be referring to the Mother and Baby Home which was in Newry, which was called Marianvale. Marianvale was in a separate building from St Mary's Newry.
  - (v) The Applicant confirms (at paragraph 6 GSC-053) that she was never hit in St Mary's Newry. That is correct. There was no corporal punishment in St Mary's Newry. I had been there since 1957 and I never saw anyone being slapped or hit in any manner. We all engaged on the basis of mutual respect for each other. It would have been totally contrary to our ethos for a Sister to hit any other person. I read the Applicant's statement where she said "*the nuns weren't too bad there. They would shout and scream at us but I don't recall them ever hitting me*". While I accept that perhaps due to the noise of machinery in the laundry people sometimes had to raise their voices, but I do not remember any lady being shouted or screamed at. We view the core of our ministry to uphold the dignity and rights of women. It is my recollection that we interacted with each other on the basis of mutual respect.
  - (vi) At paragraph (25) (GSC-076) the Applicant states that she was "*not given any survival skills or guidance...how to cook*". As stated above, I took the ladies for lessons in the evenings. In addition to crafting skills lessons, I taught cooking skills which were held in the convent kitchen. Our objective was to ensure that the ladies could be independent and self-sufficient when they left St Mary's Newry. However, I appreciate that the Applicant was still very young when she left St Mary's Newry, and it is a great pity that the statutory services available at that time did not provide the level of after-care support for such vulnerable children as they do today.

- (vii) I read with great sadness the Applicant's account of her childhood before she arrived with us. It very painful to read. She clearly experienced a great deal in her early years. I hope that in St Mary's Newry, she experienced stability, warmth and love.

9. Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true

Signed:

**SR 281**

Dated the 5<sup>th</sup> day of February 2016

Special help and classes were given to any of the teenagers or ladies who may have been illiterate upon their arrival in St Mary's. Aside from this, the lessons which were given by the Sisters to the ladies in St Mary's Newry related mostly to cooking and baking classes, craft classes including knitting, crotchet, cane work. The focus was to ensure that the teenagers acquired the necessary domestic and life skills to ensure they would be independent and self-sufficient when they left St Mary's Newry. There were also music classes, Irish dancing lessons, and drama classes.

#### **6.12. How medical treatment was provided**

As no records remain, we have asked one Sister who worked St Mary's Newry about how medical treatment was provided. The teenagers were all registered with the local G.P. Surgery in Newry. Where a medical issue arose, the teenager would have been sent to attend on the local GP and would have had access to the medical services available to them through that GP Practice. See also the Hand Book referred to above, a copy of which is attached hereto which states at page 5 (paragraph number 5): "*In collaboration with the Directress, the [Group Mother] arranges medical treatment for the children*". The Inquiry might be in a position to clarify whether medical records have been made available to the Inquiry by relevant medical practices, as these records would not be available to the Congregation.

#### **6.13. How contact with family was preserved?**

As no records remain, we have asked one Sister who worked St Mary's Newry about how family contact was preserved in St Mary's. Siblings were kept together, and this was encouraged by the Sisters as it was understood that siblings would give great support and comfort to each other. That Sister recalls at least one instance where two sisters from the same family were admitted together, and were kept together, and those two girls were visited by their mother and younger sister. When possible, some teenagers went for a home visit at Christmas or an overnight stay from time to time. There Sisters did not restrict family visits. The Sisters facilitated parents remaining in contact with their children, and facilitated visits and meetings, and it is the Sisters' recollection that parents who came to visit were treated with great respect and always made welcome. Where a child had been placed with the Good Shepherd Sisters due to suffering child abuse in her family home, the Sisters would have been anxious to ensure that family visits were supervised to ensure that the child was not exposed to risk of further abuse or harm by a particular family member. In 1971, the Irish Province of the Congregation published a book of guidelines called