

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 387

Witness Name: HIA 387

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 387

I, HIA 387 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in the Mater Hospital in Belfast. I know nothing about my parents or their circumstances, save for what is contained in my Birth Certificate. My maiden name is [REDACTED] I presume that I was with my parents before I went into Nazareth House but I really have no idea.

Nazareth House, Belfast, 9th November 1953 – 1st July 1961

2. I have no idea who placed me in Nazareth House, or why. I have no idea whether the courts were involved. I thought that I went in when I was roughly two years of age, however I have recently obtained records from the Family Care Society, which suggest that I was received into Nazareth House at the age of four years, on the recommendation of a priest [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I may have gone into the nursery before this, but I cannot recall. I remained there until I was fourteen years. My brother, [REDACTED] who was a year older than me, was taken into care at the same time. He was sent to the Christian Brothers and I was never allowed to see him. I only saw him a few times in the Convent. Sometimes some of the Nazareth Lodge boys were taken up to Nazareth House to be altar boys during special masses and I

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would have recognised [REDACTED] This only happened once or twice and we lost touch over the years.

3. I remember being dragged along the long hall by my hair, by a nun in a white dress. She was telling me that I wasn't a baby anymore. I must have been about four at the time. She handed to me a nun who was wearing a black habit, and I remember I was holding a doll, which they took off me. I was brought into a room, like a large classroom, which was full of children and there was lots of noise. It was very intimidating. I remember I was put on a table and I had wet myself. All of the children were looking at me. I recall a nun striking a cane hard across the table to get everyone's attention. I was given the number 49. If a nun called out my number and I didn't happen to hear, I would be slapped with a ruler. We were all separated into different dormitories.
4. The nuns that I recall being in the Convent at the time were **SR 31** and **SR 134** I remember one nun with a really red round face. She always looked angry. There was another nun, **SR 59** who would give me a sweet sometimes. If she was standing talking to me, and another nun came along, she looked scared, and she would stand back from me. **SR 59** was the only nun I remember who was kind.
5. I had no idea what lay in store for me over the next few years. The nuns constantly told us that no one wanted us because we were bad, we were orphans. There was emotional abuse and humiliation. I was only a child feeling very small and helpless. I was told that I wasn't worthy to have such a beautiful name of [REDACTED] and how dare I [REDACTED] the day of [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I always felt scared and bewildered about why they said this to us as we were only children. We called the nuns the dark shadows. We could always tell which nun was coming into the dormitory by the way they walked and the tinkle of their beads.

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6. I was beaten senseless sometimes, either because I said something wrong, or because the nun didn't like me. When we did not do the right thing, we were slapped around the head and the back of the neck. The nuns would hit us on both sides of our hands with a ruler, until our hands bled. We were getting punched most days for something or other. If we did not cry, they would hit us around the face and pick us up by the ears. Sometimes it left me dizzy and momentarily dumb. Sometimes at school, if we didn't know an answer or we were being punished, we had our hands tied behind our backs and the nuns would come behind us and slap us on the head. They also hit us with the leather belts they wore around their waist. We also would have been dragged to the front of the class, where we had to stand in the corner with a dunce hat on. They would make us kneel on the ground for a long time. I was put in a dark room for talking out loud. When we got older, we were put in charge of younger ones, and when they did wrong, we were punished as well. I used to stare at the nuns in the eye and I would refuse to cry until I get into bed at night-time. I don't know where I got my strength from.
7. We were worked as children, like little slaves. We had to clean and polish the floors and stairs, which we did with cloths tied to our feet. We had to polish the church, and do the washing. I had to gather wet sheets up, take them across the courtyard to where the laundry was and put them in big hot tubs. There was many a night where I had to kneel at the top of the dormitory darning socks, and I would fall asleep on the floor. There was a bucket of socks for me to work through. The rest of the children would be asleep somewhere. The nuns would come and bump me on the head whilst I was working, and I wouldn't even know what I had done wrong to deserve this. I was made to darn the socks at least one night a week. I was quite a stubborn child, and I believe that I might have been made to do these chores because the nuns saw me as being defiant. They were trying to break us down. We received no payment for the work we did.
8. In the morning we had to get up and tidy the area around our bed. We were stripped naked first thing in the morning. We had to take our nightclothes off and walk naked down cold halls into the bathroom. It was embarrassing. We

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were bathed two or three times a week. The nuns put Jeyes fluid into the bath water, and it would burn our skin. The same water was used for all the children and it was cold by the end. The nuns washed our mouths out with carbolic soap, which made us feel sick. We had to stand naked and have our hair washed in big tin baths in the yard, regardless of the weather. We were checked for nits. If I had nits, the nuns would cut all my hair off, and then push my head back down into the water. Sometimes it felt like they were drowning me. They would hit me at the same time and pour Jeyes fluid onto my skin. They would hit us if we tried to lift our head out of the water. Sometimes we would try and wet our hair so it would look as if we were already washed, but the nuns would smell it to check, and then they would really make us feel as if we were going to drown to teach us a lesson. If we wet the bed, we had to walk around the yard with the sheets on our head and no shoes on, regardless of the rain and snow, so that everyone could see us. Sometimes the nuns would rub our faces in the wet sheets. On a Friday night, we were made to stand naked in a big hall and hold our knickers in our hands and turn them inside out so the nuns would inspect them. If my underwear was soiled, I would be punished and called a rank, smelly dirty girl. The first time I had my period, I was petrified. I thought the devil had actually got me for all the bad things the nuns told me I did. I tucked myself up in bed and wouldn't get out. The nuns told me I was an evil wicked child because of what the devil had done to me. They never told me what was actually happening to me. There was no education about personal development.

9. Our clothing was not warm enough for the winter days when we were put into the garden. We would be sent out without any coat, and indeed I don't remember having a coat at all the entire time I was in Nazareth House. Our clothes were always hand-me-downs, and we generally didn't have our own personal clothes. Everything was shared. My shoes were always too big for me and sometimes I needed an elastic band to keep them on. Sometimes we used to steal apples from the Holy Rosary. We would tuck them in our knickers. When the nuns realised what we were doing, they started to remove the elastic from our knickers so that we couldn't hide anything in there. We had to tie string around our legs instead.

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10. I felt neglected. We weren't fed properly. I was always hungry. Breakfast was either lumpy porridge or bread in dripping. It was basically the same food every day. We were given lumpy fatty stew. If I didn't eat my dinner, because it was fatty, the nuns would hold my mouth until I swallowed it. If I was sick, the nuns would make me eat my vomit. I don't believe I was the only person that this happened to. As I got older, I realised it was easier to just try to eat the food. Sometimes the older girls would supervise meal times and they were just as bad as the nuns. Sometimes we had to eat standing up because there weren't enough chairs.

11. When we went to bed, the nuns would come round and make us cross our hands and legs so that the devil could not get to our body. We did not even understand who the devil was, but as we grew older we believed it to be the nuns and the priests.

12. I was sexually abused by the nuns. I did not understand until I left the home, what the nuns had done to me and how wrong it was. We were too young to understand that we were being abused. The nuns would call us out of bed and take us to the nun's bathroom. They might have taken one girl, or a few girls, who would wait outside the bathroom as we were taken in to the bathroom one by one. There were two nuns in the bathroom. I was told to take off my nightdress, and I would have to stand naked in the cold bathroom. I was told to get up on a table and spread my legs so that they could examine me. One of the nuns would put her finger inside my vagina. Then she would hit me and tell me I was smelly and dirty. She would laugh at me until I cried, and then hit me again. She would also hit me on the vagina with a brush. The other nun would be watching and giggling. I don't remember the names of these nuns, but I remember that one of them would have been wearing a white dress. This would happen every couple of weeks. Many a night I did not feel safe in my bed knowing what was going to happen. I cried myself to sleep most nights. I only realised after I left the home, through conversations with other people, that what the nuns did to me was wrong.

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13. We had to go to Confession every week. We were only children and weren't doing anything wrong so we would make up our sins. On one occasion, when I was aged about ten years, I was one of the last girls to make it to Confession. The priest came out of the Confessional Box. He got me by my ears, pushed me on the floor and then dragged me back up again. He dragged me in to the Sacristy. He pulled my pants down, forced my legs open and raped me. I didn't know what he had done, but I knew that I didn't like it, and I didn't like the smell of him. I was screaming and kicking and he held his hands over my mouth. He told me that I wasn't worthy and made me beg for forgiveness, and he told me that I had the devil's eyes. I don't recall this priest's name [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This was the only time that this happened.

14. There was an old people's home on the other side of the convent. Sometimes we were taken up there and we would be told to sit on an old man's knee. I was never comfortable with this. The old men would touch us on our legs and we would pull away. The nuns would laugh and say "oh go on and give him a hug". It felt like we were being used when we were brought over to the old men.

15. We went to primary school on the grounds of Nazareth House, and then St Monica's Secondary School. My education was inadequate. It was mostly about religion. I learned how to say my prayers forwards and backwards. The only book I can remember was the Bible. I recall one occasion when the Reverend Mother came to the classroom, with a visiting priest. I was being asked questions on the Bible. I said "well if Jesus was a Jew, God was a Jew, why are we Catholics? I don't want to be a Catholic anymore, I want to be a Jew". I was dragged by the hair and they shouted "how dare you [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I was slapped and told I wasn't worthy, and made to kiss the priest's feet.

16. Nobody was monitoring our education. We were never tested on any subjects. We were taught our ABC's and how to count but I was never encouraged to

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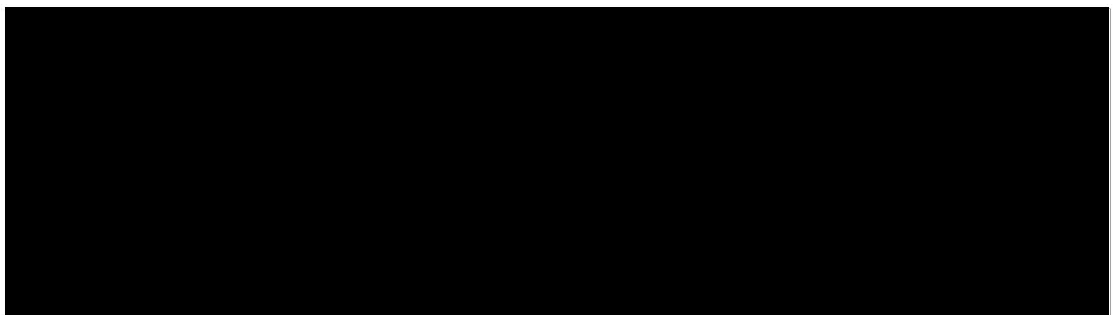
study or take exams to get a good start in life in the workplace. I felt very let down in terms of the education I was given.

17. I recall a girl called [REDACTED] being given a beautiful box of beads by her mother. The nuns immediately took it off her and said she couldn't have it. At Christmas, I received that present by accident from Father Christmas, and the nuns took it off me and gave it to [REDACTED]. Everybody else got whatever stuff the nuns had collected, dolls that were pieced together. I pulled the Christmas tree down, and then I wasn't allowed any dinner. I never believed in Father Christmas after that.

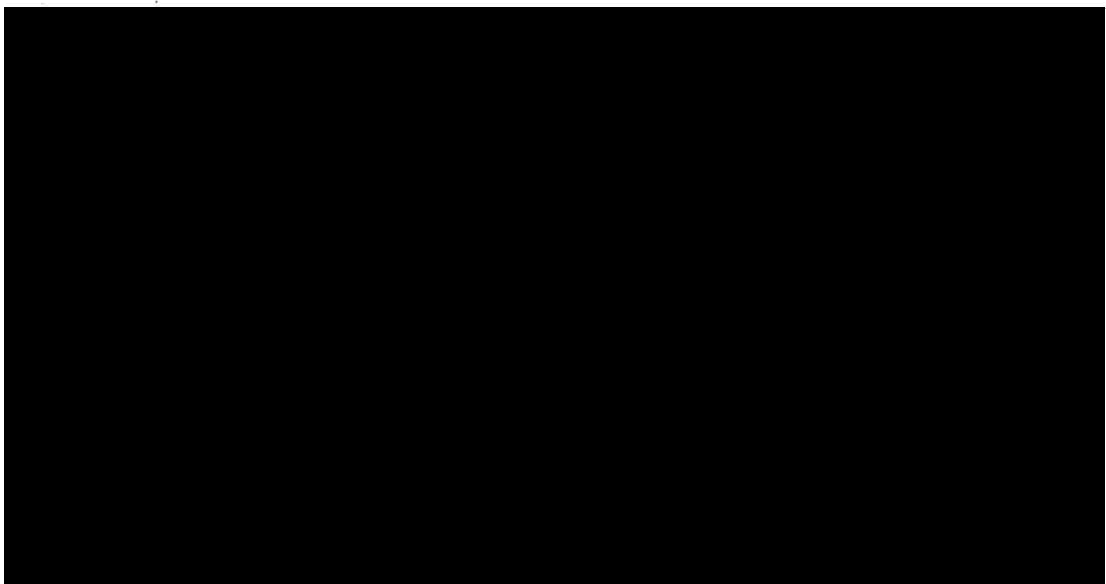
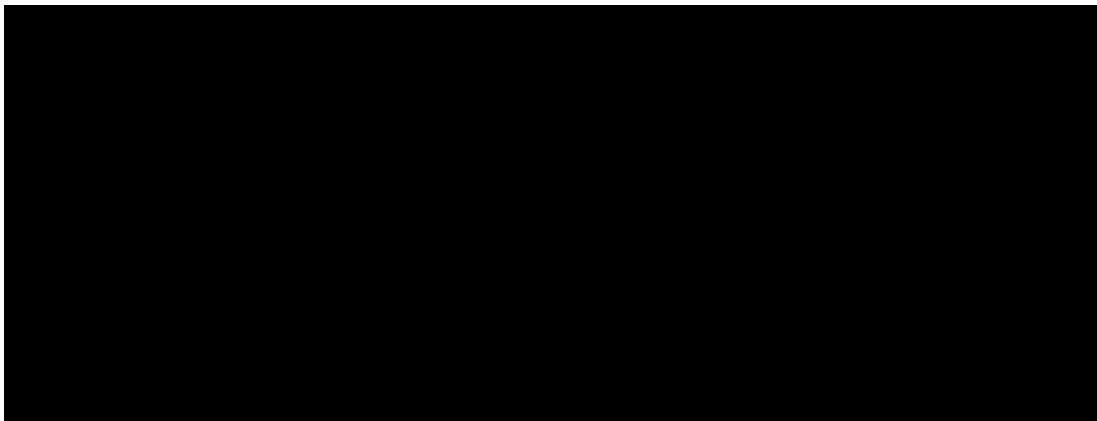
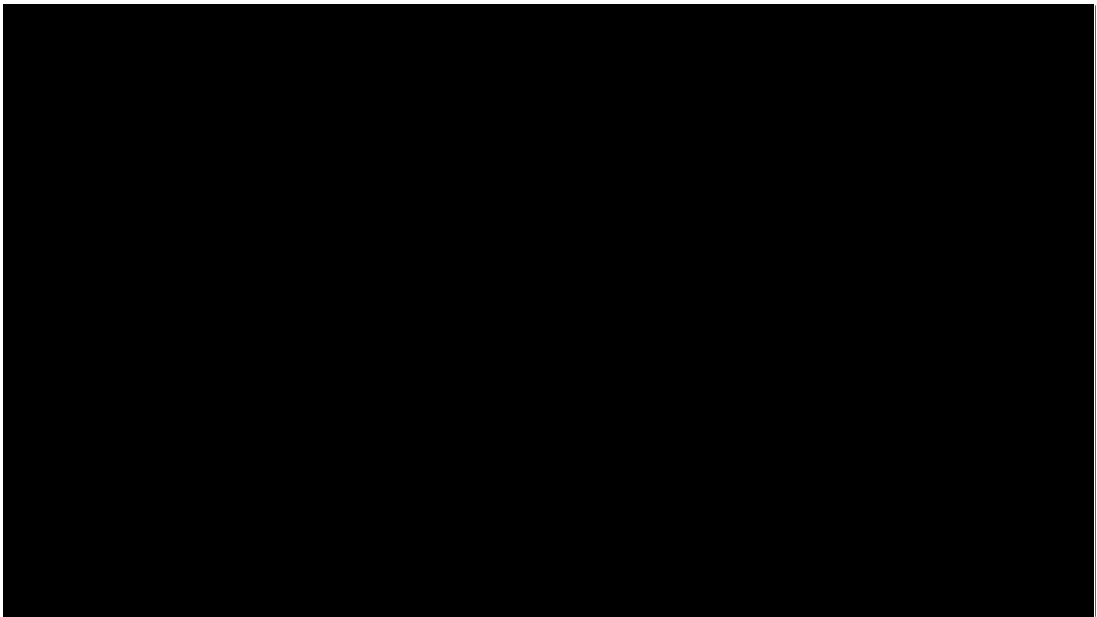
18. I always knew my age and my birthday, because my birthday was on a feast day, but we never got presents or even sang Happy Birthday to each other. Very few of us had visitors at Nazareth House. If the nuns knew that there were going to be visitors in the home, they would have dressed us nicer than normal. I don't remember ever seeing a Social Worker.

19. I remember when I was aged around nine or ten years, we were all brought to see the children being sent away to Australia and Canada. I hid because I was terrified that they were going to put me on this boat and send me to the end of the world. I hid behind a bin and a taxi man found me and brought me back to Nazareth House.

20. At one stage, after I was a bit older, I told a nun about what the priest had done to me in the Sacristy. I was aged about fourteen years at the time. Suddenly I was moved to the Good Shepherd Convent. I believe they were getting rid of me because I told somebody that the priest had raped me.



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Life after care

25. I left care when I was sixteen years of age. I was not given any survival skills or guidance. I didn't learn communication skills, how to cook or look after my personal hygiene. I had no concept of money. They didn't teach us that we had rights, the same as everyone else. I was never given any self-confidence or sense of self-esteem. The nuns took all my innocence away. They took everything a human being is entitled to, and took it away from me. They took away my childhood. When I left there, I had nothing. I didn't know who to turn to.
26. When I left care, I got on a train and I ended up in [REDACTED] Belfast where I was sleeping rough. I didn't know anything about hostels or homeless shelters. Everything was alien because I knew nothing other than the homes. I was deprived of a proper education which made it very hard for me to get a job as a teenager and young adult. The cruelty and abuse left me fearful and shaky, and it hindered my chances of finding employment. I was forced to steal on occasions, but never for the sake of stealing. I only stole food, when I had no money.
27. A friend said she was going to [REDACTED] so I decided to go with her. When I arrived in [REDACTED] I had no qualifications so the only employment I could get was as a cleaner, a live in job which gave me a roof over my head.
28. My childhood has definitely had an impact on my adult life. I still have nightmares about what the nuns did, and about the priests who raped me. My experiences have made it very difficult for me to build relationships as an adult and to trust anyone. I have found it difficult in life holding relationships.
29. I got married when I was approximately twenty-four years of age. I got married because I wanted protection, security and a home life. I have two children. I was lucky I had a good mother in law who helped me with my children, and taught me the right way to talk to them and discipline them. My husband suffered from a [REDACTED] and I had to bring the children up on my own. I

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have always been honest with my children about my childhood, and the fact that I had none. I taught them everything. I made sure they have everything, most importantly their education. I took foreign students into my home so that my children would learn that we are all different, and unique in our own way. I have introduced them to all religions. I am now remarried, and have two step-children. We have six grandchildren. I feel that my children have suffered because they don't have any extended family members from my side of the family.

30. My education was so inadequate, I find that it still affects my life, even today. I find it difficult to spell and read, and there are words I still cannot pronounce. I didn't realise until I was fifty, when I went back to Tech, that I had dyslexia. I did a computer class. I have trained myself to read and spell a little, but I still get blanks. Whilst I am not an educated person, I am self-educated, and I always believe that there is nobody more educated than a self-educated person, because they want it and work for it themselves. I always try to re-educate myself. I do feel that I am a stronger person because of my experiences. I fight my corner now. I work with young people, and I always fight for them when necessary, and teach them about their rights.

31. Over the past fifteen years I have tried to find out who I am. The nuns gave us no sense of our identity. We're not educated because we had no voice, and no one to answer our questions. I am 64 years of age, and I have no evidence that I was there, only sad memories of a lost childhood, which I have never forgotten. I haven't been able to find out any information on my parents, save for what was contained in my Birth Certificate, which I managed to get a few years ago. I also got my Baptismal Certificate from St Brigid's Catholic Church. I tried to find out about my parents after receiving my Birth Certificate but I didn't get anywhere. I don't know where they are now, or whether I have any siblings other than [REDACTED]. I have approached several organisations in an attempt to find records or documentation relating to me, but I found that obstacles were placed at every turn. I have been told that the records related to my upbringing were burnt or destroyed or simply unavailable. It felt like no-one wanted me to see my records, and I have been fobbed off. I have only

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recently obtained three sheets of paper from the Family Care Society which detail my admissions into the various homes.

32. All of my life I have had to take not knowing where I come from, whether I have any other siblings, my family's medical history. I have nothing to relate to. I have medical issues which I would like to be able to relate to my background if possible, and to pass on to my own children for the benefit of them and their children. I have skin problems and I wonder if it was to do with the use of Jeyes fluid when I was younger. I still cannot stand the smell of it.
33. I only met my brother [REDACTED] ten years ago, when we found each other through the Salvation Army. He was very badly affected by his experiences with the Christian Brothers. He stayed there until he was about nineteen years of age. He is living in supported housing in the [REDACTED] He is still traumatised and will not talk about his childhood. He drinks, and just does nothing. His eyes are dead. He says he will never set foot back in Ireland. I cannot see him much, it's too painful.
34. I believe that the nuns and priests thought they were above the law, and nobody would stand up to them. They were the worst kind of criminals. They preyed on the most vulnerable and helpless. They had no love. Love and compassion was locked out of their hearts. They were paid to look after us, not abuse us. To them, we were discarded nuisances that nobody wanted. I hope they pay for their actions.
35. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police.

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Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed _____

HIA 387

Dated _____

7/7/14

and dressed and fed and would then have brought them over to School after, At least some of them, attending Mass . I would have come into contact with the children at school on occasions when I would have attended to visit to speak with them on matters of religious education and to assist in the preparation for First Communion, Confession and Confirmation. I do not recall ever being in attendance for their First Communion or Confirmation and believe that these may in fact have taken place in the Parish Church rather than in the Church in the House. This would have been quite a sensible approach as it would have involved the children being part of the wider community in the Ormeau Road/Ravenhill area. Other than that I really had very little contact with the children. I do recall all the children making Confessions and this would have been reasonably regularly as would have been the practice at the time. Maybe once a month, that sort of time period. My recollection is that the children would have come over in their group with the Sister who was in charge of their group. They would each have said their confession and then would have waited in the Church and then returned to the residence in their group as a unit. The Confessions which I carried out were always held in the Chapel inside Nazareth House itself.

9. Dr. Cathal Daly lived in Fitzwilliam Avenue close to the House with his mother and sister while he was a lecturer at Queens University. He celebrated Mass sometimes in Nazareth House and took the evening service of Rosary and Benediction occasionally.
10. I remember the layout of the house as follows. There were rooms to the front of the building at ground floor level and that is where I had my breakfast. On the Ravenhill side at Groundfloor level was the residence for the elderly men. On the Ormeau Road side there was a long corridor on the first floor and a room which had some of the youngest children in it. Along the corridor was a stairway which led to the area where the elderly ladies lived on the first floor. At the end of the corridor a stairway led up to the chapel on the first floor and at the end of the corridor at ground floor level were the classrooms. Beyond these rooms were the dining room and residence for the girls but I never visited these. There was also a hall where occasional entertainments were held.
11. I have been asked to respond to an allegation brought by a former resident,

HIA 316 This is not a child whom I remember and I do not recall her in any way. That is not because of anything in particular as I really have very little time with the children and do not recall many of them at all. I can confirm that I was never in the children's sleeping area in day time or at any time. Any times I visited the House at night it would have been as a result of a phone call from the staff to visit an elderly patient who was sick or dying and I would have been met at the doors by one of the Sisters. I did not have a key which allowed me to enter the House. I was let in by one of the Sisters. I would have been accompanied by that Sister when I visited the elderly resident and would then have been accompanied by a Sister who would have seen me to the door again. At no time did I ever visit any child during the night and deny that this event happened as described or at all. If I had been telephoned to visit a child the procedure would have been the same as that in operation for a visit to an elderly or sick person and a staff member would have been present.

12. I have also been asked to comment on an allegation by **HIA 387** or **HIA 387** **HIA 387** Again I do not remember this person directly. I simply deny that the event that she describes could ever have happened as far as I am concerned. The children attended their Confession in groups and would not have left on their own but would have remained in the Church until all of the children had finished Confession and would have left together. It is inconceivable that an event of this nature could have happened without there being a witness and I deny that this happened and deny that I was involved in any incident of this nature.

13. I am aware of various allegations concerning Brendan Smyth having been visiting Nazareth House. I can confirm that I was never aware of Brendan Smyth visiting the Home.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

NHB 84

Dated

05/02/2015