

Witness Name: Fr. Nicholas Wetz
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits: 3
Dated:

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Father Nicholas Wetz

I, Father Nicholas Wetz, of Downside Abbey will say as follows:-

1. I was educated at Alderwasley Hall Prep School, Derbyshire, and then at Belmont Abbey School, Hereford. I obtained a BA Hons degree from Essex University in Policy Making & Administration. I then worked in various roles for our family wine company, Unwins Ltd, for several years before joining the novitiate¹ at Belmont Abbey in 1985. My priestly studies were completed at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome 1988-91. I taught Religious Studies and coached sport at Belmont Abbey School until 1994. Following the closure of the school, due to declining numbers, I was appointed Claustal Prior of the monastery, Novice Master and Director of our Commercial Operations. The importance of restructuring our finances and business opportunities meant I relinquished the two monastic roles two years later in 1996.
2. In September 2004, after the appointment of a lay Director of Finance, I asked for a short sabbatical before my new appointment of Parish Priest of Belmont Abbey Parish. In January 2009 I was once again appointed as Claustal Prior of the monastery, and to be Junior Master in 2011. In 2013 I resumed the duties of Procurator of the monastery and in 2018 was appointed as Roman Catholic army chaplain to 22 Regiment SAS Hereford. I have been a Trustee of both the Belmont Abbey General Trust and Belmont Abbey Mission Trust for almost the entire period from 1991 to 2018. As Claustal Prior I was responsible for the day to day running of the monastery and the delegation of weekly duties. As Junior Master I had responsibility for the studies and formation of monks who had moved on from the novitiate. As Parish Priest I

¹ I was admitted to the novitiate when I began my monastic life as a novice (a junior and unprofessed member of the community). More detail is provided about entry into monastic life generally at paragraphs 41 to 42 below.

attended diocesan safeguarding training days in addition to the in-house monastic sessions organized by CSAS and others.

3. I make this statement regarding improvements and developments at Downside since the conclusion of the hearings into Ampleforth and Downside (Part 1 of the English Benedictine Congregation Case Study) on 15th December 2017. As I detail below, I was appointed Prior Administrator with effect from 1st September 2018. When I speak about events that occurred from that date I do so to the best of my knowledge and recollection with reference to relevant documents. When I speak about events between 15th December 2017 and 31st August 2018 I do so based on information and documentation provided to me as part of my appointment, or that has been provided to me since 1st September 2018.
4. I will be speaking primarily on matters relating to the monastery and this statement should be read alongside the third statement of Andrew Hobbs, who will speak primarily to matters relating to the school, and the statement of Nicholas Eldred who will speak primarily to matters relating to structure and governance. I have read both of these statements in draft and to the extent that the information contained in them is within my knowledge I agree with them.

Appointment as Prior Administrator of Downside

Process of Appointment

5. On 24th May 2018, the Downside Chapter informed the Abbot President that they wished to petition the Holy See to continue with a Prior Administrator for a further two years. This decision arose following the Visitation of Downside between 9th April and 2nd May 2018, by the Abbot President, Christopher Jamison, who decided that Downside's period of administration and congregational support should continue for a further two years.
6. As a preparatory step, the Abbot President, with the approval of the Abbot of Belmont, had already approached me on 26th April 2018 to obtain a view as to whether I would be prepared to accept the appointment of Prior Administrator should the Downside community decide not to hold an abbatial election.

7. After a week of reflection and two lengthy conversations with the Abbot President I agreed to be open to the appointment should it be formally offered. The Abbot of Belmont Abbey and his Council agreed to the President's request to appoint me at their the meeting on 11th June 2018 and the Trustees of Downside Abbey were informed of my appointment, subject to Holy See approval, on 18th June 2018.
8. On 15th July 2018 I was appointed by the authority of the Abbot President under a rescript of the Holy See as Prior Administrator of Downside for two years with effect from 1st September 2018. This was made public over the weekend of 14-15th July 2018.

Preparation for Role of Prior Administrator of Downside

9. As mentioned above, I had two lengthy initial discussions at Belmont with the Abbot President on 26th April and 3rd May 2018 at Belmont in which he briefed me on the background to the appointment, and the current issues and state of affairs at Downside Abbey. He informed me of the Visitation (which is described in further detail at paragraphs 70 to 74 below) and its conclusions, especially the formal Acts of Visitation. During these meetings we discussed the status and background of the monks under safeguarding plans (referred to at paragraphs 51 to 61 below). This was especially important to me as I wished for full transparency and to know the exact nature of the safeguarding issues before I accepted the position.
10. I made three visits to Downside before my appointment came into effect. During these visits (18 July, 14-17 August, and 23-24 August 2018) I met the resident community, the Head Master, and the HR department. I was able to have a good look around and make some notes on changes and personnel.
11. On 26th July 2018 I held a telephone conference call with Nicholas Eldred and Richard Bevan (two of Downside's lay advisers) who briefed me on the separation process and other Downside related business. I had my first full meeting with them on 13th September 2018.
12. I had a further meeting with Abbot Christopher at Belmont Abbey on Saturday 4th August 2018.

Manager and two monastic trustees to monitor the progress of separation and to answer questions and make decisions that might otherwise get held up between formal Trustee or Governor meeting dates. I have also been liaising with Bishop of Clifton and the Diocese's education department. There is absolutely no question, or desire of the community, to reverse their decision to separate the School from the Trust. Their wish is to ensure that the School continues and prospers in the years ahead.

26. A significant change which pre-dated my arrival was Dom Leo's resignation as Chair of School Governors on 5th January 2018. Following this the Governors elected Mr Adrian Aylward as the first lay Chair to replace him. The appointment of the first lay Chair of Governors was seen as an important step in the separation of the Trusts and in the reduction of the role of monastic governance. His appointment together with the reasons for it was accepted by the monastic community without reservation.
27. As mentioned above, following the Visitation of Downside in April and May this year, the Abbot President decided that the period of administration and congregational support should continue for a further two years. I was appointed Prior Administrator upon the expiry of Dom Leo's term of office. Dom Leo also resigned as a Trustee and School Governor as of 1st September 2018. I replaced him in both capacities.
28. On 17th May 2018 following the recommendation of the Interviewing Panel and the School Governors, the Trustees approved Mr Andrew Hobbs, formerly acting Head Master, as the new Head Master, with effect from 1st September 2018. This appointment was made following a competitive recruitment process with the assistance of Perrett Laver (recruitment consultants), which attracted a strong field of candidates from around the world, including serving Heads.
29. A new Finance and General Purpose Committee, (previously an Advisory Group) made up of three professional lay people (the executive director of the English National Ballet, a director at Deloitte, and a business chief executive and former BBC Trust member) together with one Downside Trustee and an external Trustee, was established to advise the Trustees and this held its first meeting in London on 24th September 2018. The creation of this committee was one of Abbot Christopher's formal Acts of Visitation and was appointed by the Downside Trustees to advise them on restructuring and financial issues. They have already provided useful insights and input into our possible monastery restructuring and future business plans.

legitimately be in a public area of the school. The work done by the Head Master and the school generally have significantly altered this perceived deference. It was also mentioned to me after a recent School Governor Plenary Meeting how the governors felt so much freer these days to express their opinions.

Visitation of Downside

70. Since Abbot Christopher Jamison's election as Abbot President in 2017, he has made one Visitation to Downside. This was the ordinary canonical visitation which took place between 9th April and 2nd May 2018. He was assisted by Abbot Geoffrey Scott of Douai.
71. The purpose of these quadrennial visitations is to formally make enquiry of the temporal and spiritual state of the monastery. The Visitors interview all members of the community, senior staff and meet with the Trustees. They will also ask for, and consider, reports prepared on Formation, Safeguarding and Finance.
72. The Visitors made the following recommendations regarding safeguarding; that a DSL or equivalent be appointed by the monastery and, as an Act of Visitation, that the recommendations of the SCIE report as regards the management of monks with restricted life and ministry be carried out by the end of August 2018.
73. The monastery has now conditionally appointed a DSL. The first round of advertising, shortlisting and interviews did not provide a suitable candidate. The second round of advertising, with increased hours for the role, ended on 13th December 2018 with 25 candidates applying. The interviews for the shortlisted candidates took place on 11th January 2019 and the successful candidate will take up her position as soon as references and employment checks have been completed.
74. A review of monks with restricted life and ministry was initiated by my predecessor and the cases of all three monks have been reviewed with Clifton Diocese Safeguarding Office and the Downside Safeguarding Committee. More detail is provided at paragraphs 51 to 61 above. There are no on-going issues or concerns regarding any monks resident at Downside.