

# MINISTER'S VOW ON CHILD ABUSE PROBE

## We must confront darkest secrets of our past

— Angela Constance



**SUPPORT** Abuse survivor Chris Daly has praised the bravery of Angela Constance



**PLEDGE** Angela Constance at Holyrood last week

■ Marion Scott

**Angela Constance has vowed to give a voice to Scotland's victims of institutional child abuse.**

The Education Secretary said "dark secrets of the past" must be exposed after launching a huge probe into the issue.

On Thursday, Constance announced that QC Susan O'Brien will lead a four-year nationwide inquiry with power to compel organisations and individuals to participate.

O'Brien, who headed up the inquiry into the failings which led to the 2001 death of Edinburgh baby Caleb Ness by his own father, will hear testimony from victims abused while in care.

Cases will include those from church-run homes and residential schools such as St Ninian's in Gartmore, Stirlingshire.

**Allegations dating from September 1964 will be examined from children's homes run by charities Barnardo's and Quarriers as well as council-run homes and residential schools.**

There will also be evidence from children who were fostered.

One of the boldest moves is the proposed removal of Scotland's strict three-year time bar rule which has prevented thousands getting justice in the civil courts, even when abusers were convicted.

Almost 1000 cases were dismissed by the House of Lords in 2008 because of time bar, a decision described by victims as a "victory for the devil".

Survivors are determined the Government should still find a way to have those cases heard.

Constance said: "I want to see justice done. I want survivors to have their voices heard and I want Scotland as a country to face up to its past."

**"We let countless children down and I'm determined to ensure that never happens again."**

The minister was deeply moved by the bravery of victims who opened their hearts to tell painful stories.

She said: "There's a lot that saddens me about the past. Whether it's local or national government, the police, court service or care providers, I believe all have to face up to their responsibilities or past failings and co-operate with the inquiry."

Constance said work had still to be done to establish a compensation system for victims.

She said: "I'm very conscious of a range of views from survivors. Reparation is very important. It's also what led me to address two particular issues, time bar and access to civil justice. There are

complexities to face. But I want survivors to know we're in the business of opening doors, not closing them."

The minister said the inquiry will not establish guilt or innocence. She added: "That is for the justice system. It will be

about identifying where there has been systemic failure to protect children in care.

"We'll ensure the process is fair and robust and that it does not cut across the work of the police or court service."

The new National Child Abuse

Investigation Unit have established a centre of excellence to investigate historic cases as well as new.

A £14.5million survivors' fund will provide practical help and access to services.

**The minister added: "We're on a journey and it will be a long journey. I believe starting the journey shows our commitment to getting it right."**

Constance's words were welcomed by abuse survivor David Whelan.

The 55-year-old was one of two boys abused by John Porteous, dubbed the Beast of the Bell Tower after being jailed for molesting the pair while a Quarriers house father in the 1970s.

David said: "Angela Constance is the first politician who has listened to us and done something about it."

"I applaud her bravery and determination for tackling what is a very difficult and complex subject."

"Former First Minister Jack McConnell apologised for what happened to all of us in 2004 but nothing was done to make the changes that were needed to bring us to where we are today."

"I hope scrapping time bar will encourage the organisations responsible for children abused in their care to settle cases out of court rather than drag victims through an adversarial procedure which can only cause even more damage."

Chris Daly, 50, from Glasgow, who claims he was abused by nuns in the 70s while at Nazareth House children's home in Aberdeen, said: "We've waited far too long for this moment but thanks to her we are moving forward."

**"The time for silence and secrecy has long gone – we need openness and truth and I feel now we have a chance of that."**

Lawyer Cameron Fyfe, who represents hundreds of victims, said: "I'm heartened by the Government's commitment to scrapping time bar, which has prevented thousands getting justice in the civil court."



**SCANDAL** Blairs College in Aberdeen

### Exclusive Priest abused boys at church training college

**A retired priest is facing jail after admitting sexually assaulting three teenage boys.**

Colman McGrath abused two trainee priests at Blairs College in Aberdeen and went on to indecently assault another teenager he was tutoring at his chapel in Langside, Glasgow.

The abuse only came to light years later and in June last year McGrath – who retired in 2006 – was interviewed by police about his conduct.

Last week, at Glasgow Sheriff Court, McGrath pled guilty to three charges of indecent assault between August 1972 and September 1982.

It is the second conviction of a Blairs priest for abuse carried out there during the 70s and further deepens the sex abuse scandal which has engulfed the Catholic Church in Scotland.

In 1996, Father Desmond Lynagh was sentenced to three years for his abuse of a 14-year-old student while working as a teacher at Blairs in 1974.

The victim would later accuse Cardinal Keith O'Brien of covering up the crime before the cardinal, leader of Scotland's Catholics, retired over his own sexual misconduct at the college.

McGrath was ordained as a priest in June 1962 and taught trainee priests

at Blairs for 16 years. He was then based at St Helen's Presbytery in Langside until 1984.

Prosecutors detailed how he targeted three teenage boys in a series of assaults, involving him asking them to undress before spanking them. He also gave one boy an oiled massage after telling him to undress.

The abuse came to light in 2014 when one of the victims contacted the Catholic Church and reported the incidents.

Sheriff Kenneth Mitchell deferred sentence until next month and continued bail.

Blairs College, which closed in 1986, has become central to the church's abuse scandal.

O'Brien was rector of the seminary from 1980 to 1985 before being made Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

He was head of the institution when, it has been alleged, he made sexual advances to a 19-year-old trainee priest.



**GUILTY** McGrath



## MINISTER Mail has been on side of the angels

Constance paid tribute to the Sunday Mail's years of campaigning to help victims of abuse.

She said: "The paper was on the side of the angels. The Sunday

**FURY** De La Salle story

Mail gave them a voice and hope when they had none. I know from speaking to many survivors just what that meant to them."

We were the first to uncover the shameful systematic abuse in

many of Scotland's children's homes and residential schools.

And we campaigned for justice after senior church figures labelled victims as "fantasists" and lawyers acting for the De La Salle monks

at the centre of the List D School scandal said former pupils were motivated by "greed" or "attention seeking".

Our campaign demanded everything the Scottish Government have now promised.