

#### 4.4 FR JAMES GRENNAN (Deceased)

In 1988, ten girls alleged that they had been sexually molested by Fr James Grennan whilst he heard their Confessions on the altar in the parish church of Monageer. These girls were aged around 12 or 13 at the time and they made the complaint to the principal of Monageer national school, Mr Pat Higgins. Mr Higgins contacted the South Eastern Health Board, who sent a social worker, to speak with the girls. The Health Board then arranged for Dr Geraldine Nolan, Director of the newly established Validation Unit in Waterford, to interview the girls. On 4 May 1988 she interviewed 7 of the 10 girls who made the allegations. The other 3 girls had been refused permission by their parents to attend Dr Nolan.

Dr Nolan provided a composite report on all 7 girls who were interviewed individually. The substance of each complaint was similar and it is therefore useful to recite certain aspects of Dr Nolan's report hereunder:

*"Confession was a major time that the girls felt unhappy about. This was held on the altar with Fr Grennan sitting on a chair and the children kneeling on red cushions at his feet. The rest of the class remained in their seats and were told to keep their eyes closed because they were in a house of God and to show respect. They were told that if their eyes were closed their prayers would go straight to God. If they opened their eyes while the Confession was occurring Fr Grennan would chastise them. At Confession Fr Grennan would grasp the child's hands in his hands and pull them towards his private parts. The zip would be described as half down and there was never any allegation of his putting their hands inside of the unzipped area. He would pull the child close and rub his face and mouth around their jaw while asking them questions about their families etc. He was also described as putting his hands under their skirts and fondling their legs to mid-thigh level only.*

*Other occasions when the girls were likely to be alone with Fr Grennan were in the vestry especially if they were preparing for lessons etc. for readings. The main allegations there were of fondling through their clothes of the upper body. He was alleged to have touched inside their T shirts while ostensibly examining the pattern or wording etc. on the T- shirt. Some of the children also described either in his own house in his sitting room or at their house or a relative's house, sitting on his knee and being fondled but in the presence of other people it was made to look like tickling.*

*One girl also described a rather severe slap on her ear in the class when she said she would tell her parents about it. He offered his apologies and asked her not to tell. He said he would pray for her.*

*... Fr Grennan's actions in many cases have been going on for two or three years and in some cases over the past school year. They are not allegations that would be made up for any malicious intent and the girls described much the same activity in different ways."*

The Inquiry has met with the following witnesses.

#### **4.4.1 BRIDGET**

Bridget alleged the following:

Bridget was one of the group of ten girls who alleged sexual abuse by Fr Grennan during Confession in Monageer church in April 1988. She told the Inquiry that sexual abuse had taken place on the altar in the church at Monageer during Confession, in the parochial house and in the vestry. She said that while preparing for Confirmation, the whole class was present in the church, but at certain times she had to collect magazines and other items from the priest which would result in her being on her own with him. She stated that while alone on these occasions Fr Grennan inappropriately touched her. She was one of the girls who, with her family, walked out of the Confirmation ceremony in Monageer.

#### **4.4.2 EIMEAR**

Eimear alleged the following:

Eimear was also one of the 10 girls who alleged sexual abuse by Fr Grennan during Confession at Monageer church in April 1988. She told the Inquiry that Fr Grennan had put "the fear of God" in the Confirmation class in relation to their knowledge of catechism. Fr Grennan constantly kept a watch on all the children while he was on the altar and hearing Confession from one of them. She said that Fr Grennan would pull her hands in close to him so that she touched his genital area. She said Fr Grennan's fly was half open during these encounters. He would then get close to her ear and her face and his face would touch her face and he would begin licking her jaw and licking her ear. She said this happened on numerous occasions. She informed the Inquiry that she was not contacted by the South Eastern Health Board after 1988 until a Health Board official called to her house requesting her consent to the handing over of her files to Mr George Birmingham in 2002. She confirmed that no counselling was offered at any time after 1988.

#### **4.4.3 OLIVIA**

Olivia alleged the following:

Olivia was also one of the 10 girls who alleged sexual abuse by Fr Grennan during Confession at Monageer church in April 1988. She told the Inquiry that her class felt very threatened by Fr Grennan and afraid of him. She was personally petrified of him and uneasy at his untidy appearance and in particular his dirty and scruffy dress and odour of alcohol and cigarettes. She stated that he would place her hands in his hands whilst she was up on the altar kneeling in front of him and he would put her hands onto his private parts and lick her jaw and stick his tongue into her ear whilst asking her about a particular commandment. This happened on a number of times and on a regular basis.

#### 4.4.4 ITA'S PARENTS

Ita's parents alleged the following:

Ita was one of the group of 10 girls who alleged that they were sexually abused by Fr Grennan during Confession in Monageer church in April 1988. She made a statement to Garda Behan at the time of the initial investigation and attended Dr Geraldine Nolan for assessment. Both Ita and her parents had been assured by the Health Board that Fr Grennan would not be present at the Confirmation ceremony due to take place the following June. Other families whose children had complained about Fr Grennan had been given similar assurances. In fact, Fr Grennan was at the ceremony and appeared prominently at Bishop Comiskey's side from the start. Ita and her family walked out of the church in protest. The family felt upset at how the situation had been handled. Their suffering was exacerbated some years later when their child died tragically in an accident and Fr Grennan insisted on conducting the funeral service against the wishes of the family.

Ita instituted civil proceedings against Bishop Comiskey, the Minister for Justice, Ireland and the Attorney General which have now settled.

#### 4.4.5 FERGUS

Fergus alleged the following:

Fergus was an altar boy who served with Fr Grennan for a period of up to eight months prior to his death. He took an overdose of medication before Fr Grennan's funeral in order to avoid having to attend it. As a result of this suicide attempt, he received counselling. On 30 May 1994, Fergus alleged to his mother, and subsequently to a counsellor, that he had been sexually abused by Fr Grennan soon after commencing his service as altar boy.

Both Fergus and his therapist wrote to Bishop Comiskey in relation to the allegations on 21 June 1994. This letter was passed to Bishop Comiskey via Fr Paul Andrews SJ, a well known psychologist. Fergus told the Inquiry that he believes that if Bishop Comiskey "*had done his job*" in relation to the 1988 complaints, the abuse which happened to him would not have occurred.

Fergus did not provide details of the nature or extent of the abuse to the Inquiry although he did attend for an oral hearing during which he discussed the response of the Diocese to his allegation.

#### 4.4.6 DEBORAH

Deborah alleged the following:

Deborah spoke of her abuse by Fr Grennan to Mr George Birmingham and to her solicitor. She also met with Bishop Walsh in May 2002. Bishop Walsh gave her his phone number inviting her to contact him should the need arise. She spoke with Bishop Walsh on three subsequent occasions. The abuse is alleged to have started when she was five years of age in the mid 1970s. She alleged that the abuse

continued for a number of years and that when she was seven years of age Fr Grennan tried to penetrate her.

Deborah's mother contacted the Inquiry and stated that although Fr Grennan was a regular visitor to their home, and on occasion stayed overnight, nothing improper occurred between Fr Grennan and her daughter. She said that Fr Grennan would sometimes sleep in Deborah's bed; if she was already asleep she would not move her, but she was quite certain that if anything had happened, Deborah would have told her.

Deborah stated to George Birmingham that she wrote to Bishop Comiskey in 1993 detailing in her letter what Fr Grennan did to her but she received no reply. She said that in 1995 she wrote another letter asking why she did not receive a reply to her earlier letter. Bishop Comiskey denied ever receiving any correspondence from Deborah. Deborah's mother recalls her writing a letter to Bishop Comiskey but did not know its contents and does not know if it was posted. There is no evidence of these letters on the diocesan files made available to the Inquiry.

Deborah had a troubled and unstable adolescence which continued into her twenties. She blamed this on the abuse she suffered from Fr Grennan. Deborah committed suicide in 2002, aged 31.

#### **4.4.7 SHEILA**

Sheila alleged the following:

In June 2002, Sheila met with Bishop Walsh to report a complaint of sexual abuse perpetrated by Fr Grennan on her as a child. Sheila was one of the original group of ten girls who alleged abuse by Fr Grennan in Monageer in 1988. No details of this abuse were recorded and the Inquiry has not met with this complainant. The Inquiry notes that Sheila pursued counselling paid for by the Diocese and met regularly with the Diocesan victim support person.

#### **4.4.8 ANNA**

Anna alleged as follows:

In 1981, Anna was 11 years old and residing at her grandmother's house when Fr Grennan visited and sat her on his knee. He began to rub his hands against her skin and in particular against her back and her breasts underneath her clothing. Anna did not make a complaint to the Diocese or Health Board at any time and only made a complaint to Gardai in July 2002.