

any or all of his duties and functions which would bring him into unsupervised contact with children pending the completion of all appropriate inquiries.

- The Inquiry is fully conscious of the pain caused to any priest who, in the position of Fr Alpha, is required to step aside as a result of an unproven allegation of a repugnant offence, but the paramountcy given to the protection of children requires that some priests and other persons in employment may be required to endure this apparent injustice in the interests of the common good.
- The Inquiry is concerned at the delay which has occurred in the determination of the allegations against Fr Alpha through a Canon law penal process which would adjudicate on the guilt or innocence of the priest and impose penalties. It does however appreciate that this has been caused to an extent by the piecemeal nature of the reporting of allegations which occurred over a four year period by the complainants.
- The Inquiry would encourage the parties to the civil proceedings in child sexual abuse cases to bring them on for hearing at the earliest date so that the courts of law may finally determine the truth or otherwise of the very serious allegations.

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#### **FR JAMES GRENNAN (Deceased)**

In 1988, ten girls alleged that they were sexually molested by Fr James Grennan whilst he heard their Confession on the altar in the parish church of Monageer. Fr Grennan was parish priest of Monageer and Chairman of the Board of Management of the national school. These girls were aged 12 or 13 years at the time. 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, who was 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 to attend Dr Nolan by their parents. She spoke with the Director of Community Care in the South Eastern Health Board, Dr Patrick Judge after conducting these interviews and before writing her report. Dr Judge then called on Monsignor Breen who, as Vicar General, was representing Bishop Comiskey in his absence from the Diocese. Dr Judge demanded that Fr Grennan be removed from the

parish immediately. Although most of the activity complained of occurred during Confession, allegations were also made concerning visits by Fr Grennan to some of the girls' homes and inappropriate behaviour in his own home and in the sacristy.

Confusion arose at the very early stages of this case. During the interview between Dr Patrick Judge and Monsignor Richard Breen, the impression was either given or taken up that Fr Grennan had exposed himself on the altar to the girls. It was not suggested by any of the children that Fr Grennan had exposed himself to them. In fact, Dr Geraldine Nolan did not refer to any exposure on the part of Fr Grennan but rather said that he held the children's hands and pressed them to his groin, unexposed, and that he touched their legs and other parts of their body, including their faces. The Ferns Inquiry has spoken to some of the girls who made the original allegations against Fr Grennan and their description of what occurred did not involve an allegation of exposure.

Dr Judge told Mr Higgins on 5 May 1988, that he should never again leave the children alone with Fr Grennan. The following day, Monsignor Breen spoke to Fr Grennan who was shocked at what was alleged and went to speak with Dr Judge who was adamant that what the girls had said was true.

Mr John Jackman, a Knight of Columbanus and a lay person of some influence in the Diocese, was approached by a Garda who was also a Knight who suggested that Mr Jackman should try and contact Bishop Comiskey in an effort to move Fr Grennan out of the parish until after the impending Confirmation ceremony which would defuse the situation and let the Gardai do their job. Due to Bishop Comiskey's absence from the Diocese, Mr Jackman telephoned Monsignor Breen and was told that he, Monsignor Breen, could do nothing to calm the situation.

In addition, on instruction from his Superintendent, a local Garda contacted Fr Grennan and suggested he should absent himself temporarily from the parish. Fr Grennan sought legal advice at this point and although he did in fact leave for a fortnight's holiday, he returned before the Confirmation ceremony on 20 June 1988. Bishop Comiskey returned to the Diocese on 28 May. He read Monsignor Breen's memorandum of the accusations of the girls and the interview with Dr Judge, and immediately spoke with Fr Grennan about the events in Monageer. Fr Grennan vehemently denied that he had exposed himself on the altar which he apparently still believed was what was being alleged although Monsignor Breen's memorandum did not refer to exposure.

On the basis of the meetings with Monsignor Breen and Fr Grennan and after consultation with the four Deans of the Diocese, Bishop Comiskey concluded that what was alleged to have occurred on the altar in Monageer could not have occurred. In doing so he appears to have adopted a threshold of probability rather than credibility with regard to the complaints. The allegations made by the seven girls might well have been regarded by the Bishop as improbable, even highly improbable but they were not incredible. By dismissing the complaints as incredible and therefore, by implication, mischievous, a situation was created which caused deep division in the parish and grave hurt to the children and their families. The sad history of this matter followed from this flawed decision.

Bishop Comiskey told the Inquiry that whilst Fr Grennan agreed to leave the parish for a short while immediately after the allegations were made, Fr Grennan considered it important that he should return for the Confirmation and Bishop Comiskey agreed with this. He told the Inquiry that Fr Grennan failing to appear for the Confirmation would be seen as an admission of guilt. When Fr Grennan appeared on the altar with Bishop Comiskey at his side, two families walked out of the ceremony. The families interpreted the presence of Fr Grennan on the altar with Bishop Comiskey as a total rejection of the complaints made by the children. Bishop Comiskey may not have intended his presence to be interpreted in that way but he had, in fact, at that time, rejected the complaints without meeting anyone concerned other than the priest in question.

Bishop Comiskey confirmed that he did not speak with the Health Board or the Principal of the school; neither did he speak with Dr Judge. Bishop Comiskey expressed surprise to the Inquiry that none of the girls who had made the allegations came to see him but he did not feel it was appropriate for him to visit them.

Bishop Comiskey was aware before 20 June when the Confirmation ceremony took place, that the Health Board had investigated the allegations of the girls and had found them to be credible. Bishop Comiskey did not see the actual report prepared by Dr Geraldine Nolan until August 1988.

Bishop Comiskey described the Confirmation day in Monageer as a very joyful, happy, sunny summer day and was unaware of anybody walking out of the ceremony. This is at odds with the evidence the Inquiry has heard from Mr Patrick Higgins, the girls themselves and others who described families as being very upset with children crying after the ceremony.

Bishop Comiskey called a meeting of the Council of Priests to discuss newspaper articles that had been written in the aftermath of the walkout. As a result of the meeting with the Council of Priests, a letter was sent to Fr Grennan assuring him of the full support of the Council in the face of unfounded allegations and unnecessary and unfair publicity. They pledged their support to Fr Grennan in his pastoral service to the people of Monageer. The Inquiry was informed by the chairman of the Council of Priests that the Council was not aware at that time of the Health Board investigations which found the allegations credible.

Bishop Comiskey saw the Health Board report in August 1988, but said he had already formed an assessment of the allegations made by the girls as reported to Monsignor Breen, having spoken with him and a number of priests in the Diocese. That assessment led him to the belief that the allegations were not credible. When Dr Nolan's report was presented to him, he was already convinced of Fr Grennan's innocence and it was in that light that he considered the report.

In 1989, Fr Grennan attended Dr Peter Fahy, a psychiatrist in the Blackrock Clinic for psychiatric assessment. Bishop Comiskey emphasised to the Inquiry that this was not for assessment or treatment of any condition regarding child sexual abuse but rather for treatment for strain arising from the complaints. Dr Fahy wrote back to Bishop Comiskey, "*I cannot see how he could have done what he is accused of doing in full view of a congregation*". Bishop Comiskey confirmed to the Inquiry that he was in

complete agreement with the content of Dr Fahy's letter at the time and did not attach the slightest degree of credence to the accusations.

After media attention surrounding the Confirmation ceremony had died down, Fr Grennan continued as parish priest in Monageer. In his evidence to the Inquiry, Mr Patrick Higgins, the Principal of Monageer National School, said that he feared for his job after he had initiated the inquiry by the Health Board. He said that he felt greatly relieved once Dr Geraldine Nolan had validated the complaints of the girls. Undoubtedly, Mr Higgins was in an invidious position in effectively having to report the behaviour of his employer. He said he felt threatened with dismissal but his trade union intervened and the matter did not arise.

Fr Grennan continued in his role as manager of the school and although in the immediate aftermath of the Monageer incident he was an infrequent visitor, over the subsequent months he resumed the practice of calling regularly and even requiring that children be sent up to the presbytery on errands. Mr Higgins said that he never allowed the children to go to the presbytery or to accompany Fr Grennan anywhere without written permission.

The Inquiry also notes from documentation submitted by the Department of Education and Science that Patrick Higgins made a complaint to a Department Inspector, in early May 1988, in relation to the complaints and allegations made known to him by the school girls in April 1988. The Inspector noted that he considered these to be of the utmost seriousness and subsequently disclosed the visit to his senior officer, the Divisional Inspector. The Department felt it could not investigate the case because it had not received any formal complaint directly. This decision was reinforced by the fact that the Principal had acted according to the Department of Health guidelines.

The Department of Education confirmed to the Inquiry that this represents the only notification of child sexual abuse against a priest of the Diocese of Ferns to the Department.

The Monageer incident was raised again in November 1995 by Councillor Gary O'Halloran, a member of the Board of the South Eastern Health Board, who sought a full investigation into the handling of the affair by the State authorities. This investigation is dealt with in Chapter 6 of this Report. The matter was also the subject of a Garda investigation at that time: this is dealt with at Chapter 7.

The investigations by the Health Board and the Gardai attracted a great deal of media coverage, partly because it coincided with the cases of Donal Collins and Sean Fortune. One of the allegations against Bishop Comiskey was that he was involved in a cover-up "of immense proportions". It is alleged that he allowed some of his senior clergy to criticise journalists who reported on the walkout from the Confirmation ceremony, without informing them of the South Eastern Health Board report. Fr Walter Forde, who was the Diocesan Press Officer, said that he had been told by Bishop Comiskey that the allegations against Fr Grennan were utterly without foundation and he confirmed to this Inquiry that he had not been given a copy of the South Eastern Health Board report at that time.

Bishop Comiskey was accused in the media of interfering with the Garda investigation and with meeting Health Board officials with a view to getting their agreement that the matter should be dealt with by the Diocese. Bishop Comiskey told the Inquiry that such a meeting never took place and that there was never any agreement allowing the Diocese to handle the matter. This is confirmed by the Health Board witnesses spoken to by the Inquiry.

An anonymous and undated letter addressed to Bishop Comiskey which was date stamped by the Diocese as having been received on the 26 February 1996 and which purported to come from one of the girls who had initially made an allegation against Fr Grennan but who had subsequently not attended for interview with Dr Geraldine Nolan, was included in the diocesan file submitted to this Inquiry. This letter claimed that the allegations against Fr Grennan had been initiated by one girl in the class who was annoyed with Fr Grennan over another issue. This was not a view supported by the complainants who attended this Inquiry.

The Inquiry took the view that, whether or not the decision to speak to Mr Higgins about the abuse was the result of an effort by the girls to "get their own back" on Fr Grennan, once the church authorities were alerted to it, some action should have been taken, at the very least to determine whether the allegations were credible. The validation by Dr Nolan should have been sufficient to establish a credible case upon which the diocese could have acted.

In June 1994, a psychiatrist attached to the South Eastern Health Board, wrote to Bishop Comiskey informing him that a patient, Fergus (4.4.5.) had made an allegation of sexual abuse against Fr Grennan. Bishop Comiskey wrote to Fergus saying that he was taking his allegation very seriously and asking Fergus to bear with him while he dealt with the matter. He also offered to meet with Fergus if he felt this was helpful. This offer was not taken up.

In February 1995, Fergus's psychiatrist reported to Bishop Comiskey that Fergus had settled back to school and was putting the "*fear, hurt and anger behind him*".

## **BISHOP EAMONN WALSH**

In May 2002, Bishop Eamonn Walsh met with Deborah (4.4.6) who alleged that she was sexually abused by Fr Grennan from the age of 5 until she was 10. Deborah told Bishop Walsh that, in 1993, she wrote a letter to Bishop Comiskey outlining the detail of what had occurred. In 1995, she said she wrote again to Bishop Comiskey asking why she had never received a reply to a previous letter. Bishop Walsh instructed that the diocesan files be searched thoroughly for any evidence of these letters from Deborah. There is no record on file of these letters having been received by Bishop Comiskey or the Diocese and Bishop Comiskey had confirmed that he does not recall receiving them.

Deborah consulted a firm of solicitors who agreed to act on her behalf against the Diocese. In August 2002, Deborah committed suicide. Bishop Walsh met with Deborah's parents after her suicide and they appear to be of the view that although Fr Grennan was a regular visitor in their home and stayed overnight in Deborah's

bedroom with Deborah present, it was extremely unlikely that he would have abused their daughter.

In June 2002, Bishop Eamonn Walsh visited Monageer and Boolavogue to celebrate the Vigil and Sunday Masses. Prior to this, Bishop Walsh met six of the girls who had made a complaint against Fr Grennan in 1988. Some of the girls expressed reservations with the way Bishop Walsh conducted these meetings. They believed his approach was intrusive and two of the girls criticised him for holding the meetings in Fr Grennan's former sitting room in the parochial house where some of the abuse had occurred. According to Bishop Walsh, the purpose of the meetings which he had was to explain the nature of his visit to the parish the following week-end. He was concerned that it would be upsetting for the victims to have 1988 brought up again and he wished to hear their concerns in person. He offered counselling to the victims and described his role as a listening one. He said that he did not ask questions about what had happened and he did not accept that his approach was intrusive. Bishop Walsh said he was not aware that abuse was alleged to have occurred in the parochial house although this fact was stated in the report from Dr Nolan which was in the possession of the Diocese.

Bishop Walsh acknowledged publicly the suffering in the parish and the division caused by the Monageer situation. He said that:

*... [young children and their families]: "spoke up when it would have been far easier to keep quiet and let things carry on. They did the right thing and not without considerable cost to themselves. You will never know how many other people will have been helped by your witness. I wish to publicly acknowledge your hurt, which was compounded by the way the case was handled.*

*There are people in this parish who suffered greatly because they stood by their priest and with a good conscience. Some continue to feel this hurt.....*

*The Diocese contributed to the pain of this parish instead of easing it. For this I apologise and I apologise to anyone who was ever abused by Fr Grennan. I realise that it is too late in the day for apologies. I will continue to cooperate fully with all who are committed to bringing healing and closure for those who have been hurt in any way."*

It was very painful for Fr Grennan's family to hear this statement and they were angry that the Diocese had apologised to anyone who had been abused by Fr Grennan.

In a civil suit that arose out of this case, a settlement was reached which included a statement by the Diocese which publicly acknowledged the hurt experienced by the victim. According to Bishop Walsh, this was also a matter of great upset to the family of Fr Grennan.

## **THE INQUIRY'S VIEW ON THE DIOCESAN HANDLING OF THE FR GRENNAN CASE:**

- **The Inquiry believes Bishop Comiskey was incorrect in dismissing the allegations of the girls in Monageer. The allegations may in his view have been improbable, but they were not incredible. Such allegations were capable of being true and they should have been treated by the Bishop accordingly.**
- **Fr Grennan was accused of inappropriate, offensive and criminal behaviour. However, it was not only the alleged activity of Fr Grennan which caused suffering to the girls in Monageer but the effect that the handling of the complaints subsequently had on their lives.**
- **Bishop Comiskey's unquestioning support of Fr Grennan was given without any understanding of the consequence for the children who made the complaints. Children making complaints deserve special protection from the Church and from society. This added duty of care was not met by the Diocese in this case.**
- **The Inquiry is of the view that the way in which the Diocese and Bishop Comiskey handled the allegations brought by the girls in 1988 led to a great deal of unnecessary suffering for the girls, their families and the people of Monageer. The handling of these allegations by the Health Board and the Gardai are dealt with at chapters 6 and 7 of this report. The error by the Church Authority was greatly exacerbated by the failure of the Gardai to carry out any adequate contemporaneous investigation.**
- **Whilst the Inquiry accepts that the Diocese owed a duty to its priest when an allegation is made, the duty owed to the ten young girls is paramount. They made a statement to the Principal without knowing or expecting that it would end up in the public domain. To the credit of most of the girls' families, the parents supported and believed their daughters; however, family divisions occurred between generations and the Inquiry has heard how grandparents were divided against parents and grandchildren over the issue.**
- **Bishop Eamonn Walsh's apology to the parishioners of Monageer was unequivocal and may have gone some way towards healing the hurt in that parish.**
- **Parish priests are appointed as managers of national schools as a matter of course. In this role, they have made a valuable contribution to Irish education under the patronage of their Bishop. However, the Inquiry has become aware of a number of priests who have abused this position and used it to give them greater access to children for the purposes of abusing them sexually. The Inquiry believes that no person should be appointed or retained to a position of authority over children without proper investigations being made as to their suitability for such an appointment.**

- Fr Grennan continued in his role as Chairman of the Board of Management of the national school in Monageer after this controversy occurred without any investigation by the Department of Education or the Diocese as to his suitability for such a role.

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### FR SEAN FORTUNE (Deceased)

Sean Fortune was born in Gorey, County Wexford, in 1953 and was educated in the Christian Brothers School in Gorey. In July 1968, when he was 14 years old, Sean Fortune attended the Christian Brothers Juniorate in Carraiglea Park in Dun Laoghaire with a view to completing his secondary education and joining the Christian Brothers Order.

Sean Fortune attended Blackrock College for one term in September 1971, with the intention of becoming a member of the Holy Ghost order instead of a Christian Brother. The College has confirmed to the Inquiry that he was not asked to leave because of any impropriety, but rather because he was regarded as temperamentally unsuited for missionary work.

Sean Fortune did not proceed to the novitiate of the Christian Brothers. In 1973, he applied to St Peter's seminary in his native Wexford to pursue a vocation for the diocesan priesthood. He was admitted into St Peter's seminary without being assessed because of the five years he had spent in the Juniorate of the Christian Brothers.

The first allegation against Sean Fortune of which the Inquiry has become aware was made by Stephen (4.5.1). Stephen complained to a senior staff member in St Peter's in 1976 about the sexual abuse perpetrated on him by Sean Fortune. Although the response of the staff member was one of anger against Stephen, Fortune's approaches to him ceased thereafter and his relationship with the senior staff member, which had been quite a close one, ended. It is inferred that the staff member spoke to or reprimanded Sean Fortune. This senior staff member is now deceased and the Inquiry does not know whether he spoke to anybody else in St Peter's about Stephen's allegations.

An allegation of sexual abuse against Sean Fortune was made in connection with the Catholic Boys Scouts of Ireland in early 1979. A full report was prepared by the assistant scout leader at the time which was finalised in December 1979. The Inquiry is satisfied that this full report was passed on to Bishop Herlihy by a scout leader in St. Peter's in 1979 or early 1980. It has not been possible to establish whether this complaint was made informally to the Bishop prior to Sean Fortune's ordination in