

ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

The Inquiry has identified approximately 100 allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse that were made between 1966 and 2005 against 21 priests⁵² operating under the aegis of the Diocese of Ferns. It is no part of the function of the Inquiry to form any view as to whether those complaints or allegations are, or any one of them is, well founded. The primary task of the Inquiry is to identify the response by the Church and public authorities to such complaints whether they are true or false.

The material contained in this Chapter is, therefore, a summary of the many allegations brought to the attention of the Inquiry. The Inquiry emphasises that the contents of this chapter consist of allegations or complaints substantially in the terms of the history provided directly or indirectly by the complainants. With the exception of the two priests who pleaded guilty to certain charges brought against them and to certain specific and limited admissions referred to in Chapter 5, all of those allegations and complaints are and were vehemently denied by all of the priests living at the time when the allegations were made against them. The priests who were dead at the time when the allegations were made did not have the opportunity to refute such allegations. Again, it must not be assumed that the Church or lay authorities accept that the allegations set out in this Chapter were made to them at all or were made in the terms recorded in this Chapter save to the extent that it is expressly so admitted elsewhere in the Report. The failure to repeat the phrase "it is alleged" throughout every paragraph of this Chapter must not be taken as indicating that the Inquiry has accepted that the allegations or complaints are, or any of them is, true.

It must also be noted that although the allegations of abuse outlined hereunder refer to a period which spans over thirty years, only a handful of these allegations were disclosed to the Diocese of Ferns or to the Civil authorities prior to 1990.

To preserve the anonymity of the complainants each of them has been ascribed and identified by a fictitious Christian name. So far as practicable, a comparable protection has been extended to priests against whom allegations or complaints have been made by ascribing a fictitious surname from a letter of the Greek alphabet to each of these priests.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to exercise this discretion effectively in relation to priests who hold or held unique or distinguished positions which were material to the allegations made against them or to priests who were convicted of an offence related to child sexual abuse or to priests who were or are prominent in the public domain as a result of media focus on allegations or complaints that surround them.

Criminal proceedings were instituted by the DPP against Fr Donal Collins in respect of 4 of the complaints made against him and against Fr James Doyle in respect of one complaint against him. Both of those proceedings resulted in convictions of the accused. Criminal proceedings were likewise instituted against Fr Sean Fortune in

⁵² The priests dealt with in the Appendix hereto are not included in this number.

respect of a total of 66 charges of sexual abuse. Those charges were struck out following the suicide of Fr Fortune.

Six other priests against whom allegations or complaints were made were deceased at the time of making the complaint and three priests have since died. In respect of complaints against four priests, the DPP, decided not to institute proceedings on evidence presented thus far. In a further two cases notified to Gardai, a file containing a statement of complaint was not passed to the DPP. In the remaining three cases known to Gardai, the complainant did not make a formal complaint to Gardai and no prosecution could therefore occur.

Criminal convictions have arisen in respect of the following complainants; Dylan, Darren, Conor, Rory and Adam. No criminal conviction occurred in respect of any other complaint referred to in this Chapter.

A number of allegations of abuse by priests in the Diocese have been the subject of civil proceedings which were settled either by the Diocese or the priest concerned.

Some priests against whom an allegation has been made have been the subject of either a private or public apology by Bishop Eamonn Walsh, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Ferns since April 2002, and this has been identified by the Inquiry where this has occurred.

The Inquiry has retained, as far as is practicable, the vocabulary and terms in which the complaints were recorded.

4.1 FR DONAL COLLINS

4.1.1 SAM

Sam alleged the following:

Sam was a student in St Peter's during the mid to late 1960s. During his intermediate exam year, Fr Collins abused him for the first time in Fr Collins's room. Fr Collins invited Sam to his room on the pretext of photographing him. A second incident happened in the dormitory when Fr Collins masturbated Sam while Sam was in bed. Fr Collins abused Sam on a total of six occasions. Fr Collins has denied masturbating Sam as alleged.

Sam made a complaint to the Diocese by letter dated 15 April 2002 and met with Bishop Walsh later that year. The Diocese notified the South Eastern Health Board and the Chief Superintendent of Wexford. The DPP, however, directed that the criminal prosecution should not proceed. Sam subsequently wrote to Bishop Walsh seeking compensation.

4.1.2 UNIDENTIFIED COMPLAINANTS 1966

The Inquiry has heard from clerical witnesses who allege the following:

In 1966, Fr Patrick Curtis and Fr Tom Sherwood, both senior teachers at St Peter's College, contacted the bishop's secretary, in relation to complaints of child sex abuse against Fr Collins. The abuse occurred when Fr Collins visited "the attic" dormitory at night to perform examinations of an intimate nature involving the measurement of the length of boys' penises on the pretext of ascertaining whether or not they were growing normally. The Inquiry was told that approximately 20 boys were involved. Fr Collins has disputed the detail of this account of the alleged abuse.

The complaints were reported to Bishop Herlihy who transferred Fr Collins to pastoral ministry at Kentish Town in London where he remained until 1968. Fr Collins returned to St Peter's College in 1968. This is covered in further detail at Chapter Five.

4.1.3 NOEL AND VICTOR

Noel alleged the following:

In April 1989, Bishop Comiskey received a complaint of child sexual abuse against Fr Collins. This was the first complaint made directly to Bishop Comiskey in relation to this priest. The complainant did not identify himself but Bishop Comiskey wrote to Fr Collins seeking his response.

A further complaint was made to Bishop Comiskey in May 1989 by the parent of a former pupil of St Peter's College who said that Fr Collins had been abusing boys in the college. This complainant was the mother of the unidentified complainant above who was subsequently identified as Noel.

In 1991, Bishop Comiskey met with Noel who complained to the Bishop of sexual abuse perpetrated against him and another student named Victor by Fr Collins, when he, Noel, was approximately 16 years old, during the early 1970s at St Peter's College. According to Noel, the students at St Peter's dreaded the prospect of being called to Fr Collins's room. On one occasion, Fr Collins placed his hands on Noel's genitals continuously rubbing him. Noel also mentioned a widely known incident involving Victor who returned to the dormitory very late one evening in a drunken state, shouting that Fr Collins had attacked him. Victor had no memory of any sexual abuse taking place but was fearful that something might have happened as Fr Collins had given Victor alcohol. Fr Collins has particularly denied that sexual abuse ever occurred with Victor and had reassured him on that point many years later.

4.1.4 RORY

Rory alleged the following:

Rory attended St Peter's College as a boarder during the 1970s. He states that he was abused by Fr Collins who was his science teacher, from second year onwards. He complained that after class one day Fr Collins asked him if he was worried about anything and specifically asked if he was developing normally. This placed a doubt in Rory's mind as to the normality of his development, a doubt which Fr Collins exploited, eventually persuading Rory to allow him to examine him. Fr Collins masturbated the boy four to six times a year for four years.

Rory reported to Bishop Comiskey in 1991 that he had been sexually abused by Fr Collins while a student at St Peter's College. He was offered and received counselling expenses from the Diocese.

In December 1994, he made a formal complaint to An Garda Síochána. He subsequently instituted High Court proceedings against Fr Collins, the Trustees of St Peter's College and the bishop. This civil case settled with compensation being paid to Rory in January, 2000.

Rory met with Bishop Walsh in July 2003 and the bishop recommended that Rory make contact with Sister Helen O'Riordan, diocesan support person.

4.1.5 CONOR

Conor alleged the following:

Fr Collins first abused Conor during his fourth year at St. Peter's College in the early 1970s. He stated that he was invited by Fr Collins to his room to discuss the Young Scientist project. Fr Collins changed the subject to Conor's maturity, both mental and physical. He put his hand on Conor's private parts and started touching him. Two more incidents are alleged to have happened over the following year. After the third incident, Conor was not in that position with Fr Collins again and nothing further happened. Conor first made a complaint in relation to this abuse to An Garda Síochána in 1995.

4.1.6 DYLAN

Dylan alleged the following:

Dylan first made a statement to the Gardai in 1995 alleging abuse by Fr Collins during the 1970s whilst he was pupil of St Peter's College. Fr Collins regularly invited Dylan to his room for discussions. On one occasion the discussion turned towards Dylan's relationship with girls, adolescence and masturbation. Fr Collins put his hand on the zip of Dylan's trousers and said that boys of Dylan's age had doubts about whether they were developing properly or not, and if he could look at Dylan's penis he would be able to confirm that he was developing correctly.

After continuous objections from Dylan, Fr Collins stopped attempting to abuse him.

4.1.7 EDMUND

Edmund alleged the following:

Edmund made a statement to An Garda Síochána in 1995 in relation to abuse suffered when he attended St Peter's College as a day student during the 1970s where he had Fr Collins as his science and physics teacher. He was involved in a project for the Young Scientist of the Year exhibition. He was brought to Fr Collins's room to discuss the project. On a number of occasions Fr Collins forced Edmund to engage in mutual masturbation and oral sex. On one occasion Edmund alleges, Fr Collins attempted anal sex with him.

Civil proceedings were instituted by Edmund against Fr Collins, St Peter's College and the Bishop of Ferns in 1999. Edmund met with Bishop Walsh in 2002 and spoke of how the abuse had affected him. The Bishop apologised for the abuse, acknowledging that the apology was late in the day. Edmund's civil case was eventually settled with payment of compensation. Edmund was one of many complainants who said to this Inquiry that they found the civil process very difficult.

4.1.8 DEREK

Derek alleged the following:

Derek made a statement to An Garda Síochána in 1995 in relation to abuse suffered while he was a student at St Peter's College in the 1970s. On a number of occasions in his second and third year, Fr Collins asked him to drop his trousers so he could inspect his genitals and see how he was developing. He also remembers Fr Collins offering to show him his own genitals but Derek never encouraged him to do so. On one occasion while Derek was preparing a project in third year for the Young Scientist exhibition, Fr Collins put his hand down Derek's underpants and asked him if this turned him on. Fr Collins later told him that what happened between them was private, that nobody else would understand and therefore nobody should be told.

Derek wrote to a priest of the Diocese in 2002 in relation to this abuse and the abuse a friend had suffered at the hands of Fr Collins in St Peter's College. This letter was immediately passed on to Bishop Walsh. Although Derek was affected by the abuse he suffered, he has stated to the inquiry that he is now in a happy marriage with a good family life, career and fulfilling participation in the Catholic Church. Derek met with Bishop Walsh in 2002 and expressed some ideas on moving forward as a Church. He indicated that he did not feel the need for further counselling. Derek was one of the few abuse victims who still practiced his Catholic faith. For most victims who spoke with this Inquiry, the abuse had the affect of alienating them from the Catholic Church and from organised religion in general.

4.1.9 DARREN

Darren alleged the following:

Darren first made a statement to An Garda Síochána in 1996. Fr Collins admitted to having sexually abused Darren during the 1980s whilst he was a boarding school pupil at St Peter's College. Darren stated that while he was in second year at study one night, Fr Collins told him to collect copy books and bring them to his room at the college. In the room, Fr Collins sat down beside him on the couch and spoke about Darren's height and weight. He told Darren to take off his shirt and jumper and, using a measuring tape, measured his chest and waist and the inside of his legs. Fr Collins then unzipped his trousers and measured his penis with the measuring tape. Fr Collins fondled Darren's testicles and penis while talking to Darren about the size of his penis and what size it could be. The abuse continued on a regular basis throughout Darren's remaining period at St Peter's College. Fr Collins performed oral sex on him, gave him alcohol and showed him two pornographic films.

Darren wrote to the diocese in September 1995 but did not receive a written reply to his initial letter, so he wrote again. The diocesan secretary replied seeking the identity of the priest and the nature and circumstances of the abuse. This letter was not received by Darren, owing to a change of address.

The diocesan secretary telephoned the Director of Community Care of the SEHB to arrange a meeting. Monsignor Breen, vicar general, provided the Director of Community Care with a copy of the letter from Darren together with the response. The Director of Community Care undertook to pursue the matter with the Garda authorities.

The civil proceedings taken by Darren have now been settled.

4.1.10 RICHARD

Richard alleged the following:

Richard told the Inquiry that he was instructed to attend Fr Collins's room in relation to either the Legion of Mary or his swimming associations when he was first abused. He was touched and masturbated by Fr Collins on a number of occasions. Richard stated that Fr Collins usually offered him alcoholic drinks during such occurrences. Richard stated to the Inquiry that he was warned by a nurse of the college not to be alone with Fr Collins. Richard first reported the instances of abuse to An Garda Síochána in 1996.

4.1.11 UNIDENTIFIED COMPLAINANTS

Three unidentified complainants alleged the following:

The Inquiry has been made aware of three recent complaints made to Bishop Walsh in relation to instances of sexual abuse by Fr Collins while they were students at St Peter's College during the 1970s. The three complainants did not wish to make formal complaints or have the matter pursued with a Church or Garda investigation. One of these complaints has now been settled by the Diocese.

4.1.12 GEORGE

George alleged the following:

In early January 2004, the Diocese of Ferns received a letter from a firm of solicitors engaged by George which cited instances of sexual abuse by Fr Collins against George in the late 1980s and early 1990s when he was a student at St Peter's College. This is the only complaint identified by the Inquiry that concerns sexual abuse by Fr Collins after his appointment as Principal of the college. The letter also refers to instances of physical abuse by another priest at the college. George has instituted proceedings against the Diocese in respect of sexual abuse by Fr Collins.

4.2 FR JAMES DOYLE

4.2.1 MATTHEW

Matthew alleged the following:

The Inquiry has been told by a priest who served on the teaching staff of St Peter's Seminary from 1969, that some time in 1972-1973, whilst James Doyle was a student and still a junior member of the seminary, he returned to the College drunk and attempted to molest a student called Matthew. This staff member reported the matter to the Dean (now deceased), who was dismissive of the complaint. He then reported the matter to the President of the College now also deceased. On 5 February 1973, the President of the College wrote to James Doyle advising him that his ordination was being postponed. James Doyle was, however, approved for ordination one year later in 1974 by the newly appointed President of St Peter's College. One clerical witness to the Inquiry has stated that it was his belief that Bishop Donal Herlihy directly intervened to have James Doyle's ordination proceeded with although the Inquiry has seen no documentary evidence of such intervention. This ex-President of the college has told the Inquiry that he had no information about James Doyle at the time of his ordination that would have caused him to reconsider his decision to recommend it.

4.2.2 UNIDENTIFIABLE COMPLAINANTS

- (i) A priest of the Diocese informed the Inquiry that the sergeant of Gorey Garda station contacted him in December, 1979 and told him that Fr James Doyle had given a lift to a young soldier who was hitchhiking and propositioned him. The young man jumped out of the car and reported the incident to An Garda Síochána who pursued Fr Doyle to Wicklow, stopped him and questioned him. The sergeant (now deceased) told this diocesan priest the following day that he did not propose to pursue the matter any further or charge Fr Doyle but that he did want to reinforce the warning that the Gardai had given him the day before. He sought an assurance from the diocesan priest to whom he spoke that there would be no further incidents. Fr Doyle's agreement to receive medical treatment in Belfast satisfied the Gardai at the time.
- (ii) A second priest of the Diocese said to the Inquiry that he was told by a Garda Superintendent in or about 1980 that Fr Doyle had been on his way to Belfast when he picked up a hitchhiker near Gorey and attempted to abuse him sexually. The Superintendent told the Inquiry that he reported this matter as well as his knowledge of general rumour surrounding Fr Doyle to Bishop Herlihy at this time.
- (iii) Shortly after an incident involving Fr Doyle and a hitchhiker (1979/1980), the diocesan priest referred to at (ii) above, was approached by a local parishioner who told him that an altar boy had been sexually abused by Fr Doyle. This priest recalls seeing graffiti near the sacristan's home on the path to the church saying "James Doyle is bent". He questioned Fr Doyle and Fr Doyle's reply was that he was a little bit foolish but made no further comment. Although he interpreted this comment as an admission, the priest in question has stated to the Inquiry that he still does not know what Fr Doyle is alleged to have done. He reported both matters to Bishop Herlihy and recalled that Bishop Herlihy sent Fr Doyle to Dublin for treatment with a psychologist or psychiatrist.

4.2.3 ADAM

Adam alleged the following:

In the early 1990s, Fr Doyle sexually assaulted Adam who was 12 years of age at the time, during a visit to the boy's home. The incident arose when Fr Doyle went to the bathroom in the course of the evening. Adam's father heard his son scream "stop". He immediately went to the landing and saw Fr Doyle standing over Adam. The boy was crouched in the corner with his back to the wall and Fr Doyle had one hand on his crotch and the other on his buttocks. Adam explained to the Gardai how the priest pushed him into the corner and grabbed his private parts. The family contacted Fr Doyle's parish priest. Two months later the boy's father discussed the assault with Bishop Comiskey. The matter was reported to the Garda Síochána and Fr Doyle was charged and convicted of indecent assault.

Notwithstanding Bishop Comiskey's expeditious removal of Fr Doyle and his subsequent dealings with him following this complaint, as more particularly set out in Chapter Five of this Report, the Diocese did not meet or attempt to meet with this victim or his family in relation to this complaint. The consequences of this case were very serious for the family concerned.

4.2.4 BARRY

Barry alleged the following:

Barry complained of abuse by Fr James Doyle in 1981 when he was approximately 11 years of age. He told the Inquiry that he had found a watch at a local Wexford GAA pitch which he gave to Fr Doyle so that the owner could be found. While he was handing over the watch, Fr Doyle undid his own and Barry's clothing and whilst he did not remove any clothing, he did expose both Barry and himself. Fr Doyle touched Barry and told Barry to touch him. Fr Doyle promised Barry that if the owner of the watch was not found, he would see that the watch was given to Barry. Barry did not tell anybody in his family what had happened because he felt he would not be believed. He returned, with some misgivings, to collect the unclaimed watch and Fr Doyle tried again to impose himself on Barry although no actual physical assault took place. Barry only recently disclosed his abuse to a local doctor. He reported the abuse to An Garda Síochána in January 2003.

4.2.5. BARRY'S BROTHER

Barry also alleged the following in relation to his younger brother:

Barry believes that his younger brother, who did not contact the Inquiry, was also abused by Fr Doyle as an altar boy and that such abuse would have occurred for a longer period than Barry's abuse.

4.2.6 JEREMY

Jeremy alleged as follows:

Jeremy was a student in St Peter's boarding school whilst James Doyle was a senior pupil there and during his first few years as a seminarian. Jeremy was about four years James Doyle's junior. He recalled lying in his bed one evening when James Doyle came into his cubicle and started to fondle him. He was deeply disturbed by this but felt he could tell no-one. He said he had admired and respected James Doyle until then but this episode had destroyed that. He stated that James Doyle was not drunk at the time of the alleged incident.

4.3 FR ALPHA

4.3.1 EDWARD

Edward alleged the following:

Edward was an altar boy in a parish in Wexford in the mid 1970s when Fr Alpha was appointed curate there. He made a statement to Garda Tom Murphy in November 1995, outlining sexual abuse by Fr Alpha from the summer of 1974 when he was 15 years of age. He stated that Fr Alpha asked him to attend his house to help with parish work, especially when Fr Alpha was on duty. On the pretext of trying on swimming trunks, Fr Alpha encouraged Edward to take off all of his clothes. Eventually Fr Alpha lay on top of him and, as they both lay on the bed naked, masturbation took place. Edward stated that he felt sorry for Fr Alpha and let him lie on top of him on his bed for approximately 15 or 20 minutes. Edward visited Fr Alpha's room in his house at least three times a week. The abuse, as alleged above, happened over a four or five year period mostly in the evening time. After some time Edward began to realise that this was wrong. He stated that Fr Alpha brought him on holidays on three occasions and on each holiday he was sexually abused by him. In the spring of 1980 Fr Alpha's advances towards him ceased.

In 1995 Edward made a statement to the Gardai. Through the Gardai he also made contact with the Diocesan Delegate, Fr Cosgrave. On 31 October 1997, Bishop Comiskey wrote to Edward indicating a willingness to meet him and confirming that a church investigation was still ongoing. They met in November 1997.

Fr Alpha vehemently denied any improper behaviour between himself and Edward. He confirmed that they had been on holidays with his, Fr Alpha's, brothers, but was quite adamant that nothing untoward occurred. He also said that he first became acquainted with Edward in May 1977 when Edward was already aged 18 years. He affirmed that he never had any sexual relationship with Edward either as a boy or an adult.

In May 1997 and again in June 2003 following further allegations, a decision was taken by the DPP not to proceed with a criminal charge against Fr Alpha and he remained in ministry until he stepped aside in 2002 at the request of the Apostolic Administrator.

4.3.2 GAVIN

Gavin alleged the following:

Gavin stated to the Inquiry that he was first abused by Fr Alpha in the mid 1970s when he was between seven and eight years of age and acted as an altar server for him. Gavin alleged in detail the nature of this abuse for the first time in his fourth written statement to the Gardai in September 2002. Gavin claims that he was raped by Fr Alpha beside a pond in a field near his home. He claims he blocked out this memory for years and only recovered it after years of therapy. He stated that Fr Alpha continued to abuse him throughout his teenage years.

After he completed his leaving certificate, Gavin entered the seminary in St Peter's. While he was there, Gavin met with the Spiritual Director of the Seminary. Gavin told the Inquiry that he believed he had discussed the abuse with the Spiritual Director on many occasions. Gavin has stated that the Spiritual Director suggested to him that he, Gavin, should ring Fr Alpha and arrange to meet him at St Peter's College. Gavin advised the Inquiry that Fr Alpha did drive to St Peter's on that evening and spoke to Gavin but not to the Spiritual Director. Gavin alleged that Fr Alpha refused Gavin's request to stay away from him and his family.

The Spiritual Director of St Peter's at that time attended the Inquiry and explained that in his capacity as Spiritual Director, students or seminarians came to him from time to time to speak to him. The meeting might involve the Spiritual Director hearing the Confession of the seminarian but it was his belief and contention that all matters discussed by seminarians with him in his capacity as Spiritual Director came under the seal of Confession and that they were absolutely confidential and private. The Spiritual Director could and did give certain evidence in relation to other matters but would not and did not discuss in any way the information, if any, given to him by Gavin. The Inquiry accepted that discussions between seminarians and their Spiritual Director were covered by sacerdotal privilege but that Gavin was free under Civil law to give whatever evidence he thought fit in relation thereto.

Gavin left St Peter's College and married. The President of St Peter's College at that time has stated to the Inquiry that he was unaware of Gavin's alleged sexual abuse by Fr Alpha at the time of his leaving St Peter's. Gavin's marriage subsequently broke up. He claims that the cause of this break-up was related to his renewed sexual contact with Fr Alpha in the years between 1990 and 1996.

Gavin made an initial complaint to the Gardai in September 1996. He met with Bishop Comiskey in March 1997. Gavin told the Inquiry that he told Bishop Comiskey that he was abused by Fr Alpha but did not go into the details as he was not encouraged to do so by the demeanour of the Bishop and by the fact that Bishop Comiskey had revealed to him details of the identity of another complainant, which concerned him.

Gavin made a third statement to An Garda Síochána in May 1997, in relation to a counter-complaint made by Fr Alpha that Gavin had abused him. Gavin conceded that he did make an approach to Fr Alpha but claimed that this was because of his confused sexuality which resulted from the child abuse perpetrated by Fr Alpha. These complaints were referred to the DPP but not proceeded with by him.

4.3.3 ERIC

Eric alleged the following:

In June 1993, when Eric was 15, having become friendly with Fr Alpha he was in the sitting room of the parochial house with him discussing problems he was having at home. He alleges that he was upset and Fr Alpha became tearful and knelt down in front of him, putting his hand up and down his legs, brushing across the crotch area of Eric's trousers. These activities lasted for about half an hour during which time Eric felt confused and froze. As Eric left, Fr Alpha gave him a

hug and kissed him on the lips. Eric went home but did not disclose the abuse to anybody. Eric alleged that similar incidents occurred on a weekly basis thereafter, until some time in July 1993 when Fr Alpha told Eric that he, Eric, had problems sexually and that Fr Alpha wanted to help him. After initially resisting Fr Alpha, Eric submitted. In August 1993, it is alleged that Fr Alpha forced Eric to perform oral sex on him. Acts of a sexual nature are alleged to have continued on a regular basis in the parochial house until June 1994 when, Eric claims, Fr Alpha and another man raped him. On the following day, Eric went to the local forest with the intention of hanging himself.

In October 1995, Eric disclosed his sexual abuse by Fr Alpha to two doctors who were treating him in hospital and spoke to the Sister in charge of the ward in January or February 1996. In February 1996, the SEHB informed the Gardai. Eric then made a statement to the Gardai.

Eric met with Bishop Comiskey on 3 January 1997. In breach of what Eric believed to be an undertaking of confidentiality, a statement given by him to the diocese outlining the abuse he had suffered was passed on by a priest of the diocese to Fr Alpha and he then revealed it to Eric's parents. This caused a row that resulted in his parents not speaking to Eric for two years. The Bishop apologised for that breach. A series of correspondence and meetings ensued between Eric and Bishop Comiskey throughout the next two years.

In July 1997, a further and more detailed statement of abuse was provided by Eric whereupon Bishop Comiskey strongly advised him to report to the Gardai who would be able to investigate the allegations properly and in a way that the Diocese could not do.

Eric maintained regular correspondence with the Diocese until Bishop Comiskey's resignation after which Eric received no further communication.

The DPP decided not to prosecute in this case on the evidence presented to him.

Eric stated that he was embarrassed by an approach made to him by Bishop Eamonn Walsh outside a church at a Confirmation ceremony in 2003, during which the Bishop discussed the DPP's decision not to prosecute Fr Alpha. Bishop Walsh has stated to this Inquiry that when he met Eric by chance on this occasion, he was conscious that the decision not to prosecute would have been a disappointment to him. He felt that it would have been remiss of him not to acknowledge the situation. Bishop Walsh spoke to Eric in private and used the opportunity to invite Eric to meet with him to discuss the matter fully. This meeting took place a short time later.

Fr Alpha denies all of the allegations outlined above.

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.