

Introduction

10.1 The principal college for the education of diocesan priests, or what the Church itself calls “formation”, in the Archdiocese of Dublin during the period under investigation by the Commission, was Holy Cross College, situated at Clonliffe Road in Drumcondra, Dublin and generally known as Clonliffe College. There were a number of alternatives to Clonliffe as a means of achieving admission to diocesan ministry during this period, namely, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co Kildare; the Irish College in Rome and the Propaganda College in Rome. Clonliffe College was founded in 1859 and ceased operating as a seminary in June 2000. It had two boards, the college council and the college finance committee. The college council was made up of priests appointed to the staff of the college by the Archbishop of Dublin and this council was responsible for advising the college president with regard to policy and its implementation. The college finance committee was made up of the college president, the vice-president, the director of formation, the college bursar, the diocesan financial administrator and a number of other priests of the diocese appointed by the Archbishop. The function of that committee was to advise the college president on financial policy, its implementation and oversight.

10.2 From the 1960s, the programme for a candidate attending Clonliffe consisted of seven years training. The first three years were typically taken up with philosophical studies at University College Dublin, at the conclusion of which the successful student would obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree. The remaining four years of training were taken up with theological studies in Clonliffe College itself. It was also possible to complete the first phase of training in philosophical studies at the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, initially by way of the award of a National Diploma in Humanities recognised by the National Council for Education Awards (now the Higher Education and Training Awards Council - HETAC) and, later, by a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy.

Eligibility and application

10.3 Canon 241 of the code of canon law states: *“The diocesan bishop is to admit to the major seminary only those whose human, moral, spiritual and*

intellectual gifts, as well as physical and psychological health and right intention, show that they are capable of dedicating themselves permanently to the sacred ministries.”

10.4 Canon 1041 excludes from formation as a priest those suffering from “*insanity and psychological infirmity*”, where such infirmity results in the priest being incapable of properly fulfilling his ministry. The faithful are obliged by canon 1043 to reveal to their priest or bishop any irregularities in the make-up of a candidate, so that those irregularities may be properly investigated. Even if those irregularities are discovered after the process of formation commences in a seminary, the bishop retains the discretion to exclude the candidate from continuing his formation for the priesthood.

10.5 A minimum requirement for entry into Clonliffe College was that the candidate had passed the Leaving Certificate and/or Matriculation.

10.6 An application form was completed by the candidate, supported by a letter of recommendation from his parish priest. Clonliffe College then dispatched a questionnaire directly to the parish priest, which sought information on certain aspects of the candidate’s personality and background, such as his mental health, any history of crime, his general suitability for the priesthood and whether or not he was under any undue influence that led him to his application. At this stage, the director of vocations of the college decided whether or not a candidate was suitable for further assessment by the college.

10.7 The candidate then underwent a medical examination. The next step was an in-depth interview between the candidate and a member of the college staff.

Psychological assessment

10.8 Sometime around the early 1970s, psychological assessments of candidates began. The psychological assessment would typically address such areas as personal background, social background, general intelligence, special aptitudes, vocation interests, personality and sexuality.

10.9 Following the initial assessment, the candidate met his assessors who would provide the candidate with feedback on the outcome of his assessment. The assessors in turn typically met the president of Clonliffe College, the director of formation and the director of vocations, before a final decision was taken on admittance. Monsignor Peter Briscoe, who was first appointed to the college in 1978 and was president from 1989 until its closure in 2000, indicated to the Commission that he had no specific recollection that anyone was ever excluded as a result of concerns arising from the psychological assessment about sexual predilections involving children. Most of the priests in the representative sample had completed their formation before this time period.

Garda vetting

10.10 There was apparently no process whereby potential candidates for the priesthood were vetted by An Garda Síochána. In December 2000, the then director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Dublin, Fr Kevin Doran, commenced correspondence with An Garda Síochána in an attempt to open an avenue to allow the director to have potential candidates screened for any police history. At that time, Fr Doran was informed by An Garda Síochána that it dealt with clearance applications only with respect to prospective full-time employees of certain designated organisations operating within the health board areas, where such employees would have access to children and vulnerable adults. As of 2002, the Catholic Church was not one of those designated agencies. In August 2002, the National Child Protection Office of the Irish Bishops' Conference lobbied the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, seeking to have the Church designated as a body that could seek vetting of prospective priests through a priests-clearance procedure. The Commission understands that the current position is that the prospective candidate supplies the diocese with a written authority to An Garda Síochána authorising them to supply the diocese with a note of any criminal convictions recorded against him.

Evaluation during formation

10.11 Bishop Eamonn Walsh was Dean of Clonliffe College from 1977 to 1985. He told the Commission that the college council evaluated the students on an ongoing basis. Monsignor Alex Stenson, who was a member of the staff at Clonliffe College for 25 years, told the Commission that evaluation

meetings would occur approximately once a month. The Commission was unable to obtain any records of any evaluations carried out on any of the priests in the representative sample. The absence of this information was in part explained by Bishop Walsh:

"I always recall ... Brendan Houlihan, as President saying to me when a priest is ordained he should leave the college with a clean record. If we have approved him for ordination, he should start from scratch and maybe that accounts for the attitude towards records, that once you promoted the person for ordination then he is a graduate and let the file begin from that day forward".

Pastoral placement

10.12 During each year of formation, a student was assigned a pastoral placement. In addition, the student was placed in a group which was formed for the purposes of considering the pastoral, social and theological aspects of the placement. These pastoral reflection groups were led either by the director of formation of the college or by someone else with specialist qualifications in this area within the College staff. The student was expected to write a half-yearly report of his progress in the pastoral setting, which would be presented to the director of formation and to his own supervisor.

10.13 Monsignor Briscoe outlined to the Commission the type of pastoral experience that a candidate was likely to attain during his period at Clonliffe College. In his first two years in the seminary, he would typically visit poor and disadvantaged people in special centres. The third year involved youth work and in years four and five, respectively, the candidate would be assigned to work with seriously ill people and in prison chaplaincy. In the final two years at the college, the student was placed in a parish and was usually maintained in the same parish.

10.14 During the first six years in the seminary, pastoral experience typically took place during an afternoon or an evening each week. In his final year, the student would normally be ordained as a deacon and it was also normal for him to spend an extended period of his summer vacation working in a parish in the south of England.

Spiritual director

10.15 Once admitted to the College, all candidates were required to have a spiritual director. It was a matter for the candidate himself to choose his spiritual director, but his choice was subject to ratification by staff at the College. The role of the spiritual director is as a spiritual mentor and as a confessor.

10.16 Canon 246-4 states: *“The students are to become accustomed to approach the sacrament of penance frequently. It is recommended that each should have a director of spiritual life, freely chosen, to whom he can trustfully reveal his conscience.”*

Canon 240 states: *“Besides ordinary confessors, other confessors are to come regularly to the seminary; while maintaining seminary discipline, the students are always free to approach any confessor, whether inside or outside the seminary...in deciding about the admission to orders, or their dismissal from the seminary the vote of the spiritual director and the confessors may never be sought.”*

10.17 This canon enshrines a principle in canon law that whatever discussions the candidate has with his spiritual director are absolutely confidential and may not be revealed to anyone other than the candidate. Monsignor Briscoe told the Commission that the spiritual director’s function was to work exclusively with the students, so that the students gained discernment as to whether they were suitable for a life in the priesthood or not. He confirmed that the work was entirely confidential and that the spiritual director could not breach that seal of confidentiality.

Sexuality, celibacy and child sexual abuse

10.18 Evidence received by the Commission confirmed that during the formation process there was some training in the demands of celibacy. The matter was usually addressed in courses and talks organised by the college. Some of those courses and talks also addressed the issue of sexuality. Monsignor Briscoe indicated to the Commission that the issues of a student’s own sexuality and celibacy were matters for the student to deal with in conjunction with his spiritual director. From the 1980s onwards, there was a series of sexuality seminars held on an annual basis. The Commission was

advised that the purpose behind the seminars was largely to emphasise the importance of the issue of sexuality and to provide a means for the students to reflect upon, and to become aware of, personal issues that they needed to address in this area. The seminars were provided by personnel who were trained as counsellors with expertise in the psycho-sexual area. An extra emphasis was placed on the understanding of celibacy in the final years leading up to ordination.

Training on the issue of child sexual abuse

10.19 The Commission has concluded, on the basis of its investigations, that in the years 1970-1995, there was no structured training on matters concerning child sexual abuse by priests or others. It is not apparent that the issue of child sexual abuse was a matter within the contemplation of the psychological assessors during that time.

10.20 The evidence suggests that the issue of child sexual abuse as a relevant factor in the screening and training of priests became a matter of some relevance in the mid-1990s. The document *Child Sexual Abuse: Framework for a Church Response* (generally referred to in this report as the *Framework Document* – see Chapter 7) was published in 1996. The Commission is of the view that this publication reflected a marked awareness of the existence of the problem of child sexual abuse and, in many ways, was a positive attempt to identify ways in which this problem could be addressed.

10.21 Chapter 8 of the *Framework Document* deals specifically with the selection and formation for the diocesan priesthood and for religious life. It recommends the screening of candidates, including a full psychological assessment by an experienced psychologist who is well versed in the Church's expectations of the candidates, with particular attention to celibacy. Paragraph 8.2.2 of the document states:

“Formation is progressive, and must be evenly balanced between the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. The whole process of formation of candidates for the priesthood and religious life should foster an integration of human sexuality and the development of healthy human relationships within the context of celibate living.”

- 10.22 Chapter 8 goes on to recommend that lay men and women should be involved in the training of priests and religious and that those in formation should have reasonable access to counsellors. It cautions that in the pastoral placement of students, the candidates must expect and receive the same formal supervision as other trainee staff in those pastoral settings.
- 10.23 At paragraph 8.2.6, it is stated:
“Since candidates for priesthood and the religious life are being prepared for ministries in which they will be in a position of sacred trust in regard to children, they must be made aware of what are appropriate boundaries in relating to children and of the absolute importance of respecting these boundaries.”
- 10.24 At paragraph 8.3.1, it is stated:
“Since a genuine spirituality is central to all personal life, good spiritual direction and counseling are invaluable for priests and religious. Serious personal inadequacies can hide behind questionable spirituality. Ongoing education promoting psycho-sexual maturity, healthy living and human wholeness is essential. Good practice guidelines should be developed in order to promote awareness of the need for appropriate pastoral boundaries.”
- 10.25 In chapter 9, paragraph 9.2.1 states:
“Priests and religious should receive ongoing education and in-service training in regard to the nature and effect of child sexual abuse. This is necessary to ensure that they reach out with competence and compassion to all victims of child sexual abuse whom they may encounter in the course of their ministry. Furthermore, such education and training should help towards ensuring that proper procedures for the protection of children are put in place in respect of all institutions that they are involved in managing – schools, youth facilities, for example.”
- 10.26 At paragraph 9.2.2 it is recommended that:
“Information days or seminars on child sexual abuse continue to be arranged for priests and religious. These information days and seminars should be followed up by the provision of new and additional

information as and when it becomes available. It would be particularly appropriate if practitioners from the health authorities, the police, and other professional bodies were contributors to this educational process.”

10.27 Paragraph 9.2.4 states: *“Education in the area of child sexual abuse needs to be provided on an ongoing basis to all involved in the formation of students to the priesthood and religious life.”*

10.28 Paragraph 9.2.5 states:
“Candidates for the priesthood and religious life need to continue to be made aware of the nature of child sexual abuse and its effects on victims and their families. In the course of their future ministry they may well come across situations of child sexual abuse, and so it is important to help them gain knowledge as to how to respond properly to these. Particular attention should be paid to the issue of child sexual abuse by priests and religious. Candidates should be made aware of the implications and consequences of this in civil law and canon law and of the procedures for dealing with it.”

10.29 The document *Our Children, Our Church* was published in 2005. The purpose of *Our Children, Our Church* was stated to be the provision of a set of policies and procedures for those who have responsibility for the protection of children and young people in the life of the Catholic Church in Ireland. In its introduction, it is stated that this document is intended to provide a more comprehensive and unified approach to child protection across the Catholic Church in Ireland than was previously indicated in the *Framework Document*. Its aim was to bring greater clarity and consistency to the Church’s procedures in relation to child protection.

10.30 Chapter 5 of *Our Children Our Church* deals with the selection and formation of candidates for the priesthood and religious life. It recommends that formation personnel are satisfied that the future priest or religious can relate appropriately both to children and adults before presenting him/her for ordination or final vows.

10.31 It is also recommended that those engaged in formation provide comprehensive training in safe and best practice in working with children and young people. There was a recommendation that during formation, essential matters to be addressed should include:

- the absolute importance of respecting appropriate boundaries in the interaction with children;
- knowledge of the theories associated with sexual abuse;
- how abusers operate and the elements of treatment for abusers;
- Awareness of the immediate and long term impact of abuse of all kinds;
- The pastoral needs of all those affected by child abuse.

Current position

10.32 Since 2000, Clonliffe College has ceased to operate as a seminary. At present, candidates for the diocesan priesthood in Ireland may attend St Patrick's College, Maynooth; St Malachy's College, Belfast and the Pontifical Irish College in Rome. Today, the sexual history of a candidate is relevant in his assessment for admission to the seminary. The *Ferns Report*, which was published in 2005, identified areas of sexual history that the Church at that time regarded as necessary to consider when assessing the suitability of seminarians. For convenience, the section of the *Ferns Report* is reproduced below:

“With regard to sexual history, the following issues are addressed:

An applicant who has been in a prior relationship should have concluded that relationship and have allowed for a significant period of time before being accepted by a Diocese. In the case of a candidate who has had a sexual relationship (heterosexual), a substantial period of celibate living should precede entry into the seminary;

In a recently expressed judgement of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, the Cardinal Prefect stated “The ordination to the Diaconate or to the priesthood of homosexual persons or those with a homosexual tendency is absolutely

inadvisable and imprudent and, from a pastoral point of view, very risky... A person who is homosexual or who has homosexual tendencies is not, therefore, suitable to receive the sacrament of sacred orders.” (Congregations Bulletin, December 2002). According to Dr Farrell, the College of Maynooth accepts the force of this reasoning and advice;

If it becomes known that a seminarian is engaging in physical genital activity with another person while he is in formation, he is asked to leave immediately. Certain other kinds of behaviour are also inconsistent with celibate chastity e.g. engaging in flirtatious or seductive behaviour and dating. It goes without saying that being in possession of, or accessing, pornographic material (whether print, video, electronic, digital etc.) is completely incompatible with being a seminarian. It is also unacceptable to participate in or to advocate the gay subculture by which is meant allowing a seminarian to define his personality, outlook or self-understanding by virtue of same-sex attraction;

Insofar as it is possible to determine, the older applicant should have achieved a successful integration of his sexuality and the younger applicant should have the capacity for such integration. Where there are clear contrary indications, the applicant should not be accepted;

A competent person should take a full history of the candidate. Particular attention should be paid to the presence of sexual abuse, sexual acting out or sexual orientation problems etc;

The child protection policy as set down by the Episcopal Conference should be fully complied with.”

The Ferns Report concluded:

“Thus, much has changed in the screening process and in the overall formation of seminarians in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Today a much greater emphasis is placed on screening for men who are able to live a life of chaste celibacy. In order to ensure that candidates possess the psycho-sexual-socio maturity necessary

for priests today, Maynooth College has been providing more resources for students, which is a vast contrast to the situation 40 years ago. Celibacy formation is integrated into the entire seminary programme through conferences, formal lectures and advice from formation personnel, spiritual direction and the fulltime availability of professional counselling.”

“Whilst the rigorous standards now in place in Maynooth would be of assistance in ensuring that only men who are emotionally, intellectually and sexually mature are admitted for ordination, the reality is that very few diocesan priests are ordained in Ireland in any year. Increasingly, parishes are welcoming priests ordained abroad to replace retiring clergy. Priests who are ordained in seminaries outside Ireland should be subject to the same level of assessment as has been undertaken by seminaries such as Maynooth.”

10.33 Archbishop Martin confirmed to the Commission that the rector of the Irish College in Rome reports annually to the bishops in Ireland. He confirmed that issues of training and sexuality are managed in a similar way to the current approach in St Patrick’s College, Maynooth. The Archbishop also receives from St Patrick’s College twice yearly reports on each student from the Archdiocese of Dublin. Archbishop Martin confirmed to the Commission that a final psychological assessment is carried out on all students in the later part of their studies before ordination.

10.34 This practice and previous psychological testing requirements in Ireland appear to have been adopted independently of any formal directions from Rome on the issue of mandatory testing. The position of the universal Church was clarified on 30 October 2008, when the Congregation for Catholic Education for Seminaries and Educational Institutions (a congregation of the Roman Curia with responsibility, among other matters, for the regulation of seminaries) presented a document entitled *Guidelines for the use of psychology in the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood*. This document advises that the early detection of “*sometimes pathological*” psychological defects of men before they become priests would help avoid tragic experiences. The document recommends that seminary rectors and other officials should use outside experts if they cannot handle the screening

themselves. The testing is to be directed at areas of immaturity in development. It states:

"Such areas of immaturity would include strong affective dependencies; notable lack of freedom in relations; excessive rigidity of character; lack of loyalty; uncertain sexual identity; deep-seated homosexual tendencies, etc. If this should be the case, the path of formation will have to be interrupted."

- 10.35 Vatican officials, when introducing the document to the press, said that the tests would not be obligatory, but would be decided on a case-by-case basis when seminary rectors wanted to be sure that a man was qualified for the priesthood.

The views of others

- 10.36 Fr Desmond O' Donnell, a psychologist who is a diagnostic tester for admission to ministry for the Church of Ireland and the Catholic Church, gave expert evidence to the Commission. He has been carrying out such testing in Ireland for more than ten years. He suggested to the Commission that a practice adopted by the Church of Ireland, in having prospective candidates carry out ministry work in their own parish for a period of three years before application and professional assessment, is a good way of identifying those candidates with personalities inconsistent with ministry.

- 10.37 Dr Marie Keenan, a lecturer and psychotherapist, who has a particular interest in therapeutic work with victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse, gave expert evidence to the Commission. She believes the system of training currently in place at Maynooth does not achieve openness on the part of seminarians on issues of sexuality. The principal reason why this arises, she articulates, is fear of expulsion arising from disclosures which might be regarded as inconsistent with life in the priesthood. Dr Keenan told the Commission that her experience is that seminarians believe that any disclosures about homosexual ideation would result in the student being required to leave the seminary. Dr Keenan wanted to stress that there are some exceptional bishops and church leaders in the Catholic Church in Ireland who foster opportunities for a true spirit of openness and honesty among their priests by providing true mentoring and honest leadership, despite what she considers to be a closed clerical culture that operates within

the Catholic Church on the issues of sexuality and celibacy. Dr Keenan argues that, at the very least, the seminary structure and programme content are in need of serious independent review if the aim is to produce emotionally and sexually healthy men, ready for the challenges involved in the life of dedicated priesthood.

10.38 Monsignor Connolly, the President of St Patrick's College, Maynooth is of the view that Dr Keenan's assertion that disclosures about homosexual ideation would lead to expulsion is too terse and un-nuanced. He considers that the issue is neither ideation nor orientation but rather is of a tendency to a particular form of sexual behaviour. He points out that the position of the Holy See represents a much more differentiated position than that summarised by Dr Keenan. He describes the approach of the College in the following terms:

"When a candidate is selected as a seminarian for a Diocese, he enters a process of formation at a seminary or a propaedeutic⁵⁰ course of formation elsewhere. In keeping with the Church's vision of candidates in this process, the seminary is a formation community where 'the candidate himself is a necessary and irreplaceable agent of his own formation. Nobody can replace the responsible freedom of individual persons' (Pastores dabo vobis no. 69)⁵¹. An aim of seminary formation is that the student, by the time he will be ordained for ministry, will have a secure sense of his human and priestly identity; able to hold the ambiguities and complexities of his life in a wholesome tension with Gospel and ministerial values.

The formation staff at St. Patrick's College Maynooth endeavours to facilitate an environment where that goal can be achieved and the concomitant level of responsibility in the individual can be supported and promoted. In the course of formation, there are a number of fora where, in a confidential way, the seminarian can explore and arrive at a satisfactory resolution of those areas of his life that he discovers present as inconsistent with priestly ministry.

⁵⁰ Providing preparatory or introductory teaching.

⁵¹ *Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day* promulgated in March 1992 by Pope John Paul II.

Throughout the entire process of formation for ministry, the Church is moved by two concerns: to safeguard the good of her own mission, and at the same time, the good of the candidates. To this end, one of the necessary aspects of the process of formation is the on-going evaluation of the human and ministerial identity as it takes shape in the candidate. This includes the suitability of a candidate for ministry in an increasingly demanding culture.

The seminarian is fully engaged in this process with his Formation Director and any decisions taken in this regard are made with his co-operative collaboration. A man who is wholesome, aware of his strengths and limitations and able to support his commitment with a solid spiritual life is always the best prospect for a fulfilled and effective priestly ministry.”