

Introduction

17.1 Fr Ioannes was born in 1927 and ordained in June 1953. He served in parishes in the Archdiocese from 1953 to 1988. He was in the USA from 1988 until 1993 when he was summoned home to deal with a complaint of child sexual abuse. He has not been in ministry since then.

17.2 The Commission is aware of three complaints of child sexual abuse and one of physical abuse against Fr Ioannes. These complaints all relate to incidents in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. He has admitted to sexually abusing three others but it is likely that there are more victims of both sexual and physical abuse. In 2009, he pleaded guilty to a number of charges. The Archdiocese has made a civil settlement with one victim and Fr Ioannes personally paid compensation to another.

First Complaint, 1974

17.3 The first complaint against Fr Ioannes was made in 1974. There are no records in the archdiocesan files about this complaint but there is no doubt that it was made. The complaint was made by the parents of a young boy.

17.4 The mother of the boy told the Commission that she and her husband discussed reporting the matter to the Gardaí at the time but decided against it in their son's interest. *"It would have been better not to go to the guards because we never heard of anything like that before, neither of us and we thought that we were the only ones"*. They also wanted to protect the priest: *"in case it was scandal I suppose. That's the way we were instructed in those days, you didn't give scandal and we went out of our way not to let anybody know who it was"*. They then decided that they had to report it to the Church in the interest of other children.

17.5 The parents complained to a local priest who wrote a letter to the Archbishop. This letter is not in the files of the Archdiocese but it was seen by the complainant's father. Monsignor Glennon was asked to investigate the matter. Monsignor Glennon met the boy's father. He then met Fr Ioannes.

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This is a pseudonym.

He met the boy's father again and told him that Fr Ioannes admitted the allegations and wanted to meet the family. The parents did not want to meet him. Monsignor Glennon also told the parents that Fr Ioannes was being sent for treatment. The mother thinks this did not happen as she saw him locally very soon after. She did not tell anyone else about what had happened.

17.6 In fact, Fr Ioannes had been sent for a psychiatric assessment by Monsignor Glennon, but not for treatment. The psychiatrist was told that the allegation against Fr Ioannes was that he had taken an altar boy to the pictures and later to his room where he was alleged to have indulged in indecent behaviour and to have taken photographs. Monsignor Glennon had spoken to Fr Ioannes who had admitted that there had been some "*handling of the organ*". Fr Ioannes told the psychiatrist that he had had no previous difficulties in his relationships with altar boys and "*did not think anything like this could happen to me*". (This subsequently transpired to be untrue and Fr Ioannes later admitted that he had misled the psychiatrist). Based on what he was told and on his own evaluation, the psychiatrist reported that he could not find any evidence of serious psychiatric disorder or of any serious psycho-sexual maladjustment. He was of the opinion that the incident appeared to have been an isolated aberration.

Complaints of physical abuse, 1978

17.7 Sometime in 1978, complaints about Fr Ioannes behaving in a violent or aggressive manner were made to his parish priest. In one incident Fr Ioannes had knocked a young boy unconscious. The parish priest reported to the Archbishop who asked Bishop O'Mahony to deal with the matter. The parish priest said that he thought that Fr Ioannes was subject to an uncontrollable impulse and had psychotic tendencies. He was aware of other incidents of violent/aggressive behaviour.

17.8 Bishop O'Mahony sent Fr Ioannes back to the psychiatrist who had assessed him in 1974. Fr Ioannes attended the psychiatrist on several occasions between September and December 1978. Fr Ioannes assured him that there had not been any sexual problems since they had last met in 1974. The psychiatrist reported to Archbishop Ryan that Fr Ioannes had a tendency to act impulsively but, after acting impulsively, he recognised his aberration and tried to make amends. The psychiatrist was satisfied that "*it*

should therefore be safe and in fact advisable" to leave Fr Ioannes where he was.

17.9 In 1979, Archbishop Ryan made inquiries about Fr Ioannes. His parish priest expressed concern that he was still behaving in an aggressive manner. Bishop O'Mahony met Fr Ioannes and it was agreed that he would go back to the psychiatrist. Fr Ioannes saw the psychiatrist twice in 1980. It is clear from the reports that the issue being addressed was his aggressive behaviour and not child sexual abuse. There was further correspondence between the parish priest and the Archbishop over the next few years. In 1985, it seems that the parish priest thought that Fr Ioannes no longer had a major problem with aggression. Fr Ioannes expressed his disappointment at not being made a parish priest and he began to look for an appointment in the USA. He had done holiday work in the USA a few times.

17.10 In October 1986, his parish priest prepared a draft reference for use by the Archdiocese. This included information on his problems with aggression but did not mention the admitted incident of child sexual abuse in 1974. There is no evidence that the parish priest had any knowledge of the 1974 complaint, although it was known to the Archdiocese. The reference was sent by Archbishop McNamara to an American diocese. Fr Ioannes was not offered a position by this diocese.

San Diego, 1988

17.11 In June 1988, the Bishop of San Diego wrote to Archbishop Connell asking him for a reference in respect of Fr Ioannes. The reference which was sent described Fr Ioannes as "*an excellent priest in many ways*". It did not mention the allegation of child sexual abuse or, indeed, the problems with aggressive behaviour. In a later letter about the practical details of the arrangements, the Archbishop recommended Fr Ioannes as "*a priest in good standing.*"

17.12 Fr Ioannes worked in San Diego from 1988 to 1992. On his return, Monsignor Stenson made inquiries about how he had fared in San Diego. The report was less than flattering but there was no suggestion of any child sexual abuse or aggressive behaviour. The Bishop of San Diego did not want him back.

Seattle

17.13 Fr Ioannes then sought an appointment in the archdiocese of Seattle. This diocese asked the Archdiocese of Dublin for a comprehensive letter of recommendation indicating, among other things, that he *“is a priest in good standing, and there has never been any charge of misconduct against him. Please also indicate that you do not know of any behaviour on his part that could cause scandal in your diocese, or in the Archdiocese of Seattle, if it were to become publicly known”*.

17.14 In June 1992, Monsignor Stenson replied to the Archbishop of Seattle stating that Fr Ioannes was a priest in good standing but there was no mention of misconduct or scandal. A further letter from Seattle in July 1992 asked for a description and some examples of Fr Ioannes’s *“relationships with others: men, women, youth, children”*. The letter continued: *“Did you ever hear any criticism about the way he relates with others? Have questions, rumor regarding celibacy or his relationship with others been raised? If so please explain”*. In reply, Monsignor Stenson said that, in the past, there had been some outbursts of temper with altar boys but *“there has never been any suggestion whatever of improper or immoral behaviour”*.

Civil claim, 1993

17.15 In March 1993, the boy involved in the 1974 complaint, who was now a young man, started a civil claim against the Archdiocese and Fr Ioannes. He alleged that the sexual abuse he suffered had included buggery. Fr Ioannes was asked to come home from Seattle to deal with the allegation. He was referred to Dr Patrick Walsh, director of psychological services, Hospitaller Order of St John of God. In his letter to Dr Walsh, Monsignor Stenson said:

“It appears now that he has had a history of paedophilia, beginning when a curate in [...] with one boy. Subsequently, he had involvement with boys in [three other parishes]. As far as can be determined there have been five or six boys in all. All that was known to us up to very recently was one incident involving unseemly photographs of a boy and occasional outbursts of physical violence with altar boys.”

- 17.16 Monsignor Stenson had discovered this information when he attended a meeting with Fr Ioannes and the Archdiocesan solicitors. Fr Ioannes had told them that the first abuse had occurred around 1961 and the last abuse in 1986. He admitted that he had abused the 1974 complainant but denied that this had involved buggery. He had not told the psychiatrist about the pre-1974 incidents, either when being assessed in relation to that incident or when being assessed in respect of his unduly aggressive behaviour.
- 17.17 Fr Ioannes did not have an appointment in Dublin at this time. He was living with a religious order. He was removed from ministry and was made a beneficiary of the Clerical Fund Society (see Chapter 8).
- 17.18 Dr Walsh issued a report in June 1993. Fr Ioannes had admitted abusing four boys. Dr Walsh considered that, because of his tendency to deny and minimise, it was safer to leave open the possibility that he may have abused others. He concluded that Fr Ioannes would require a therapeutic programme which would need to involve some residential component and eventually a long term plan for the future.
- 17.19 Fr Ioannes continued to live with the religious order. Suggestions that he be appointed to a limited ministry were rejected by Archbishop Connell.
- 17.20 Fr Ioannes paid compensation to the 1974 complainant in July 1993. The claim against the Archdiocese was withdrawn.

Garda investigation, 1994

- 17.21 In March 1994 the young man who had first complained in 1974 and who had reached the civil settlement in 1993 made a complaint to the Gardaí. He described how the complaint had been made in 1974 and his subsequent dealings with Fr Ioannes and the Archdiocese. He also complained that he had been indecently assaulted by a priest who his family thought was involved in investigating the complaint against Fr Ioannes. This priest was Fr Dominic Savio Boland (see Chapter 32).
- 17.22 The Gardaí contacted Monsignor Stenson who gave them Fr Ioannes's address. Fr Ioannes was arrested in May 1994. He declined to comment on the allegations. The Gardaí interviewed Monsignor Stenson who

told them that he *“was not at liberty as Chancellor to disclose what files we may or may not have on individual priests”*. The garda investigations concluded that the complainant was genuine and sincere in his complaint. It was noted by the Gardaí that Fr Ioannes and the Church authorities had offered little or no assistance to the Garda investigation. In August 1994, the DPP decided not to prosecute. The DPP’s office stated that *“This Office is not prepared to look beyond the delay aspect”* in the case. The complainant was described as being *“guilty of wholly unjustified and excessive delay as far as a criminal charge is concerned and his allegations cannot now be considered”*.

17.23 Meanwhile, Fr Ioannes was attending Dr Walsh for individual therapy. Dr Walsh reported in December 1994 that it might be possible for Fr Ioannes to be appointed to a chaplaincy under certain conditions. Consideration was again given to finding a limited ministry for Fr Ioannes. In February 1995 Monsignor Stenson consulted Dr Walsh about a possible appointment to a parish. Dr Walsh did not think this was advisable. Before any decision was made on an appointment to a convent or hostel, another complaint was received.

Second complaint, 1995

17.24 Another young man made a complaint to the Gardaí in October 1995. His initial statement was misplaced or lost. He alleged that he had been sexually abused by Fr Ioannes during the late 1970s/early 1980s.

17.25 Around this time there was media coverage of the civil settlement which Fr Ioannes had made in 1993. Both Fr Ioannes and the complainant were named in the media. The Archdiocese issued a statement explaining that the settlement had been paid by the priest and not by the Archdiocese. It seems that Fr Ioannes moved out of the religious order’s house where he was living when the story broke.

17.26 The Gardaí were unable to contact Fr Ioannes. They were told – it is not clear by whom – that he had been sent to live in St John of God’s. This was not the case. According to the Garda files, they contacted St John of God’s and were told that Fr Ioannes had gone to the USA for treatment. St. John of God’s was requested to contact the Gardaí when Fr Ioannes returned

from the USA. St John of God's has no record of this interaction with the Gardaí and told the Commission that this request was "*not formalised to the superior of the house*".

17.27 Fr Ioannes had admitted to abusing the young man who made this criminal complaint when he made admissions to Monsignor Stenson and the archdiocesan legal advisors in 1993. Nothing further happened.

17.28 In late 2002, the complainant looked for information on the state of the investigation. As the original statement had been mislaid, a new statement of complaint was taken in January 2003. He stated that there were about six incidents of abuse over a three-year period when he was between 11 and 14 years old. The abuse involved fondling of the genitals.

17.29 In November 1995, Fr Ioannes's name was one of the 17 given to the Gardaí by the Archdiocese (see Chapter 5).

1996

17.30 From November 1995 to May 1996, Fr Ioannes was in a therapeutic facility in the USA. In February 1996, this facility reported that Fr Ioannes was "*making excellent progress*" and "*possesses a good level of insight to have realized these psychological dynamics*". It was recommended that he remain in treatment so as not to lose "*his current therapeutic momentum*". In March 1996, Fr Ioannes wrote to Archbishop Connell asking questions about his future. He said that he wished to serve as chaplain to a nursing home and suggested that he remain in the therapeutic facility to prepare for retirement. In March 1996, the facility said that Fr Ioannes continued to make progress and had been encouraged to write and seek a limited ministry.

17.31 The second complainant, whose complaint to the Gardaí ran into the sand when the Gardaí were told that Fr Ioannes had been transferred to a therapeutic centre in the USA, began a civil claim against the Archdiocese in April 1996. The Archdiocese told the therapeutic facility that "*it would be very unwise to give [Fr Ioannes] any kind of limited pastoral assignment on his return*".

17.32 In June 1996, the therapeutic facility, in a somewhat surprising development, having regard to its earlier reports, stated that Fr Ioannes was a “*fixated pedophile*” and recommended that he attend individual therapy once a week for some time. The Archbishop was advised to identify someone from his office to whom Fr Ioannes would be accountable. The conclusion was that, if his internal work was supported by external supports, the likelihood of his re-offending “*is almost nil*”.

17.33 Fr Ioannes returned from the USA in June 1996 and, at the request of the Archdiocese, was given temporary accommodation in the St John of God’s community house in the hospital grounds. The Gardaí were not notified by St John of God’s. The Archdiocese did not know the Gardaí were looking for him at this stage. The advisory panel advised the Archbishop that Fr Ioannes should be requested to maintain a low profile. When it came to the attention of the advisory panel later that month that Fr Ioannes had left his supervised accommodation and that his whereabouts were unknown, it advised that the Gardaí be notified immediately. Fr Ioannes wrote to Archbishop Connell in respect of his hasty departure and requested leave of absence for a year. It appears that efforts were being made by the Archdiocese to contact Fr Ioannes. In early July 1996, the Gardaí were notified that he had left Ireland. The Archdiocese withdrew his financial support in August 1996.

1997

17.34 In July 1997 Fr Ioannes contacted Monsignor Stenson setting out his reasons for fleeing and promising to return and co-operate fully. When he returned to Ireland he again lived at the community centre in St John of God’s. It was decided that Dr Walsh of the Granada Institute would resume responsibility for his therapy and that Fr Ioannes himself would contact the Gardaí to advise of his return. Monsignor Dolan wrote to the Gardaí to tell them of his return. Unfortunately, the Gardaí did not pursue their inquiries into the second complainant’s complaint at this time. It appears that the original investigating garda had retired and, somehow, the file on the complaint was lost. The Archdiocese reinstated financial support for Fr Ioannes in August 1997.

17.35 In October 1997, the issue of Fr Ioannes's aftercare was discussed. He was adamant that it was within the remit of the USA therapeutic facility but the Archdiocese had made a decision to put the Granada Institute in charge. This meeting became fraught and ended with an agreement that Monsignor Dolan would contact the USA facility to indicate what the Archdiocese had decided and to request their help. Accommodation was found for Fr Ioannes in an apartment which was previously occupied by Fr Ivan Payne (see Chapter 24). When Fr Ioannes found out that the furniture in the apartment had been previously owned by Fr Payne, he demanded that it be removed and fresh furniture obtained. The Archdiocese agreed to this request. He lived alone in the apartment. A support team was put in place and he was to remain in touch with the Archdiocese. He was treated as a retired priest. He remained there until October 2002.

17.36 In April 2002, the diocese of San Diego issued a statement to RTE in which it quoted Archbishop Connell's 1988 recommendation of Fr Ioannes. In October 2002, the Archdiocese issued a statement about this. The Archdiocese said that when Archbishop Connell gave the recommendation to the diocese of San Diego in 1988, he had no knowledge of the 1974 complaint. There was no record of such a complaint in the Archdiocesan files. The statement accepted that the absence of a record was a serious deficiency. The Prime Time programme *Cardinal Secrets* was transmitted in October 2002 and featured the story of Fr Ioannes. Fr Ioannes left the country just before the programme was transmitted.

Physical abuse complaint

17.37 In November 2002, another complaint was made. This time the complainant was the young man who had been seriously physically assaulted by Fr Ioannes in 1978 and about whom the parish priest had reported to the Archdiocese. The young man said that the incident occurred around March or April 1978. Fr Ioannes had kicked and punched him causing him to lose consciousness. He was seen by his GP at the time and was off school for a week. The parish priest had visited him. His father had gone to the garda station to make a complaint but, having had a conversation with a sergeant he knew there, it was decided not to pursue the matter.

17.38 Once again, the Gardaí could not contact Fr Ioannes because he had left the country. Various attempts were made by the Archdiocese to try to find him. His diocesan allowance was cut off in January 2003.

17.39 In January 2003, the second complainant made a fresh statement to the Gardaí as his original statement could not be found. His brother also made a statement alleging that he had been sexually abused by Fr Ioannes.

17.40 Fr Ioannes returned to Dublin in August 2003 and took up residence at his previous accommodation. He agreed to be interviewed by the Gardaí but did not turn up. He went to Bundoran towards the end of August 2003 and then went abroad again.

17.41 He returned to Dublin in 2008. In May 2009, just as this report was being finalised, he pleaded guilty to a number of charges of sexual assault.

The Commission's assessment

Archdiocese

17.42 The handling of the initial complaint in 1974 was quite simply disastrous and typical of its time. Nothing was done even though Fr Ioannes admitted his guilt. He was free to commit other offences and this he duly did. The failure to do anything was compounded by the failure to maintain any proper record of the complaint.

17.43 All of the letters recommending Fr Ioannes to dioceses in the USA in the 1980s either do not mention or gloss over the problem of his violence and aggression.

17.44 Cardinal Connell has stated that he had no knowledge of the 1974 complaint when he wrote the reference for the bishop of San Diego in 1988. The Commission accepts that this is so. The details of that complaint and the report of the psychiatrist were not in the archives. A copy of the psychiatrist's report was provided to the Archdiocese in 1993.

17.45 The Commission also accepts that Monsignor Stenson had no knowledge of the 1974 complaint when he wrote to the Archbishop of Seattle. It is notable that the diocese of Seattle was, in 1992, diligent in looking for

detailed information about priests coming to work there. Effectively, that diocese did force the Dublin Archdiocese to admit the problems about physical aggression.

Gardaí

17.46 The Gardaí dealt properly with the 1994 complaint. However, the Garda handling of the 1995 complaint was most unsatisfactory. The prosecution of the investigation was haphazard and desultory. The statement made by the complainant appears to have been lost and no attempt to redress the situation was made until the complainant returned to the Gardaí to inquire as to the status of the investigation in 2002. No steps were taken on either of the occasions when Fr Ioannes returned to the country, even though the Gardaí were notified of his presence by the Archdiocese. Despite the re-activation of the complaint in 2002/2003, Fr Ioannes lived in Ireland untroubled by the law for a considerable period before he left the jurisdiction.