

Introduction

23.1 Fr Hugo was born in 1909 and ordained in 1935. He died in 1988. He had various appointments throughout the Archdiocese of Dublin, ending up as parish priest in Blessington, following a period as a curate in Drimnagh.

Complaint, 1981

23.2 There is one complaint of abuse against Fr Hugo. This complaint was initially made to the Archdiocese in 1981 but was not actually investigated until 1995. The complaint relates to Fr Hugo's time in Drimnagh. He is alleged to have abused a child from 1959, when the child was about 11 years old, until 1976 when she was in her mid-twenties.

23.3 In 1978 the complainant told her sister about the abuse. She said that Fr Hugo had been sexually abusing her continuously between 1959 and 1976 and the abuse included full sexual intercourse from the time she was a child. At first she did not know what was happening to her. Fr Hugo sent her to a nun to explain the facts of life. He also told her what to say in confession.

23.4 Fr Hugo lived alone in Drimnagh. He was very involved with the complainant's family and was a regular visitor to their house. He was very popular and used to holiday with the family.

23.5 In 1981, the complainant's sister informed Bishop Forristal who was then an auxiliary bishop of Dublin. A meeting with the bishop was arranged and she was accompanied to that meeting by another priest. At this meeting, the sister gave details of the abuse to Bishop Forristal. There was no follow-up of the complaint which she had made.

23.6 In evidence, Bishop Forristal agreed that he did meet the sister in 1981. Bishop Forristal said he had passed on the complaint either directly to Archbishop Ryan or to one of his secretaries, but there are no details in the Archdiocesan files of that complaint.

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This is a pseudonym.

23.7 In February 1995, the sister wrote to Bishop Forristal referring to the 1981 meeting and asking why there had been no follow-up. She was aware that Bishop Forristal had been the chair of a committee which was responsible for drafting the *Framework Document*. She was anxious to know why they had been let down and why nothing was done about their complaint.

23.8 Bishop Forristal replied indicating that he remembered her visit to him in spring or early summer of 1981 and he remembered the priest who had accompanied her. He was certain that he had informed Archbishop Ryan or his secretaries of the complaint. He said that “*as Auxiliary Bishop, I would have regarded the Archbishop as the only person in the diocese who was competent to deal with the priest and to pursue the case*”. He told her that he had been unable to follow-up the matter as he had been appointed Bishop of Ossory in July 1981 and his jurisdiction in Dublin had ceased. He advised her to contact Archbishop Connell as he could no longer deal with cases outside his diocese.

23.9 In March 1995, both the sister and Bishop Forristal contacted Archbishop Connell to inform him of the complaints. Archbishop Connell asked Monsignor Stenson to investigate. Bishop Forristal confirmed the fact that he had had the meeting in 1981 and he also said to Monsignor Stenson that he had been told that Bishop O’Mahony was looking after it.

23.10 At this stage, the priest who had accompanied the complainant had moved abroad but Monsignor Stenson made contact with him and he confirmed the meeting, and confirmed that Bishop O’Mahony knew about the complaint. Monsignor Stenson met the sister. She gave him the details of the complaint and she mentioned that her sister had named others whom she suspected had been abused by this priest. Monsignor Stenson checked with Archbishop Ryan’s secretary but he had no recollection of the 1981 complaint. The investigation did not go any further. In particular, Bishop O’Mahony does not seem to have been asked about his involvement. Fr Hugo was dead at this stage.

23.11 Monsignor Stenson and Monsignor Dolan were in touch with the sister on a number of occasions and offered counselling and an apology. The sister was never asked to suggest that the alleged victim make a formal complaint

herself and no questions were asked about the others who may have been abused. In response to this criticism, Monsignor Dolan said that, during the course of his work as a delegate, he had gained considerable awareness of the complex and sensitive issues relating to outreach to other possible victims. In particular, he observed that victims have a guilt when they discover that others have been abused. His experience was that, as the abuse involved an uninvited violation of a person, victims were sensitive to unexpected and uninvited approaches from the Church. The Commission could find very little evidence to support this contention by Monsignor Dolan.

23.12 The sister asked for and got a meeting with Bishop Forristal.

The Commission's assessment

23.13 No attempts were made to deal with the original complaint made in 1981 even though it was made to an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese. Fr Hugo was then occupying a prestigious position as a parish priest and there is no record of him having been spoken to in relation to these matters. He remained in his position as parish priest for a further three years.

23.14 Efforts were certainly made to deal with the matter when her sister re-activated the complaint in 1995. However, at that stage, Fr Hugo was dead. Counselling was offered to both the complainant and her sister. There was no follow up in respect of the others whom the complainant believed to have been abused. The sister was satisfied with the response she received in 1995/1996. She was satisfied that her assertion that the original complaint was not properly investigated was found to be valid. She felt that, had the matter been more thoroughly investigated in the 1980s, some closure might have been brought earlier to a very painful episode in her and her sister's life.

23.15 There is no record in the garda files of notification of the complaint to them by the victim or the Church authorities.