

Introduction

39.1 Fr Laurentius is a member of a religious order. He was born in 1935 and ordained in 1966. He spent a number of years working in Africa. He then returned to Ireland where his main activity was as chaplain to a vocational school in Dublin from 1973 to 1983. He subsequently spent a number of years working in parishes in a first world country. Since 1994, he has been living in one of his order's houses in Ireland and, since 1996, he has not been allowed any public ministry.

39.2 Fr Laurentius is a promiscuous man who has had numerous sexual relationships with women in all of the countries and areas in which he ministered. He claims that his sexual relationships were all with adults. There are two complaints from named underage girls in Ireland.

Complaints while working abroad

39.3 While he was working abroad in the first world country, in 1990, complaints were made about his relationships with adult women. A nun reported to the local head of the order and the local bishop that a number of women were disturbed by his behaviour and a formal complaint was made by one of these women. Fr Laurentius had been counselling her in respect of her sexual abuse as a child and her marital difficulties. A sexual relationship developed between Fr Laurentius and this woman. She complained that he was exploiting her and she was concerned that he would abuse other vulnerable women.

39.4 The local head of the order¹⁰⁸ discussed the matter with Fr Laurentius and with the bishop. Fr Laurentius denied that there was any exploitation involved; he said the woman had initiated the sexual contact and he had succumbed out of human weakness. Later, he told the local bishop and the head of the order that the woman had withdrawn the allegation and apologised. The head of the order told the bishop that he hoped the incident was "*over and done with*". There is no evidence that either checked whether

¹⁰⁷ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁰⁸ The term "head of the order" is used to describe a person in authority in the order. Sometimes this is the actual head, sometimes his deputy and sometimes the delegate.

or not the woman had, in fact, withdrawn the allegation. The bishop agreed that Fr Laurentius should continue in his parish duties.

39.5 In January 1994 another woman contacted the order to complain that she had been indecently assaulted by Fr Laurentius. She had reported the assault to another priest in the parish who, although he thought she was fantasising, told her to contact the head of the order. Fr Laurentius made an apology in writing to this woman and accepted that he had assaulted her. The woman concerned accepted the apology but she was surprised and concerned that he would be returning to parish work. She was aware of concerns expressed by other women about him.

39.6 Fr Laurentius was sent for treatment to Jemez Springs, New Mexico in February 1994. In the letter of reference, the head of the order outlined Fr Laurentius's background; said that he "*finds celibacy in great conflict with his natural instincts and drives*"; summarised the two specific complaints that had been made and explained that the order had had other complaints about his words and behaviour.

39.7 While in Jemez Springs, Fr Laurentius revealed that he had been sexually abused as a child. He also revealed that he had a relationship with a woman in Dublin whom he still loved. He said he had been involved with more than 40 women some of whom were under the age of 18. In an initial report, the doctors and therapists considered that he had benefited from the treatment but he needed strong support structures and safeguards and recommended that he not take part in any pastoral counselling of women, especially women who were needy. He was not to engage in direct one-to-one ministry with women nor have unsupervised contact with women.

39.8 In a later psychological report, it was stated that Fr Laurentius showed a better understanding of his sexual patterns and was able to acknowledge that some women were hurt by his actions. He had also admitted that he had treated women as objects. However, he failed to appreciate how his position as a priest coloured every aspect of his behaviour. He was unable to appreciate the power difference as a result of his being a priest. He also continued to express serious errors in his thinking regarding the sexual contact he had had with several youths. The report concluded that he had

made significant gains while in treatment. However, he did require much more work to maintain, integrate and further his treatment gains. He genuinely cared for most of the 40 women with whom he had been involved but he assumed that, because he was not intentionally hurting these women, his behaviour was healthy for a secular man. He was regarded as remaining at considerable risk of more sexual contact with women and girls. This risk was increased by the fact that Fr Laurentius considered himself to be “*cured*” and a completely new man. As a result, it was highly recommended that he not have any one-to-one ministry with women. It was acknowledged that he would progress best in a community rather than working in isolation at a parish or mission and that he should have a long-term counsellor. The psychologist also stressed that, just because his focus was on adult women, it should not be forgotten that he had also had sexual contact with minors and that this was a major past and potential problem.

39.9 The assessments and reports from Jemez Springs were sent to the head of the order in Ireland. The head of the order in the country where the complaints had been made had asked for this to be done – he was concerned that such reports might be subpoenaed in his country. Fr Laurentius returned to one of the order’s houses in Ireland in September/October 1994. In accordance with the continuing care recommendations of Jemez Springs, he signed a supervision contract with the order. A named supervisor was appointed. This supervisor was informed of his background. The contract did not mention any restrictions on ministry or on movement. The order has told the Commission that, at this stage, he was forbidden to have any one to one ministry with women. He was allowed to say mass in public and this could have involved supply work outside the order’s house.

First Irish complainant

39.10 In May 1995, the first Irish complainant reported to the Gardaí that she had been abused by Fr Laurentius about 20 years earlier when she was aged 16 or 17. This complainant had been abused as a child in a residential institution and the abuse by Fr Laurentius occurred while she was living in a hostel run by the order that had run the residential institution. Fr Laurentius was a frequent visitor to this hostel and the complainant also visited him in the order’s house. In December 1995, the Gardaí visited Fr Laurentius to tell him about the allegation and they invited him to make a statement after

caution. He declined. He spoke to the Gardaí “*off the record*” about his difficult relationship with his father, his strong sexual urges and his difficulty with celibacy. He admitted having made mistakes and was anxious to speak openly. He later made a statement to the Gardaí in the company of his solicitor and he denied the allegations.

39.11 The order’s advisory panel was informed of the allegation. The delegate of the order expressed concern at this meeting that other girls had been visiting Fr Laurentius around the time the alleged abuse occurred. The head of the order suggested that Fr Laurentius should remain where he was and be monitored. It was considered that it would be unjust to remove him without interview because his history was with adult women. It seems that the advisory panel did not see the reports from Jemez Springs. It was decided that a preliminary investigation would not be started but instead any investigation would be left to the civil law. However, there would be an initial assessment. It was concluded that there was a “*semblance of truth*” in the allegation from what had been gleaned from the assessment so far. It was decided to put Fr Laurentius on administrative leave. The conditions included no pastoral ministry and no public mass. He was allowed to say mass privately and to wear clerical garb. The bishop in the area where he was living was informed.

39.12 Fr Laurentius told the head of the order that he remembered being visited by a young woman but there had been no sexual contact.

39.13 Shortly afterwards, in March 1996, this complainant informed the order’s solicitors that she intended to take civil proceedings against Fr Laurentius and the order. Such proceedings were never actually pursued. There was no direct contact between this complainant and the order and it does not appear that any offer of counselling was made.

39.14 The Gardaí, having investigated the complaint, did not recommend prosecution because of the lapse of time and insufficient evidence. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) decided not to prosecute as there had been a considerable delay in making the complaint. The delay involved was approximately 20 years.

Second Irish complainant

39.15 In March 1997, another complainant emerged. She complained that she had been sexually abused by Fr Laurentius when she was 17. The head of the order and subsequently the delegate met her. She had been introduced to Fr Laurentius by a friend who thought he could help her with various problems she had, including sexual abuse by a family member when she was between seven and ten years old. She said Fr Laurentius seemed very kind and interested. He told her she would have to forgive her abuser. He then told her she was frigid and he could help her overcome this. He engaged in sexual activity with her over a year to a year and a half – this included full sexual intercourse. She described to the Gardaí how he effectively had power over her and she would do whatever he wanted. The abuse stopped when she met the man who was to become her husband. This was when she was about 19. She had attended a therapist in 1994 and 1995 and had given a similar account of her experiences there – this was two years before she complained to the order or the Gardaí. She had written a letter to her then boyfriend in 1978 which indicated that she had been engaging in sexual activity with Fr Laurentius before she met him (the boyfriend).

39.16 Fr Laurentius denied to the order that any sexual transgression of any kind occurred with this complainant.

39.17 The order and the complainant reported the allegation to the Gardaí. Fr Laurentius told the Gardaí in September 1997 that he did have sexual intercourse with her but that it was consensual and occurred when she was aged about 26. He said: *“It was a really close good friendship, natural and happy and the sexual relationship developed at the end”*. He said they had been friendly for eight to nine years before this occurred.

39.18 The investigating Gardaí were convinced that the complainant had been sexually abused. They recognised that this would be difficult to prove. They recommended that Fr Laurentius be prosecuted under Section 3 of the *Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1885*. This makes it an offence to procure a woman by false pretences or false representations to have unlawful sexual intercourse. Later, the DPP decided not to prosecute because the

complainant was over 17 when the abuse occurred and the evidence suggested that she consented to the sexual activity.

39.19 The order notified the local bishop of the complaint but did not notify the Archbishop of Dublin even though the alleged abuse occurred when Fr Laurentius was working in the Archdiocese.

39.20 The second foreign complainant (who claimed she had been indecently assaulted as an adult) then started legal proceedings in relation to the sexual assault which Fr Laurentius had admitted. There were discussions between the order in Ireland and the order in the other country on how to handle the claim. The head of the order in Ireland told the head in the other country that Fr Laurentius was not in ministry and would not be. He also told him that the report from Jemez Springs was "*absolutely confidential*" to the head of the order in Ireland and could not be discussed.

List of women

39.21 In October 1997, Fr Laurentius provided the head of the order with a list of the women who had been in his life. He had had a sexual relationship with eight women while in Africa, 26 women while in Ireland, three women while doing supply work abroad (in another first world country) and nine women in the first world country where complaints were made (including the two whose initial complaints had brought the problem to light). He gave the ages of all these women including the ages of those whose names he did not give. According to Fr Laurentius, they were mainly in their 20s or early 30s. He named a number of 15-16 and 17-year-olds with whom he had a "*friendship*". He described the number of times he had sexual intercourse with each individual. He said "*full intercourse rarely took place and contraceptives were always used*". The list included the second Irish complainant, gave her age as 26 and said there was sexual intercourse once. It also included the first Irish complainant, gave her age as 17 and described the relationship as "*friendship*".

39.22 Fr Laurentius was sent to the Granada Institute for assessment. It is not clear what background information was given to Granada. It was not given a copy of the Jemez Springs report but was aware that he had been in Jemez Springs. The order explained to the Commission that this may have

been because the report stated that it may not be released to anyone without the written permission of the priest. Further, the delegate at the time considered that the assessment by Granada was an opportunity to get a second opinion and that sharing the Jemez Springs report might influence Granada's findings. A report from Granada in February 1998 stated that Fr Laurentius's sexual orientation was towards adult females and there was "*no evidence of any erotic interest in children which precludes a diagnosis of paedophilia*". Granada concluded that Fr Laurentius had a well-developed sense of social intelligence and elevated level of disinhibition. He had high needs for excitement and stimulation and would flout convention in pursuit of this. It was recommended that he continue individual psychotherapy. He would derive little benefit from a strictly imposed structural regime. However, he would benefit significantly if he could be empowered to negotiate a mutually acceptable framework of accountability with his superiors. It would also benefit him if he could be constructively employed so as to foster further positive engagement in the religious community.

39.23 The order then proposed a new contract for Fr Laurentius. This would involve, among other things, not celebrating mass in public or engaging in any form of ministry. It would also require him to get permission to leave his house and to tell the local superior where he was going. Fr Laurentius considered that this later proposal was an infringement of his rights and dignity. It was suited for someone who had been convicted of child sexual abuse. He considered that the Granada report had effectively cleared him of any suspicion of child sexual abuse.

39.24 The advisory panel recommended the formal removal of his priestly faculties and wanted him to sign the proposed contract. He was also to be informed that he was not to be alone with any woman.

39.25 The order delegate met Granada in August 1998. Granada was firmly of the view that the priest had been conducting adult relationships. Granada considered that he had acknowledged his wrongdoing but the order delegate was more sceptical – it was more a question of "*notches in his gun*". The concern of both the order and Granada at this stage seemed to be mainly the question of integration of Fr Laurentius in his community and reconciling conflicts in his life (between his vow of celibacy and his sexual activities).

Granada considered that the order was making itself into a type of guard for Fr Laurentius and this could not continue. Granada asked why the order did not tell him that he could not continue to be a member of the order.

39.26 Fr Laurentius himself thought there should be no restrictions as he was not a paedophile and he was not involved with any woman at this stage. The delegate and Fr Laurentius then met Granada. Granada said that restricting his ministry was not unreasonable given that, in all professions, engaging in sexual conduct with a client would mean the end of the professional career. All were agreed that he was not a child abuser.

39.27 The delegate met the second Irish complainant and her husband in December 1998. She mentioned the possibility of a civil case. The delegate concluded that there was probably some truth in what she was alleging.

39.28 In early 1999, the delegate met Granada to discuss the possibility of limited ministry – this would involve saying mass in public but not allowing confession or counselling, especially to women. The record of the meeting which was made by the order shows that Granada repeated that there was nothing to show that Fr Laurentius was a child or adolescent sexual abuser. They were in favour of his having limited ministry.

39.29 The advisory panel deferred consideration of the proposal that he be allowed to return to limited ministry in order to enable a full dossier to be prepared including all reports.

39.30 In May 1999, the order formally asked Granada to consider the question of Fr Laurentius's return to limited ministry. Granada acknowledged that their earlier report had concluded that Fr Laurentius was "*not erotically attracted to children, and consequently did not pose a threat of sexually abusing children*". However, it had become apparent that he had difficulty making himself accountable to the religious order and had a history of repeatedly breaking ministerial boundaries and utilising his priestly status to gain access to female company. Consequently, Granada felt that it could not endorse his return to ministry with the public.

39.31 The second Irish complainant started civil proceedings and a settlement of these proceedings has been reached.

39.32 Fr Laurentius continued to complain about what he described as the “*continuing and unjust denial of priestly ministry*” and about the assessment processes. The head of the order did not accept Fr Laurentius’s view and showed considerable patience in dealing with him. The head of the order, understandably, admitted to having difficulty in maintaining charity or even hope in dealing with this “*fool*”. The advisory panel was firmly of the view in 2001 that there was no question of his return to ministry because his violations were far too serious. It recommended that he be allowed concelebrate mass privately with other members of the order and hear the confessions of other members of the order. The advisory panel was of the view that there was “*absolutely no question of child sexual abuse*” where he was concerned. The head of the order made it very clear to him that he was unlikely to be granted priestly faculties ever again.

39.33 In 2003, the head of the order told Fr Laurentius that it had come to his attention that Fr Laurentius was counselling a woman. Fr Laurentius denied this. He was refused permission to officiate at a wedding. He was, however, allowed to travel abroad to attend a wedding in 2005.

The Commission’s assessment

39.34 It would have been entirely understandable if the order had asked Fr Laurentius to leave. The Commission considers that it is to its credit that it did not do so and that it tried very hard, after the first Irish complaint was made, to ensure that he was not a risk to girls and women.

39.35 The allegations made abroad are not within the remit of the Commission, both because they do not concern child abuse and because they are not related to the Archdiocese of Dublin. They are outlined here in order to show what the order in Ireland knew about Fr Laurentius when they were handling the complaints that are within remit. The first reported incident may well have involved consenting adults but the fact that he accepted that he had indecently assaulted the second woman who complained ought to have been a major cause for concern. Such an assault is treated by canon law in the same way as child sexual abuse (canon 1395.2).

- 39.36 The reports from Jemez Springs clearly show that he was considered a danger to women in general and specifically mentioned that he had been involved in child sexual abuse.
- 39.37 It was very clear that he was using his status as a priest and as a counsellor to meet women with whom he then had sexual relationships. This is clearly predatory exploitative behaviour and, at minimum, is unprofessional conduct. Doctors or therapists who engage in such conduct are liable to be disbarred.
- 39.38 The Commission has noted that Church authorities seem to be remarkably tolerant of breaches of their rules where sexual activity with adults is concerned.
- 39.39 The Commission finds it very difficult to understand how Granada can categorically state that Fr Laurentius was not involved in child sexual abuse when there is evidence that he admitted to such abuse while in Jemez Springs and when there are two complaints from 16/17 year olds in Ireland. The Commission acknowledges that consensual sexual involvement with a 17 year old is not a crime.
- 39.40 The Commission finds Fr Laurentius's list of his sexual conquests astonishing. The detail in respect of age and precise sexual activity is simply unbelievable. It is highly unlikely that a promiscuous man would remember such detail unless he actually kept a record. It is equally unlikely that he would know or remember the ages of all the women with whom he had been involved. In the Commission's view, this list is compiled with a view to establishing that he was not a child abuser. The Commission is even more astonished that Granada regarded this as his acknowledgement of his wrongdoing. The Commission considers that the common sense assessment of the order's delegate ("*notches in his gun*") is much more realistic.
- 39.41 The order did not tell the Archdiocese of Dublin about the complaints at the time even though they related to Fr Laurentius's time in the Archdiocese. The order did inform the local bishop where Fr Laurentius was living.

39.42 The Gardaí dealt appropriately with this case.