

Introduction

46.1 Fr Aquila is a member of a religious order since the 1950s. As a brother in the order, he served in a school. He was ordained as a priest of the order in the 1960s. He served abroad for a number of years and was a chaplain in the Archdiocese of Dublin for some time. He is now retired from public ministry. He lives in another diocese where he has faculties to say mass but, at his own choice, does not have any appointment. He remains a member of the order but has no real involvement with it.

46.2 The Commission is aware of a total of three complaints alleging sexual abuse against Fr Aquila. All of the complaints related to his service in the school when he was not yet a priest.

First Complaint

46.3 The first complaint of abuse was made by a former student at the school to the Gardaí in February 2000 and involved an allegation of physical and sexual assault in the school in the 1960s. The allegation was that he had strapped a boy on his bare buttocks and subsequently applied ointment on the boy's buttocks on the premise of alleviation of the damage caused by the beating. During the course of the application of the ointment, he is alleged to have touched the boy's genitals. The priest admitted to strapping boys on bare buttocks while at the school and that he would have applied medication in such circumstances. He denied ever touching genitalia and regarded any discipline he meted out as in accordance with the "*norms of the times*". He denied any sexual attraction to, or fantasies about, children. A Garda file was sent to the DPP who directed no prosecution in September 2000.

Church response

46.4 The Dublin Archdiocese learned of the complaint from the Gardaí in February 2000. Fr Aquila was immediately requested by the superior of his order to step aside from his position as chaplain. Fr Aquila was referred to the Granada Institute for assessment and a report was issued in September 2000. This report judged him to be well adjusted, having a strong network of

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This is a pseudonym.

support, no deviant sexual fantasies and to be a conscientious and hard-working person. As the psychologist determined that there was no evidence that Fr Aquila presented a risk to children, it was recommended that he be allowed to return to his ministry. Archbishop Connell confirmed that he was permitted to return as chaplain in September 2000, having checked with the chancellor, Monsignor Dolan, that there were no other known concerns about him.

Two further complaints

46.5 Between June and July 2001, the Archdiocese learned of two further complaints of alleged physical and sexual abuse from two other former students at the school. One of those complainants reported that “*to the best of his memory*”, he thought his abuser might have been Fr Aquila.

46.6 In August 2002, Archbishop Connell withdrew his nomination of Fr Aquila as a chaplain. Although Fr Aquila was initially going to contest this, he decided to retire in 2003.

46.7 In October 2004, the order’s advisory panel considered the three complaints against Fr Aquila. While the panel considered the claims believable, it did not make any decision as to whether they did or did not happen.

46.8 It was decided by the panel and the superior of the order that no bar would be put on Fr Aquila as a priest. Over the next few years, Fr Aquila became disillusioned with the Church and his order in particular. He moved to the diocese where he grew up. In July 2006, the advisory panel considered that he was disengaging from the order and that this was a cause for concern. He was living outside of, and had no contact with, his order. The panel members agreed that contact should be made with him and that their concerns be expressed. The advisory panel met again in October 2006 and discussed an impending report due to be received from Granada via Fr Aquila’s solicitors. There was some puzzlement as to why the report had not been received by the panel – the assessment had been carried out in November 2005. The panel was also unsure if it was the case that Fr Aquila, through his disengagement with the order, did not really want to return to active ministry.

46.9 The Granada assessment, which was carried out in November 2005, was made available to the order in November 2006. It reiterated that Fr Aquila was fit for ministry. The advisory panel recommended that he should be free to exercise public ministry.

46.10 The order applied to the bishop of the diocese where Fr Aquila was living to grant him faculties to say public mass. He did not want any appointment. The order provided the bishop with a full description of his background, of the complaints received and the assessments undertaken. Faculties were granted by the bishop.

The Commission's assessment

46.11 The order, the Archdiocese and the Gardaí all dealt with this case appropriately. Regrettably, the process of dealing with the complaints seems to have caused great disillusionment to Fr Aquila. His present limited ministry and non-involvement with his order is his choice as it is clear that the order did not sideline him. The Archdiocese was correct in removing him as a chaplain when the complaints were made.