

Introduction

53.1 Fr Ignatio is a member of a religious order. He was born in 1914 and ordained in 1941. He spent most of his working life in the Archdiocese of Dublin.

Complaint, 2002

53.2 There is one complaint against Fr Ignatio. He was almost 90 years old when the complaint was made.

53.3 In 2002, a young man went to a member of the order who was working in the Archdiocese of Dublin at the time to plan his wedding. The young man told this priest that his mother had been abused by a member of the same religious order 40 years earlier when she was about 13. His mother had recently complained to the local parish priest who had independently contacted the delegate for the order.

53.4 The priest to whom the young man spoke tried to establish the identity of the alleged abuser and concluded that it was a member of his order but he could not identify him. This priest met the woman and apologised to her. He and the delegate from the order then met her and her husband. She told them that the abuse had occurred when she was bringing some goods to the order's house. She had suffered psychiatric problems all her life and was very distressed at the meeting. She had only recently told her family what had happened. She did not know the alleged abuser's name but was able to give a limited physical description. The delegate had no doubt about her truthfulness. The order arranged counselling for her and her husband. It seems the delegate met the complainant and her husband again in their home. No significant further information emerged from that meeting.

53.5 The order's advisory panel met to consider the case in September 2002. The group considered the possibility that this was a case of 'False Recovered Memory Syndrome' – in effect, they wondered did the abuse as described ever happen or was the abuse caused by somebody else. It was

¹²¹

This is a pseudonym.

agreed that the delegate would remain in contact with the complainant and would discuss the matter with her again after she had some counselling.

53.6 Some weeks later, the complainant wrote to the delegate saying she was very disappointed and hurt that he had not contacted her as he had promised to do this after a couple of sessions with the counsellor. She felt that the delegate did not believe her. It should be noted that it is clear to the Commission that, in all his dealings with this case, the delegate did believe that she was abused; he was having difficulty establishing who the abuser might be. At this stage the complainant had not named her alleged abuser.

53.7 The order reported the matter to the Gardaí in December 2002. The woman made a complaint to the Gardaí in January 2003. She alleged she was raped by the priest on the Thursday of Halloween week 1962 when she was delivering goods to the order's house and she tentatively identified the priest as Fr Ignatio. She gave a physical description of him. She gave a very detailed description of how she came to be delivering goods to the order's house. This description is clearly credible and fits with the activities which were carried out in that particular house. In April 2003, she made a further statement to the Gardaí in which she positively identified the priest as Fr Ignatio. She claimed it was he because she had recently attended his sister's funeral and recognised his voice. After the funeral, she saw him and recognised him. She also saw his picture in the order publication.

53.8 The order informed Fr Ignatio of the complaint. He strenuously denied ever having been involved in "*anything inappropriate with man, woman or child*".

53.9 Fr Ignatio was interviewed by the Gardaí. He was accompanied by his solicitor. He had no recollection of the woman's name or her family. The Gardaí outlined the allegation to him. On his solicitor's advice, he declined to answer many of the questions. A short time later, he swore and signed a statement stating that the allegations against him were entirely false.

53.10 Having investigated this complaint, the order took the view that this was a case of mistaken identity. The order believed the complainant was abused but not by Fr Ignatio.

53.11 The priest to whom the son had originally spoken met the woman many times and provided considerable pastoral support to her. That priest officiated at the son's wedding.

53.12 The Gardaí, having investigated the complaint, forwarded the file to the DPP but the garda inspector did not recommend prosecution because of the identification problems, the lack of corroborative evidence, the age of the suspect and the psychological state of the complainant.

53.13 The DPP decided not to institute charges. As well as the issues identified by the Gardaí, the DPP considered that the delay posed insurmountable difficulties.

The Commission's assessment

53.14 There can be little doubt that this complainant was abused and it seems probable that she was abused by a member or employee of this religious order. However, it also seems probable that the priest named by her is not the abuser.

53.15 The order dealt well with the complainant. It investigated the complaint as far as possible and came to a reasonable conclusion.

53.16 The Gardaí dealt appropriately with the complaint.