

32.1 Fr John Boland is a member of the Capuchin Franciscan Order. His religious name is Fr Dominic Savio Boland. He was born in 1930 and ordained in 1966. He worked in the Archdiocese of Dublin as a teacher, school chaplain and hospital chaplain. He is now living in one of the order's houses in Ireland with restrictions on his activities and ministry.

32.2 Fr Boland is a convicted serial child sexual abuser. He has mainly abused males, but there are also allegations in relation to females. He was convicted of nine counts of indecent assault in 2001 against one victim and he received a 12-month suspended sentence. The Commission is aware of allegations or suspicions in respect of nine named children. Some of these children also reported that they were aware that Fr Boland had abused other children. He has admitted to abusing about 20 children.

First complaint

32.3 The first allegation of child sexual abuse against Fr Boland for which the Commission has documentary evidence was made in December 1989 to the order. A novice in the order alleged that he had been abused when he was about 13 years old; this was four years before he joined the order. The abuse involved fondling. The head of the order decided to "*look after everything*". He arranged counselling for the victim and he sent Fr Boland to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist reported in March 1991 that Fr Boland was remorseful and seemed motivated to ensure no repetition.

Second complaint

32.4 Another complaint was made to the Gardaí in March 1994. The complainant alleged he had been abused by a priest in his own home in 1973 when he was about 11 years old. He did not know the priest's name but he knew the name of the order and he was able to describe a distinguishing physical characteristic of Fr Boland. The Gardaí then interviewed this complainant's parents. They said their son had told them about the assault at the time and the father had complained to a priest in Clonliffe College.

32.5 This complainant had told his parents in 1973 that he had been abused by a diocesan priest – Fr Ioannes* (see Chapter 17). The complaint

in respect of Fr Ioannes was dealt with by Monsignor Richard Glennon (a former chancellor of the Archdiocese, then a vicar general and parish priest). There is no record of this original complaint in the files of the Archdiocese and Monsignor Glennon died in 1985. The complainant's parents told the Commission that Fr Boland had arrived at their house shortly after the complaint had been made to the Church authorities about Fr Ioannes. The parents thought he was visiting them as part of the process of dealing with that complaint. Fr Boland and the boy were left in a room together for a short time and the boy came out and complained about him.

32.6 In 1994, when the Gardaí were talking to Monsignor Stenson about Fr Ioannes*, they told him that there was a complaint against a Fr Dominic who wore a brown robe and had a distinguishing physical characteristic. The Gardaí told Monsignor Stenson that they knew who he was and they were following it up. Monsignor Stenson made a note of this but it was filed in Fr Ioannes's files and its connection to Fr Boland was not made by the Archdiocese until 2004.

32.7 Fr Boland was interviewed by the Gardaí immediately following this complaint in 1994. He said he could not recall this complainant but did remember his house and having tea with the complainant's mother. He said that, on occasion, he would hug children but he could not recall doing anything else.

32.8 The Gardaí prepared a file for the DPP. It is clear from the Garda report to the DPP that the Gardaí believed the complainant. The DPP decided not to prosecute mainly because of the delay, but it was also considered that Fr Boland's explanation was quite credible.

32.9 The order decided that, in light of this allegation, the action taken in relation to the allegation by the first complainant was inadequate. In October 1994, Fr Boland was sent to the Granada Institute for assessment and treatment. At this stage Fr Boland was living in one of the order's houses outside of the Archdiocese of Dublin. He was allowed to say mass in public but he did not hold any public appointment.

Suspicion/concern

32.10 Shortly after this, at Easter 1995, the matron of a hospital, to which Fr Boland was not the chaplain, expressed unease about the fact that he was visiting the children's ward. He was withdrawn from all hospital work.

32.11 Granada reported that Fr Boland asserted that his involvement with children in the hospital was purely pastoral and there was no sexual activity. He acknowledged that he had "*transgressed a boundary*" with the first complainant but nothing similar had happened since. Granada, having discussed the matter with Fr Boland and his superiors, concluded that Fr Boland had not been involved with children in any sexual way since the occasion ten years earlier. However, they pointed out that he had not realised the extent to which his ministry, especially with children, could be perceived as inappropriate and that he needed greater supervision. Fr Boland agreed to hand over his car keys to his superior and not to have any contact with children except with another adult present.

Third complaint

32.12 A third complainant came forward in October 1995. He was interviewed by the order's delegate. He alleged that Fr Boland had sat him on his knee and kissed him in one of the order's houses. He was about eight or nine years old at the time. Fr Boland ran a club for young boys and this complainant had seen him behave similarly towards other boys in the club. This complainant also made a complaint to the Gardaí.

32.13 In an interview with the order's delegate, Fr Boland admitted to sexual activity with the first complainant but not with the two subsequent complainants. He admitted that he had abused other boys in the past but claimed that this behaviour had ceased eight or nine years previously.

32.14 The order's advisory group met and considered the case which was now recognised to be more serious than had previously been thought. It was decided to withdraw Fr Boland from ministry, to send him to another location and to send him for assessment and treatment to a therapeutic facility in the UK. The Granada report and the report of the delegate's interview with Fr Boland were provided to the personnel in the UK facility.

32.15 The members of the order who had lived in the same house as Fr Boland were told that he had been transferred from this house to a clinic in the UK following reports about him which were brought to the Provincial's attention. They were also told that the only address to be given for him was that of the head of the order in the UK.

32.16 The assessment from the UK therapeutic facility showed that Fr Boland acknowledged that he had a sexual interest in, and had been fantasising about sex with, young children since his mid-teens. It described a well developed belief system which supported and legitimised his sexual interest in children. It became apparent to the therapists that Fr Boland had convinced himself that boys of 11 or 12 years were aware of sexual matters and might enjoy being touched in a sexual way. He believed that they would not be harmed by what he was doing to them. Consequently, it became clear to the therapists that Fr Boland had very distorted beliefs that allowed him to sexually offend.

32.17 Fr Boland described how he used his role as a priest to target children. He would seek out opportunities to be among children and would engage their interest by offering them holy medals and pictures. He would draw upon their perception of the priest to gain their trust and be accepted by them. Once he had targeted a particular child, he would befriend the parents and begin to visit that child's house. He would then gradually gain access to the child by manipulating the family members and creating situations where he would be alone with the child. He would then introduce and normalise sexual touching as a regular component of their meetings. He believed that the first complainant "*both consented to and actively participated in the sexual contact*". He did acknowledge that he was responsible for the sexual nature of the relationship but failed to see the power differential between him and his victim.

32.18 He acknowledged that he had fantasised about children all of his adult life and had committed about 100 offences against 20 children. His first offence was when he was 16 years old when he abused an 11 year old. He claimed that he had himself been frequently abused at the age of eight.

32.19 The assessment concluded that Fr Boland had a high risk of re-offending.

32.20 The order delegate met the first complainant in December 1995. This complainant did not want any report to be made to the Gardaí and said he would regard such reporting as an invasion of his privacy.

32.21 A further report was received from the UK therapeutic facility in January 1996. This showed that Fr Boland had many manipulative techniques which he instinctively used to prevent analysis of his offending. He used methods such as:

- intellectualising his sexual abuse and deflecting responsibility onto victims;
- minimising the impact of the behaviour;
- engaging in distorted thinking about children and sexuality.

32.22 This meant that there were blocks to treating him.

32.23 Fr Boland was visited in this facility by a member of the order's advisory group. She reported that he minimised how he sexually abused children and he attempted to manipulate her into getting him some form of ministry. He used religion and spirituality to divert from his offending. She concluded that he was a dangerous offender and expressed huge doubts about his ability to engage in treatment. His thinking was much distorted and she was of the view that treatment was not helping him and he should be removed from the unit.

Fourth complaint

32.24 A new allegation then emerged. This was from a girl who alleged she had been abused during a school retreat and that other girls had also been abused. They had told some teachers and two priests but the general reaction was that nobody would believe them as Fr Boland had such a saintly reputation. One of the priests told the order. The girl and her mother were contacted by a member of the order's advisory group. The girl was angry with the priest who had reported to the order but agreed to put her story in writing. She refused the offer of counselling.

32.25 A member of the order visited Fr Boland in the therapeutic facility to put the new allegation to him. He denied any sexual involvement but said he had comforted some girls during the retreat. He later said that there were a few girls whom he hugged and kissed.

32.26 In August 1996, a further report from the UK therapeutic facility showed that Fr Boland was not making progress. He was highly manipulative and continued to exploit the image of the “*gentle, elderly, naïve priest*”. Since the new allegations had been made, he regarded himself as the victim.

32.27 The advisory group decided that the health board should be informed of the allegations in relation to the school retreat and of the places where Fr Boland had worked and given retreats. The delegate met a representative of the health board.

32.28 The advisory group member visited Fr Boland again in April 1997. She found that he was making some progress but was still very manipulative. She discussed a support group for him when he was released. She considered that he would need strict boundaries regarding visitors and callers and that he would benefit from a relapse prevention programme.

32.29 Fr Boland returned to one of the order’s houses in Ireland in May 1997. A contract of behaviour was agreed. This provided that Fr Boland:

- was free to wear his habit or clerical collar in the friary, but not in public;
- could celebrate mass privately;
- could use all areas of the house except the front door and front office;
- could make phone calls only to family, support group, counsellor, confessor or other members of the order with the permission of the superior in the house;
- could receive phone calls from family, support group, counsellor, confessor or other order members but was not permitted to answer the phone;
- could receive visits but only from family, support group, counsellor, confessor or other order members;
- could receive letters;

- could write letters to family, support group, counsellor, confessor or other order members with the permission of the superior in the house;
- could join the other order members in the Divine Office and could use the oratory but only when the doors were closed;
- could choose his own confessor outside the house;
- could not leave the house without a companion, except to visit the doctor or dentist, therapist or the head of the order and he was not permitted to drive a car.

32.30 All inquirers would be told that “*D.S. Boland is not well and is off work, and that he is unable to see you or speak to you*”.

32.31 Fr Boland attended the Granada Institute for therapy. The local bishop was informed of his current circumstances including the details of the contract.

Suspicion/concern

32.32 In October 1997, a woman wrote to the Archdiocese about her experiences with Fr Boland when he was a hospital chaplain. She said he befriended her children when she and they were visiting her mother in the hospital. He subsequently began to show what she considered to be an abnormal interest in her ten-year-old son. This letter was sent to the order by Monsignor John Dolan. The Archdiocese was told that Fr Boland had been having treatment. Monsignor Dolan replied to the woman saying that the order would deal with the issues. The order replied to Monsignor Dolan telling him that the woman could contact their delegate. Monsignor Dolan wrote to the woman and gave her the details. It seems that she did not contact the order at this stage. The order did not contact her. The order explained to the Commission the thinking behind this failure to contact her:

“It is now clear that, out of pastoral concern for both herself and her son, [...] should have been contacted by the Capuchins once they became aware of the allegation she made against one of their members. However, the thinking back then seems to have been as follows: since all correspondence relating to [...] allegation on behalf of her son had been conducted through the good offices of the Diocesan Chancellery, it was thought that [...] privacy might best be respected

and her freedom of initiative be preserved by her not being contacted directly but, instead, by her being supplied with the phone number of the Order's delegate should she wish to contact the Order".

32.33 Fr Boland continued to attend Granada and in 1998/9 wanted to have some of the restrictions lifted. Granada would not recommend this and it was made very clear to Fr Boland by the head of the order that the restrictions would stay in place.

Fifth complaint

32.34 In July 1999, another allegation was reported to the order. This came via the head of another religious order who said that one of its priests had complained that he had been abused by Fr Boland when he about 11 years old – between 1977 and 1979. This complainant had been an altar boy and Fr Boland was helping out in his parish – he officiated at baptisms and benediction. The head of the order met this complainant. He then put the complaint to Fr Boland who remembered the complainant but denied any sexual activity – he said he may have given him a hug. The complainant met the delegate and gave a full account of his experiences with Fr Boland. He also said that his school friend had been treated the same way. The complainant reported the allegations to the Gardaí in September 1999. Fr Boland was interviewed by the Gardaí. He said he could not remember any sexual activity with the complainant. The delegate was interviewed by the Gardaí and he gave them audio tapes of his interview with Fr Boland in relation to this allegation.

32.35 The Gardaí recommended that Fr Boland be prosecuted for 18 offences of indecent assault against this complainant. Further evidence was collected from the complainant's parents. The complainant had told his father about the abuse many years earlier but did not want anything done about it at that time. The DPP directed that Fr Boland be prosecuted on nine counts of indecent assault. He was arrested and charged in July 2000. He asked the order to allow him (rather than anyone else) to tell his family about the charges. The order paid £100 bail.

32.36 In January 2001, the head of the order was told by the superior in Fr Boland's house that it had been made clear to Fr Boland that he had lost the

trust of the others in the house because of recurring breaches of his behavioural contract. The house superior suggested a number of changes to the contract. He said it needed to be renamed “*Rules*” so there could be no ambiguity and to prevent Fr Boland trying to wriggle out of the terms. He further suggested that it should be made clear that the purpose of the rules, above everything else, was the protection of children. He should stop going to Granada as the sessions there were preventing him from facing reality. Fr Boland regarded himself as a victim and did not accept responsibility for his actions or for the consequences of his actions on his victims and the religious order. The revised contract should simply prohibit contact with lay people except with the prior consent of the superior. Other members of the order wrote to the head in a similar vein.

32.37 In February 2001, Fr Boland wrote a letter of apology to the fifth complainant (in respect of whom he was being prosecuted). He also wrote to the head of the order admitting that he had not always been upright and honest in the past. He admitted that he had ulterior motives in his relationship with children. However, he promised to be a person of integrity and never again be dishonest in any way. He commented that he believed therapy had done him good.

32.38 Fr Boland was convicted on all nine counts of indecent assault in September 2001. The judge wanted to know if he was continuing to receive treatment. Evidence was given that the fifth complainant (who was working abroad) was making progress because of the letter of apology and the court case. The judge took account of this and the continuing treatment and imposed a 12 month suspended sentence. Fr Boland was also made subject to the *Sex Offenders Act 2001* for five years.

32.39 The order did not report this complaint or conviction to any bishop, including the Archbishop of Dublin in whose diocese the abuse had occurred, or the bishop in whose area he was then living.

32.40 The order contacted the health board about the case. Fr Boland continued to live in the same house and continued to attend Granada. A review meeting was held in Granada in July 2002. Fr Boland felt he was doing well in the house and was determined not to re-offend. However, the

other members of the order were concerned about his presence there. He was receiving numerous letters and visits. Granada considered that he was using these letters to perpetuate an image of the holy priest whose prayers had special powers and he should stop letter writing. The order head told Fr Boland that some of his relatives had been in touch recently and were angry that they had not been told of his offending.

32.41 In November 2002, the mother who had been concerned about Fr Boland's abnormal interest in her son contacted the Garda hotline. She said she had contacted the Archdiocese years earlier and got no response. Her son did not wish to make a complaint.

32.42 In February 2003, the delegate forwarded to the Gardaí particulars of allegations received by the order in relation to a number of its members including Fr Boland. The Gardaí asked the delegate to inform all the victims concerned that they had been identified to the Gardaí and the Gardaí would be in touch with them. The delegate contacted the first complainant and the third complainant and said he was still investigating the case of the girl. The complainants did not reply.

32.43 In 2004, as part of its review of all child abuse files, the Archdiocese contacted the order about Fr Boland and how the complaints had been dealt with. The Archdiocese was aware of only one complaint (the mother). The head of the order confirmed that the mother had not been in contact with them. He said that other complaints had been received by the order but none related to Fr Boland's appointments in the Archdiocese. He said Fr Boland had been removed from ministry. He also told the Archdiocese where Fr Boland was now living and that the local bishop had been fully informed. Astonishingly, he did not mention that Fr Boland had been convicted.

32.44 The Commission considers that the reply from the head of the order to the Archdiocese, while it may be technically correct, is not the full truth. The complaint in respect of which Fr Boland was convicted related to his involvement in doing supply work in the Archdiocese. It seems that Fr Boland organised various supply and school visiting roles himself, without the involvement of his order, but the order did know of the circumstances in which the fifth complainant was abused. The order has acknowledged to the

Commission that the Archbishop of Dublin should have been informed of the complaints in accordance with the requirements of the *Framework Document*. The local bishop was not fully informed – he had not been told of the conviction although he had been told of some of the complaints.

32.45 The Archdiocese forwarded all the correspondence from the mother to the order and recommended that the hospital authorities be informed. The hospital was not informed. The hospital was one which had been amalgamated into a new hospital.

32.46 In October 2005, the order told members of Fr Boland's family that it was aware of four named victims and one unnamed victim (it seems that the order did not know the name of the girl who complained in 1996). They were also told that Fr Boland acknowledged 100 offences against 20 children. The order said he was a considerable risk to boys between the ages of nine and 14 years, as he would use his role as a priest to seek out opportunity to be among children and would draw on their perception of a priest to make himself totally trusted. Furthermore, he deflected responsibility onto the victims and minimised the impact of his behaviour.

32.47 In November 2005, the delegate wrote to the Gardaí requesting a meeting to establish a procedure in relation to offenders who are members of religious orders. A meeting took place in March 2006. Later, the order wrote to the Gardaí about the first complainant's request for absolute confidentiality. The Gardaí decided not to approach him.

Sixth complainant

32.48 Another complainant told the Commission that he had been abused by Fr Boland. He did not know his full name but did know him as Dominic Savio and described the distinguishing physical characteristic. His account of how Fr Boland befriended him and his family and his account of the abuse was similar to that provided by other victims. On one occasion in 1986, Fr Boland was fondling him in his home when his mother walked in. She immediately told Fr Boland to leave. She complained to a priest in the order house where Fr Boland lived at the time but she got no feedback. She did not inform the Gardaí. The order has no record of this complaint. This complainant was

aware of one other boy (whom he named) who he alleged had been abused by Fr Boland.

The Commission's assessment

32.49 The order's handling of the first complaint in 1989 was relatively good for its time. The priest was sent to a psychiatrist and counselling was provided to the complainant. This is one of the few cases of which the Commission is aware that counselling was provided for a complainant before the mid 1990s. This complainant was, of course, part of the order as well.

32.50 After the second complaint was made, the order did its best to try to ensure that Fr Boland did not have access to children. It organised treatment for him and then supervised him well in spite of the difficulties he presented. It co-operated with the Gardaí when they became involved.

Communication between the order and the Archdiocesan authorities

32.51 The communication between the order and the Archdiocese was very poor in this case – in fact, it was virtually non-existent on the part of the order. The order did not inform the Archdiocese of the complaints against Fr Boland or of the fact that he was convicted. The order has told the Commission that it accepts that this “*represents an unacceptable lapse and wishes to express its regret and concern that such a lapse was allowed to occur*”. Its current reporting policy, if maintained, means that such lapses should not occur in the future.

32.52 The Commission considers that the order's current arrangements for dealing with alleged child sexual abusers are robust and are being implemented.

Gardaí

32.53 The Gardaí dealt appropriately with all complaints reported to them.

DPP

32.54 The DPP decided not to prosecute in 1994 because of the delay factor. The approach of the DPP to the issue of delay is examined in Chapter 5.