

away from working with young people. Whilst the Inquiry would regard referring Fr Doyle to Monsignor Professor O'Doherty as adequate and appropriate in the context of the time, the failure of the Bishop and his successor to act on the recommendations contained therein was entirely unsatisfactory.

- The fact that three priests of the Diocese, apart from the authorities in St Peter's, were aware of Fr Doyle's activities but did not consider it necessary or appropriate to speak with Bishop Herlihy or his successor, indicates a system of secrecy which did not advance the achievement of child protection in the Diocese. The diocesan priests did speak with Gardai and ensured medical intervention for Fr Doyle, but ultimately, under Canon law, the responsibility for the disciplining all priests rests with the Bishop. One of these priests was in fact aware of the allegation made against this priest seven years earlier whilst he was a seminarian and so was aware of a dangerous pattern of behaviour.
- It is matter of some concern that the psychiatrists treating Fr Doyle in Stroud, the Bishop of Ferns and the Archbishop of Southwark would have countenanced allowing him work either in a parish or as a chaplain to a secondary school given their understanding that one relapse from sobriety could result in him abusing a child.
- Bishop Comiskey was unaware that Fr Doyle took up a position in a treatment centre in Dublin. The Inquiry was surprised that a priest who had been convicted on charges of criminal sexual abuse could have been permitted to move back to this country and take up a position in another diocese without his Bishop being notified.
- The Inquiry believes that Bishop Walsh's response as outlined in the Report was adequate and appropriate in the context of child protection.

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### **FR ALPHA**

Fr Alpha was a curate in the Diocese of Ferns in the 1970s and 1980s. The Inquiry has heard from one priest who expressed his personal concern and unease with Fr Alpha's behaviour during his early years as a curate in the Diocese. The priest described an experience with a potential sexual connotation with Fr Alpha which caused him some concern and made him very uneasy and somewhat fearful of the growing presence of boys in Fr Alpha's house. When allegations against Fr Alpha were made in 1995, this priest spoke to Bishop Comiskey about his own experience of Fr Alpha. Bishop

Comiskey recalled the discussion but did not recall a complaint of sexual abuse being made.

Gavin (4.3.2), who met with the Inquiry, attended St Peter's seminary in the late 1980s. He spoke to the Spiritual Director of St Peter's about his alleged abuse by Fr Alpha and was advised to confront Fr Alpha and end the abusive relationship. Gavin attempted to do this. Subsequently, Gavin left the seminary and he told the Inquiry that he believes the reasons for him leaving, which included the difficulties caused by the sexual abuse, were discussed with Bishop Comiskey. Bishop Comiskey has no recollection of any allegations of child sexual abuse against Fr Alpha being raised in connection with Gavin, and the then Spiritual Director of St Peter's was unable to speak to this Inquiry in relation to the matter on the grounds that he believed it would be a breach of sacerdotal privilege, which the Inquiry respected.

In November 1995, the first formal complaint to the Gardai in relation to Fr Alpha was made by Edward (4.3.1). This was followed in January 1996, with a disclosure by Eric (4.3.3) to a doctor in Wexford general hospital that he had been abused by Fr Alpha. The hospital informed the Director of Community Care who in turn informed the Gardai. The third complaint made against Fr Alpha was from Gavin. It was not directly communicated to Bishop Comiskey until 1997.

In March 1996, the Diocesan Secretary, Fr Thomas Brennan, was informed that Fr Alpha had been interviewed by An Garda Síochána. This was the first case of child sexual abuse to be handled by the Diocese under the Framework Document.

The Diocesan Delegate met with Fr Alpha who said that he was completely innocent. In reporting on his meeting with Fr Alpha, the Delegate said to Bishop Comiskey that a decision on Fr Alpha's continuation as curate would have to await the report on his case from the Gardai. Also in March 1996, the Director of Community Care of the South Eastern Health Board wrote to Bishop Comiskey to inform him that it had recently received a notification concerning child sexual abuse involving Fr Alpha. This is understood to be a reference to Eric who spoke with the South Eastern Health Board around this time. The Diocese itself had as yet received no direct complaint.

Bishop Comiskey said that whilst his initial thought had been to look into the matter carefully, he decided quite soon to remove Fr Alpha from his position as curate. He hoped to achieve this by having him take voluntary leave of absence.

In July 1996, the Diocese had still no information about the identity of those alleging abuse by Fr Alpha, and wrote to the Health Board and the Gardai looking for some help in order to process its own investigation. Bishop Comiskey requested these bodies to encourage the complainants to meet with the Diocese for this purpose.

In September 1996, Fr Tommy Brennan, Diocesan Secretary, was informed that a further allegation of child sexual abuse against Fr Alpha would be made to the Gardai. This related to Gavin (4.3.2)

In October 1996, the Diocesan Delegate organised a meeting with Edward and recorded details of the complaint as made to him. That statement was forwarded to Fr

Alpha who met with the delegate in November 1996. Fr Alpha totally denied all allegations of child sexual abuse by Edward.

An Advisory Panel meeting recommended that the delegate contact other priests from Fr Alpha's parish at the time of the alleged abuse. One priest so contacted said that he had never heard any allegation at all against Fr Alpha and was shocked and surprised to hear what was alleged subsequently. Another priest contacted by the diocesan delegate did express his reservations at the large number of young boys around the priests' house during Fr Alpha's time there although he was not personally aware of any improper conduct on the part of Fr Alpha and had heard no rumour or suspicion surrounding him. The allegations and denial together with statements of priests who served with Fr Alpha were then sent to Bishop Comiskey in advance of the next Advisory Panel meeting of December 1996.

A further priest who spoke with the Inquiry confirmed that a number of boys used to frequent the priests' house with the permission of Fr Alpha but he emphasised that he saw this as an irritant and a possible cause of scandal rather than giving rise to any suggestion of sexual abuse. He was astonished at the allegations that subsequently arose.

It was not until January 1997 that Eric was in a position to meet with Bishop Comiskey and the diocesan delegate. At that meeting, Eric, who was accompanied by a social worker, disclosed to the Bishop details of his complaint. Eric also expressed concern over the children of a third party being in unsupervised contact with Fr Alpha. Bishop Comiskey wrote to Fr Alpha on 7 January 1997 requesting him to step aside from active ministry.

Fr Alpha's solicitors advised him at that stage that he could not defend himself against charges of either Eric or Edward without a full and thorough investigation of the allegations. His solicitor wrote to Bishop Comiskey in these terms and also pointed out that his client would have to be given an opportunity to confront his accusers.

The Advisory Panel met in February 1997 to discuss the matter. It concluded it would be necessary to conduct an investigation and to interview relevant parties. In the meantime, the Advisory Panel also recommended that Fr Alpha should be asked to undergo assessment at Stroud. Fr Alpha refused to undergo such assessment and sought a determination from the Bishop so that his good name would be restored. Bishop Comiskey has told the Inquiry that he felt unable to proceed with any Canon law procedure to remove Fr Alpha temporarily from ministry because he could not establish the veracity of the complaints before him. He pointed out that each of the complaints had inherent flaws. By March 1997, he had received three complaints in addition to an expression of unease by a diocesan priest.

These enquiries continued until December 1997. At that stage, Bishop Comiskey believed he had no choice but to invoke the provisions of Canon law to secure the removal of Fr Alpha.

Bishop Comiskey met with a Canon lawyer in December 1997 who advised the Bishop that with regard to the problem of Fr Alpha's continued exercise in ministry as a curate, he should, in the first place, undertake a pastoral solution or, failing that, an

administrative solution which would involve invoking the relevant provisions of Canon law, namely Canon 552. Bishop Comiskey had already appointed a delegate under Canon 1717 to properly investigate the allegations.

Accordingly, Bishop Comiskey wrote to Fr Alpha on 12 December 1997 inviting him to take administrative leave. Fr Alpha refused to take such leave as he believed it would be tantamount to an admission of guilt. Fr Alpha indicated that he would consult a Canon lawyer. In March 1998, Bishop Comiskey was advised to formally invoke Canon 552 which states that “.....an assistant priest may for a just reason be removed by the diocesan Bishop or the diocesan Administrator”. According to the commentary on this Canon a “just cause” rather than a “grave cause” suffices and the reason must be given in writing.

In reply, Fr Alpha strongly denied the allegations made against him and said that he would be appealing the ruling by the Bishop to Rome and that as such an appeal had a suspensive effect on the decree of the Bishop, he would, in the meantime, remain in his parish. Fr Alpha was incorrect in his interpretation of the suspensive effect of an appeal to Rome on foot of the administrative decision taken to remove him. In a subsequent letter, Fr Alpha appealed directly to the Bishop to revoke his decree and set out the deficiencies, as he was advised, in the Canon law process as adopted by Bishop Comiskey and his Canon lawyer.

Bishop Comiskey brought Fr Alpha’s letter to his Canon lawyer and was advised to suspend his decree pending the outcome of this direct appeal which Bishop Comiskey did. Bishop Comiskey’s Canon lawyer told the Inquiry that he was advised by Fr Alpha’s Canon lawyer around that time that if the decree was withdrawn, Fr Alpha would probably step aside on health grounds. Being aware that Fr Alpha had not been in the best of health Bishop Comiskey’s Canon lawyer believed this approach made sense and if successful, would achieve the objective of removing Fr Alpha from ministry. In these circumstances, Bishop Comiskey was advised to withdraw his decree. Fr Alpha has informed the Inquiry that no such formal agreement to retire on health grounds was entered into by him with Bishop Comiskey or any other person.

Following such advice from his Canon lawyer and upon receipt of a third letter from Fr Alpha in which he (i) again vehemently denied the allegations against him, (ii) challenged the procedures which were being adopted by the Bishop and (iii) outlined the measures he had voluntarily put in place to safeguard himself against the possibility of further false allegations, Bishop Comiskey revoked the decree in April 1998.

Bishop Comiskey said he felt embarrassed at having to suspend the decree. His attempt at invoking Canon law went no further. His Canon lawyer told the Inquiry that in the event of Fr Alpha not stepping aside within a reasonable time frame, Bishop Comiskey could have re-imposed the decree of removal under Canon 552.

The diocesan delegate continued to investigate details surrounding the allegations. On 22 June 1998 the Advisory Panel stated that they were unable to recommend Fr Alpha’s removal and he should be left *in situ* for the time being. They also noted that the case against Fr Alpha had become weaker. One member of that Advisory Panel,

who was also the chairman, told the Inquiry that they decided to await the DPP's decision in the matter.

Bishop Comiskey set himself a high threshold in establishing "just cause" as did his Advisory Panel. This Advisory Panel, established under the Framework Document, only met four times during Bishop Comiskey's tenure as Bishop of Ferns and at each of these meetings the Fr Alpha case was discussed. Throughout the period of 1995 to 1998, the Diocese investigated the credibility of the complaints against Fr Alpha. Fr Alpha has expressed his grave disquiet at the policy of the church authority at that time which he perceived as giving disproportionate attention to inherently flawed complaints. Fr Alpha has told the Inquiry that during that period he suffered greatly and stated "*to be innocent and face such false accusations is devastating*".

### **BISHOP EAMONN WALSH**

After his appointment in April 2002, as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Ferns, Bishop Walsh referred the allegations against Fr Alpha to the Ad Hoc Advisory Panel for review. He invited Fr Alpha to step aside pending a review of his case which Fr Alpha agreed to in May 2002. The Ad Hoc Advisory Panel recommended that Fr Alpha remain out of ministry and subject to a Precept. Fr Alpha has told the Inquiry that he felt severely pressurised by Bishop Walsh and that his retirement was effected against a background of media frenzy.

In May 2002, the DPP decided not to prosecute Fr Alpha. Fr Alpha argued that this decision confirmed his innocence and that he should be fully vindicated and restored as a priest of good standing in the parish. Fr Alpha and his family who had always protested his innocence, maintained that the decision of the DPP was equivalent to a declaration of innocence. Bishop Walsh did not share this view.

In June 2003, Fr Alpha's Canon lawyer wrote to Bishop Walsh and said that given the problems with the accusations made against Fr Alpha, the rejection of the case by the DPP, the complete absence of a credible accuser despite all the publicity and encouragement for people to come forward, the Diocese had now to seriously consider the justice due to Fr Alpha. The Canon lawyer said that the case against Fr Alpha had never been proved and that the allegations were full of holes. He said it would be an injustice not to restore this man "to being in a position of good standing".

On 19 June 2002, Bishop Walsh issued a Precept against Fr Alpha prohibiting him from participating in the act of ministry and in particular from having any contact with young people pending the completion of all inquiries into the allegations against him. In particular, Bishop Walsh has indicated that Fr Alpha could not be restored to any ministry within the Church until he had undergone a programme of assessment. Fr Alpha has persistently refused to attend for such assessment. Failure to co-operate with a programme of assessment will inevitably delay any prospect of returning to ministry a priest accused of child sexual abuse.

Fr Alpha has expressed to this Inquiry his deep sense of injustice at the way he has been treated by the Diocese. In particular, he felt deceived and unfairly stripped of

priestly ministry in a context in which he completely denied all allegations and no criminal prosecution was recommended.

Bishop Walsh described to the Inquiry a meeting which he had with Fr Alpha and his family in their home. The family expressed their anger and outrage at the way he had been treated. Fr Alpha's housekeeper also expressed her anger at the Church's treatment of the priest.

The three complainants issued civil proceedings against Fr Alpha and the Diocese. In these proceedings, Fr Alpha has counterclaimed for defamation. The proceedings are still pending.

A file on Fr Alpha has been sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which has now issued a direction to the Diocese on the Canonical procedures which must be followed in order to bring closure to the case.

#### **THE FERNS INQUIRY VIEW ON THE DIOCESAN HANDLING OF THE FR ALPHA CASE:**

- **The appropriate agency to investigate a criminal charge of child sexual abuse is An Garda Síochána. Other organisations and employers however, do have functions and duties in respect of persons accused of such abuse. In particular, they must satisfy themselves that there are sufficient grounds for requiring the employee/priest to step aside pending a determination of the allegation. The performance of those duties may involve the agency or employer informing him or her self in relation to the material facts. No inquiry or investigation should be conducted which might compromise any proceedings to be initiated as a result of the Garda inquiries. In this case, the Gardai have informed the Inquiry that their investigations were not compromised by any investigations carried out by the Diocese.**
- **It is the understanding of the Inquiry that a credible allegation is one which is capable of being believed but it is not necessary to establish that it is true or even probably true. The Inquiry believes that Bishop Comiskey was mistaken in this and other cases in seeking corroborative or additional evidence to satisfy him as to the truth of the allegation**
- **The prompt removal of a priest against whom a credible allegation is made is essential for the protection of children. As the investigation of allegations against Fr Alpha illustrate, a detailed investigation by the church authorities necessarily involves delay which could place children at risk. It is only necessary that a reasonable suspicion be established in order for this removal to be put into affect.**
- **It is the view of the Inquiry that in this case where a credible allegation of child sexual abuse was made against Fr Alpha it was correct that he be asked and if necessary, required to step aside from the performance of**

**any or all of his duties and functions which would bring him into unsupervised contact with children pending the completion of all appropriate inquiries.**

- **The Inquiry is fully conscious of the pain caused to any priest who, in the position of Fr Alpha, is required to step aside as a result of an unproven allegation of a repugnant offence, but the paramountcy given to the protection of children requires that some priests and other persons in employment may be required to endure this apparent injustice in the interests of the common good.**
- **The Inquiry is concerned at the delay which has occurred in the determination of the allegations against Fr Alpha through a Canon law penal process which would adjudicate on the guilt or innocence of the priest and impose penalties. It does however appreciate that this has been caused to an extent by the piecemeal nature of the reporting of allegations which occurred over a four year period by the complainants.**
- **The Inquiry would encourage the parties to the civil proceedings in child sexual abuse cases to bring them on for hearing at the earliest date so that the courts of law may finally determine the truth or otherwise of the very serious allegations.**

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**FR JAMES GRENNAN (Deceased)**

In 1988, ten girls alleged that they were sexually molested by Fr James Grennan whilst he heard their Confession on the altar in the parish church of Monageer. Fr Grennan was parish priest of Monageer and Chairman of the Board of Management of the national school. These girls were aged 12 or 13 years at the time. They made the complaint to the Principal of Monageer National School, Mr Pat Higgins. Mr Higgins contacted the South Eastern Health Board, who sent a social worker to speak with the girls.

The Health Board then arranged for Dr Geraldine Nolan, who was Director of the newly established Validation Unit in Waterford, to interview the girls. On 4 May 1988, she interviewed 7 of the 10 girls who made the allegations. The other 3 girls had been refused permission to attend Dr Nolan by their parents. She spoke with the Director of Community Care in the South Eastern Health Board, Dr Patrick Judge after conducting these interviews and before writing her report. Dr Judge then called on Monsignor Breen who, as Vicar General, was representing Bishop Comiskey in his absence from the Diocese. Dr Judge demanded that Fr Grennan be removed from the

parish immediately. Although most of the activity complained of occurred during Confession, allegations were also made concerning visits by Fr Grennan to some of the girls' homes and inappropriate behaviour in his own home and in the sacristy.

Confusion arose at the very early stages of this case. During the interview between Dr Patrick Judge and Monsignor Richard Breen, the impression was either given or taken up that Fr Grennan had exposed himself on the altar to the girls. It was not suggested by any of the children that Fr Grennan had exposed himself to them. In fact, Dr Geraldine Nolan did not refer to any exposure on the part of Fr Grennan but rather said that he held the children's hands and pressed them to his groin, unexposed, and that he touched their legs and other parts of their body, including their faces. The Ferns Inquiry has spoken to some of the girls who made the original allegations against Fr Grennan and their description of what occurred did not involve an allegation of exposure.

Dr Judge told Mr Higgins on 5 May 1988, that he should never again leave the children alone with Fr Grennan. The following day, Monsignor Breen spoke to Fr Grennan who was shocked at what was alleged and went to speak with Dr Judge who was adamant that what the girls had said was true.

Mr John Jackman, a Knight of Columbanus and a lay person of some influence in the Diocese, was approached by a Garda who was also a Knight who suggested that Mr Jackman should try and contact Bishop Comiskey in an effort to move Fr Grennan out of the parish until after the impending Confirmation ceremony which would defuse the situation and let the Gardai do their job. Due to Bishop Comiskey's absence from the Diocese, Mr Jackman telephoned Monsignor Breen and was told that he, Monsignor Breen, could do nothing to calm the situation.

In addition, on instruction from his Superintendent, a local Garda contacted Fr Grennan and suggested he should absent himself temporarily from the parish. Fr Grennan sought legal advice at this point and although he did in fact leave for a fortnight's holiday, he returned before the Confirmation ceremony on 20 June 1988. Bishop Comiskey returned to the Diocese on 28 May. He read Monsignor Breen's memorandum of the accusations of the girls and the interview with Dr Judge, and immediately spoke with Fr Grennan about the events in Monageer. Fr Grennan vehemently denied that he had exposed himself on the altar which he apparently still believed was what was being alleged although Monsignor Breen's memorandum did not refer to exposure.

On the basis of the meetings with Monsignor Breen and Fr Grennan and after consultation with the four Deans of the Diocese, Bishop Comiskey concluded that what was alleged to have occurred on the altar in Monageer could not have occurred. In doing so he appears to have adopted a threshold of probability rather than credibility with regard to the complaints. The allegations made by the seven girls might well have been regarded by the Bishop as improbable, even highly improbable but they were not incredible. By dismissing the complaints as incredible and therefore, by implication, mischievous, a situation was created which caused deep division in the parish and grave hurt to the children and their families. The sad history of this matter followed from this flawed decision.

Bishop Comiskey told the Inquiry that whilst Fr Grennan agreed to leave the parish for a short while immediately after the allegations were made, Fr Grennan considered it important that he should return for the Confirmation and Bishop Comiskey agreed with this. He told the Inquiry that Fr Grennan failing to appear for the Confirmation would be seen as an admission of guilt. When Fr Grennan appeared on the altar with Bishop Comiskey at his side, two families walked out of the ceremony. The families interpreted the presence of Fr Grennan on the altar with Bishop Comiskey as a total rejection of the complaints made by the children. Bishop Comiskey may not have intended his presence to be interpreted in that way but he had, in fact, at that time, rejected the complaints without meeting anyone concerned other than the priest in question.

Bishop Comiskey confirmed that he did not speak with the Health Board or the Principal of the school; neither did he speak with Dr Judge. Bishop Comiskey expressed surprise to the Inquiry that none of the girls who had made the allegations came to see him but he did not feel it was appropriate for him to visit them.

Bishop Comiskey was aware before 20 June when the Confirmation ceremony took place, that the Health Board had investigated the allegations of the girls and had found them to be credible. Bishop Comiskey did not see the actual report prepared by Dr Geraldine Nolan until August 1988.

Bishop Comiskey described the Confirmation day in Monageer as a very joyful, happy, sunny summer day and was unaware of anybody walking out of the ceremony. This is at odds with the evidence the Inquiry has heard from Mr Patrick Higgins, the girls themselves and others who described families as being very upset with children crying after the ceremony.

Bishop Comiskey called a meeting of the Council of Priests to discuss newspaper articles that had been written in the aftermath of the walkout. As a result of the meeting with the Council of Priests, a letter was sent to Fr Grennan assuring him of the full support of the Council in the face of unfounded allegations and unnecessary and unfair publicity. They pledged their support to Fr Grennan in his pastoral service to the people of Monageer. The Inquiry was informed by the chairman of the Council of Priests that the Council was not aware at that time of the Health Board investigations which found the allegations credible.

Bishop Comiskey saw the Health Board report in August 1988, but said he had already formed an assessment of the allegations made by the girls as reported to Monsignor Breen, having spoken with him and a number of priests in the Diocese. That assessment led him to the belief that the allegations were not credible. When Dr Nolan's report was presented to him, he was already convinced of Fr Grennan's innocence and it was in that light that he considered the report.

In 1989, Fr Grennan attended Dr Peter Fahy, a psychiatrist in the Blackrock Clinic for psychiatric assessment. Bishop Comiskey emphasised to the Inquiry that this was not for assessment or treatment of any condition regarding child sexual abuse but rather for treatment for strain arising from the complaints. Dr Fahy wrote back to Bishop Comiskey, *"I cannot see how he could have done what he is accused of doing in full view of a congregation"*. Bishop Comiskey confirmed to the Inquiry that he was in

complete agreement with the content of Dr Fahy's letter at the time and did not attach the slightest degree of credence to the accusations.

After media attention surrounding the Confirmation ceremony had died down, Fr Grennan continued as parish priest in Monageer. In his evidence to the Inquiry, Mr Patrick Higgins, the Principal of Monageer National School, said that he feared for his job after he had initiated the inquiry by the Health Board. He said that he felt greatly relieved once Dr Geraldine Nolan had validated the complaints of the girls. Undoubtedly, Mr Higgins was in an invidious position in effectively having to report the behaviour of his employer. He said he felt threatened with dismissal but his trade union intervened and the matter did not arise.

Fr Grennan continued in his role as manager of the school and although in the immediate aftermath of the Monageer incident he was an infrequent visitor, over the subsequent months he resumed the practice of calling regularly and even requiring that children be sent up to the presbytery on errands. Mr Higgins said that he never allowed the children to go to the presbytery or to accompany Fr Grennan anywhere without written permission.

The Inquiry also notes from documentation submitted by the Department of Education and Science that Patrick Higgins made a complaint to a Department Inspector, in early May 1988, in relation to the complaints and allegations made known to him by the school girls in April 1988. The Inspector noted that he considered these to be of the utmost seriousness and subsequently disclosed the visit to his senior officer, the Divisional Inspector. The Department felt it could not investigate the case because it had not received any formal complaint directly. This decision was reinforced by the fact that the Principal had acted according to the Department of Health guidelines.

The Department of Education confirmed to the Inquiry that this represents the only notification of child sexual abuse against a priest of the Diocese of Ferns to the Department.

The Monageer incident was raised again in November 1995 by Councillor Gary O'Halloran, a member of the Board of the South Eastern Health Board, who sought a full investigation into the handling of the affair by the State authorities. This investigation is dealt with in Chapter 6 of this Report. The matter was also the subject of a Garda investigation at that time: this is dealt with at Chapter 7.

The investigations by the Health Board and the Gardai attracted a great deal of media coverage, partly because it coincided with the cases of Donal Collins and Sean Fortune. One of the allegations against Bishop Comiskey was that he was involved in a cover-up "of immense proportions". It is alleged that he allowed some of his senior clergy to criticise journalists who reported on the walkout from the Confirmation ceremony, without informing them of the South Eastern Health Board report. Fr Walter Forde, who was the Diocesan Press Officer, said that he had been told by Bishop Comiskey that the allegations against Fr Grennan were utterly without foundation and he confirmed to this Inquiry that he had not been given a copy of the South Eastern Health Board report at that time.

Bishop Comiskey was accused in the media of interfering with the Garda investigation and with meeting Health Board officials with a view to getting their agreement that the matter should be dealt with by the Diocese. Bishop Comiskey told the Inquiry that such a meeting never took place and that there was never any agreement allowing the Diocese to handle the matter. This is confirmed by the Health Board witnesses spoken to by the Inquiry.

An anonymous and undated letter addressed to Bishop Comiskey which was date stamped by the Diocese as having been received on the 26 February 1996 and which purported to come from one of the girls who had initially made an allegation against Fr Grennan but who had subsequently not attended for interview with Dr Geraldine Nolan, was included in the diocesan file submitted to this Inquiry. This letter claimed that the allegations against Fr Grennan had been initiated by one girl in the class who was annoyed with Fr Grennan over another issue. This was not a view supported by the complainants who attended this Inquiry.

The Inquiry took the view that, whether or not the decision to speak to Mr Higgins about the abuse was the result of an effort by the girls to "get their own back" on Fr Grennan, once the church authorities were alerted to it, some action should have been taken, at the very least to determine whether the allegations were credible. The validation by Dr Nolan should have been sufficient to establish a credible case upon which the diocese could have acted.

In June 1994, a psychiatrist attached to the South Eastern Health Board, wrote to Bishop Comiskey informing him that a patient, Fergus (4.4.5.) had made an allegation of sexual abuse against Fr Grennan. Bishop Comiskey wrote to Fergus saying that he was taking his allegation very seriously and asking Fergus to bear with him while he dealt with the matter. He also offered to meet with Fergus if he felt this was helpful. This offer was not taken up.

In February 1995, Fergus's psychiatrist reported to Bishop Comiskey that Fergus had settled back to school and was putting the "*fear, hurt and anger behind him*".

## **BISHOP EAMONN WALSH**

In May 2002, Bishop Eamonn Walsh met with Deborah (4.4.6) who alleged that she was sexually abused by Fr Grennan from the age of 5 until she was 10. Deborah told Bishop Walsh that, in 1993, she wrote a letter to Bishop Comiskey outlining the detail of what had occurred. In 1995, she said she wrote again to Bishop Comiskey asking why she had never received a reply to a previous letter. Bishop Walsh instructed that the diocesan files be searched thoroughly for any evidence of these letters from Deborah. There is no record on file of these letters having been received by Bishop Comiskey or the Diocese and Bishop Comiskey had confirmed that he does not recall receiving them.

Deborah consulted a firm of solicitors who agreed to act on her behalf against the Diocese. In August 2002, Deborah committed suicide. Bishop Walsh met with Deborah's parents after her suicide and they appear to be of the view that although Fr Grennan was a regular visitor in their home and stayed overnight in Deborah's

bedroom with Deborah present, it was extremely unlikely that he would have abused their daughter.

In June 2002, Bishop Eamonn Walsh visited Monageer and Boolavogue to celebrate the Vigil and Sunday Masses. Prior to this, Bishop Walsh met six of the girls who had made a complaint against Fr Grennan in 1988. Some of the girls expressed reservations with the way Bishop Walsh conducted these meetings. They believed his approach was intrusive and two of the girls criticised him for holding the meetings in Fr Grennan's former sitting room in the parochial house where some of the abuse had occurred. According to Bishop Walsh, the purpose of the meetings which he had was to explain the nature of his visit to the parish the following week-end. He was concerned that it would be upsetting for the victims to have 1988 brought up again and he wished to hear their concerns in person. He offered counselling to the victims and described his role as a listening one. He said that he did not ask questions about what had happened and he did not accept that his approach was intrusive. Bishop Walsh said he was not aware that abuse was alleged to have occurred in the parochial house although this fact was stated in the report from Dr Nolan which was in the possession of the Diocese.

Bishop Walsh acknowledged publicly the suffering in the parish and the division caused by the Monageer situation. He said that:

*... [young children and their families]: "spoke up when it would have been far easier to keep quiet and let things carry on. They did the right thing and not without considerable cost to themselves. You will never know how many other people will have been helped by your witness. I wish to publicly acknowledge your hurt, which was compounded by the way the case was handled.*

*There are people in this parish who suffered greatly because they stood by their priest and with a good conscience. Some continue to feel this hurt.....*

*The Diocese contributed to the pain of this parish instead of easing it. For this I apologise and I apologise to anyone who was ever abused by Fr Grennan. I realise that it is too late in the day for apologies. I will continue to cooperate fully with all who are committed to bringing healing and closure for those who have been hurt in any way."*

It was very painful for Fr Grennan's family to hear this statement and they were angry that the Diocese had apologised to anyone who had been abused by Fr Grennan.

In a civil suit that arose out of this case, a settlement was reached which included a statement by the Diocese which publicly acknowledged the hurt experienced by the victim. According to Bishop Walsh, this was also a matter of great upset to the family of Fr Grennan.

## **THE INQUIRY'S VIEW ON THE DIOCESAN HANDLING OF THE FR GRENNAN CASE:**

- **The Inquiry believes Bishop Comiskey was incorrect in dismissing the allegations of the girls in Monageer. The allegations may in his view have been improbable, but they were not incredible. Such allegations were capable of being true and they should have been treated by the Bishop accordingly.**
- **Fr Grennan was accused of inappropriate, offensive and criminal behaviour. However, it was not only the alleged activity of Fr Grennan which caused suffering to the girls in Monageer but the effect that the handling of the complaints subsequently had on their lives.**
- **Bishop Comiskey's unquestioning support of Fr Grennan was given without any understanding of the consequence for the children who made the complaints. Children making complaints deserve special protection from the Church and from society. This added duty of care was not met by the Diocese in this case.**
- **The Inquiry is of the view that the way in which the Diocese and Bishop Comiskey handled the allegations brought by the girls in 1988 led to a great deal of unnecessary suffering for the girls, their families and the people of Monageer. The handling of these allegations by the Health Board and the Gardai are dealt with at chapters 6 and 7 of this report. The error by the Church Authority was greatly exacerbated by the failure of the Gardai to carry out any adequate contemporaneous investigation.**
- **Whilst the Inquiry accepts that the Diocese owed a duty to its priest when an allegation is made, the duty owed to the ten young girls is paramount. They made a statement to the Principal without knowing or expecting that it would end up in the public domain. To the credit of most of the girls' families, the parents supported and believed their daughters; however, family divisions occurred between generations and the Inquiry has heard how grandparents were divided against parents and grandchildren over the issue.**
- **Bishop Eamonn Walsh's apology to the parishioners of Monageer was unequivocal and may have gone some way towards healing the hurt in that parish.**
- **Parish priests are appointed as managers of national schools as a matter of course. In this role, they have made a valuable contribution to Irish education under the patronage of their Bishop. However, the Inquiry has become aware of a number of priests who have abused this position and used it to give them greater access to children for the purposes of abusing them sexually. The Inquiry believes that no person should be appointed or retained to a position of authority over children without proper investigations being made as to their suitability for such an appointment.**

- Fr Grennan continued in his role as Chairman of the Board of Management of the national school in Monageer after this controversy occurred without any investigation by the Department of Education or the Diocese as to his suitability for such a role.

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### **FR SEAN FORTUNE (Deceased)**

Sean Fortune was born in Gorey, County Wexford, in 1953 and was educated in the Christian Brothers School in Gorey. In July 1968, when he was 14 years old, Sean Fortune attended the Christian Brothers Juniorate in Carraiglea Park in Dun Laoghaire with a view to completing his secondary education and joining the Christian Brothers Order.

Sean Fortune attended Blackrock College for one term in September 1971, with the intention of becoming a member of the Holy Ghost order instead of a Christian Brother. The College has confirmed to the Inquiry that he was not asked to leave because of any impropriety, but rather because he was regarded as temperamentally unsuited for missionary work.

Sean Fortune did not proceed to the novitiate of the Christian Brothers. In 1973, he applied to St Peter's seminary in his native Wexford to pursue a vocation for the diocesan priesthood. He was admitted into St Peter's seminary without being assessed because of the five years he had spent in the Juniorate of the Christian Brothers.

The first allegation against Sean Fortune of which the Inquiry has become aware was made by Stephen (4.5.1). Stephen complained to a senior staff member in St Peter's in 1976 about the sexual abuse perpetrated on him by Sean Fortune. Although the response of the staff member was one of anger against Stephen, Fortune's approaches to him ceased thereafter and his relationship with the senior staff member, which had been quite a close one, ended. It is inferred that the staff member spoke to or reprimanded Sean Fortune. This senior staff member is now deceased and the Inquiry does not know whether he spoke to anybody else in St Peter's about Stephen's allegations.

An allegation of sexual abuse against Sean Fortune was made in connection with the Catholic Boys Scouts of Ireland in early 1979. A full report was prepared by the assistant scout leader at the time which was finalised in December 1979. The Inquiry is satisfied that this full report was passed on to Bishop Herlihy by a scout leader in St. Peter's in 1979 or early 1980. It has not been possible to establish whether this complaint was made informally to the Bishop prior to Sean Fortune's ordination in