

Chapter 9 Fr Ronat⁴⁷

Introduction

9.1 Fr Ronat was born in the 1930s and ordained in the 1960s. He served in a number of parishes and was a teacher and careers guidance counsellor for a number of years. All the complaints against him were made in the period 1989 to 2009 but they mainly relate to the 1970s and 1980s. He retired in late 2005. He is out of ministry at present.

9.2 Bishop Magee told the Commission that he did not know any of the priests when he arrived in Cloyne in 1987 as he had had no previous connections with the diocese. It took some time for him to get to know Fr Ronat.

9.3 It seems that Fr Ronat practiced hypnosis as a means of dealing with the problems of people who came to him in his capacity as a guidance counsellor. A number of complainants told the Commission that they were asked about hypnosis when they were making a complaint. Bishop Magee denies any knowledge of Fr Ronat practising hypnosis. Fr Ronat told the Commission that he did use hypnosis but only as a hobby. He said that he did not use it with people who had emotional problems but only for treatment of addictions such as tobacco and alcohol. He said he practised hypnosis from 1981 to about 1988/89.

9.4 The Commission is aware of a total of eleven identified complainants who alleged that they were sexually abused by Fr Ronat. Three of these were young adults at the time of the alleged abuse. There is one unidentified complainant who was also a young adult and another unidentified complainant whose age is unknown.

First complainant, Ailis,⁴⁸ 1989

9.5 The first complaint against Fr Ronat was made in 1989 by Ailis. Unfortunately, Ailis died in 2006. Her parents and sister gave evidence to the Commission.

⁴⁷ This is a pseudonym.

⁴⁸ This is a pseudonym.

9.6 Ailis and her mother made the complaint to a priest whom the mother described to the Commission as Fr Ronat's "*superior*". He was, in fact, a more senior curate in the same parish. Both women visited the priest but only Ailis spoke to him in any detail. Ailis believed and later told Bishop Magee that the priest to whom she had complained had confronted Fr Ronat but she was mistaken in that view. In July 1995, the priest to whom the complaint was made said that Ailis and her mother did not ask him to confront Fr Ronat. He said he had told the parish priest about the complaint in 1989. In 2006, he made a statement to the Gardaí in which he gave his recollection of what had happened. He described how a mother and daughter (whom he did not name) called to his house in the later years of his curacy there. He had been a curate there from 1986 to 1991. He got the impression that the daughter and Fr Ronat were "*kissing in the priests house in [...]*". He told the parish priest about this but did not know if the parish priest had done anything about it. The parish priest was dead at this stage. The priest did not remember ever talking to Fr Ronat about it.

9.7 There are no written records of this meeting in the diocesan files. There is no evidence that the parish priest did anything about the complaint.

Complaint to bishop, 1995

9.8 Six years later, in January 1995, Ailis and her parents met Bishop Magee in January 1995 to tell him of the alleged abuse. In a statement to the Gardaí in 2005, Ailis said that Bishop Magee told her he believed her and he was sorry for what had happened to her. Bishop Magee told the Commission that he did not make a record of what was said as the procedures provided that the complainant would be interviewed later by the delegate; he, the bishop, listened. There is, however, a handwritten document which seems to have been dictated by the bishop after the meeting. This records that Ailis told the bishop that she had been sexually abused by Fr Ronat between the ages of 15 and 19; that other young girls and mature women had also been abused; and that Fr Ronat gave her wine to drink when she went to him in his capacity as a career guidance teacher. She went to him for help with a personal problem. This note also records that she told the bishop that Fr Ronat's illness (see below) began after the priest to whom she complained in 1989 confronted Fr Ronat.

9.9 Ailis's parents told the Commission that Bishop Magee said this was the first complaint he had heard about Fr Ronat. They said that this meeting was sought because Ailis was concerned that Fr Ronat was recruiting other girls and abusing them and because Ailis wanted an apology. The parents also said that Bishop Magee asked them if they were looking for money. They said they were very surprised by this as they had not mentioned money nor was it a factor in their reporting. They said that Bishop Magee asked Ailis about hypnosis and about alcohol but they are not sure whether this arose on the first or the second meeting (in July 1995) with the bishop. They said the bishop told them that Fr Ronat would be "*taken out of circulation*" and be supervised. Bishop Magee told the Commission that it would not be his practice to ask whether complainants were looking for money and he did not state that Fr Ronat would be taken out of circulation. Bishop Magee denies any knowledge of Fr Ronat practising hypnosis. He said he told Ailis that he would refer the matter to the delegate.

9.10 In March 1995, Bishop Magee appointed Monsignor O'Callaghan as the delegate to carry out a canonical investigation into Fr Ronat under canon 1717.

9.11 In April 1995, Ailis was interviewed by Archdeacon Chris Twohig. According to Archdeacon Twohig's note of the meeting, Ailis said that the abuse occurred when she was 17-18 years of age in Fr Ronat's house and that it stopped short of full sexual intercourse. In his report of the meeting, Archdeacon Twohig took the view that Ailis was 16 at the time when she started to visit Fr Ronat's house so there was not a question of paedophilia: "*civil legal action would not lie on the grounds alleged by her ... There is no canonical criminal behaviour either*". The Archdeacon wondered if one could deduce that Ailis was "*besetting*" Fr Ronat: "*Might it not be possible that [Ailis] is the Ophelia of Hamlet – sweet bells jangled*". Archdeacon Twohig's report does not show any evidence of a genuine investigation. It is not an impartial recording of the facts. It diverges from the record made by Bishop Magee especially in relation to the Ailis's age. It seems to the Commission to be largely concerned with providing reasons why this might not be classified as child sexual abuse. It also, notably, seeks to lay the blame for what occurred on Ailis.

9.12 Ailis described the interview in her 2005 statement to the Gardaí: “*His attitude toward me was deplorable. He could just barely tolerate me being there. He told me he knew Fr [Ronat] and he also asked me had I been hypnotised.*”

9.13 In June 1995, Monsignor O’Callaghan put the complaint to Fr Ronat who “*strenuously*” denied it. It is not clear why there was a delay of six months from the first notice of the complaint until Fr Ronat was interviewed. Fr Ronat told Monsignor O’Callaghan that he had been a counsellor to Ailis. He said that the client counsellor relationship required the building up of trust. “*There would have been cuddling as trust was built up.*” However, he said that the cuddling was initiated by Ailis. When asked about drink, he said that “*maybe a glass of beer*” was involved. Fr Ronat also agreed that a younger girl had been in his house when she was drunk and that she spent an hour or so in his bed, left and later returned to stay the night accompanied by her two brothers. In evidence to the Commission, Fr Ronat said that Ailis was aged 19 when she first came to his house for counselling. He also said that the “*cuddling*” involved putting a hand on her shoulder when she became upset.

9.14 Monsignor O’Callaghan also spoke to the priest to whom Ailis had complained in 1989. Bishop Magee told the Commission that he (the bishop) did not carry out any inquiries as he expected the delegate to do that. The bishop did tell the then parish priest in the parish where Fr Ronat was serving about the complaint. When asked by the Commission about the completeness of the investigation, the bishop accepted that a full canonical investigation was not carried out, despite his written instruction.

Advisory committee

9.15 An advisory committee meeting was convened in July 1995. This was the first such committee in the diocese. It seems that the committee was formed in anticipation of the implementation of the *Framework Document*. (The *Framework Document* was published in early 1996 but Bishop Magee and Monsignor O’Callaghan were involved in discussions about it during 1995.) The members seem to have been chosen by Monsignor O’Callaghan. According to the diocesan records, the members were Monsignor O’Callaghan himself, Archdeacon Twohig, two solicitors, one of whom subsequently advised the diocese on the handling of child sexual abuse

cases, and the other who left the committee after a short time, and the consultant psychologist who assessed both Ailis and Fr Ronat. The committee considered this case on three occasions – twice in July 1995 and again in November 1995. The psychologist was not present for the first two meetings and would appear not to have been present for the third but there is no list of those present at that meeting. The psychologist told the Commission that he has no memory of being invited to attend or actually attending this committee in 1995 or at all. (He did become a member of the advisory committee which was established in 2005 under the title of the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee.)

9.16 Before the first meeting of the committee, Monsignor O’Callaghan wrote to Bishop Magee about the case (they had been speaking about it the previous day). The letter does not mention the names of either Ailis or Fr Ronat. The letter outlined the considerations involved in what Monsignor O’Callaghan described as a “*very delicate situation*”. The letter states that “*in the matter of liability before the law the Diocese does not have a case to meet, apart from the age of the girl*”. It outlines the concerns in relation to Ailis, concern for other children and concern for Fr Ronat.

9.17 At its July meetings, the advisory committee decided on general pastoral grounds “*without prejudice*” that arrangements should be made to have counselling available to Ailis and to have both her and Fr Ronat assessed. At its November 1995 meeting, there was a discussion of Ailis’s age at the time of the alleged abuse. The committee concluded that Ailis was about 17 when the alleged abuse started and noted that 17 was the age of consent to sexual intercourse. The basis on which the committee reached this conclusion is not clear and it contrasts with the information provided to Bishop Magee by Ailis herself. The committee recognised that the behaviour was quite improper and a serious breach of trust. However, there was no “*evidence of paedophilia nor of behaviour which would qualify as child sex abuse. Whatever evidence there is points to an attraction on the part of the priest to post-pubertal females*”. The committee asked Monsignor O’Callaghan to make discreet inquiries from a “*certain trusted person*” about possible relationships. The only one which caused comment involved a

woman aged 20 or so ten years earlier (1985).⁴⁹ The question of Fr Ronat being appointed as a parish priest was discussed. The committee concluded that an immediate appointment as a parish priest would precipitate Ailis into taking some action on the grounds that she had not been believed or taken seriously. In effect, the committee was more concerned about causing scandal than about protecting children. Monsignor O'Callaghan disputes this; he told the Commission that, as a member of the committee, he was always concerned about protecting children and this was a central part of the policy of pastoral care. It is the Commission's view that the actions of the committee in this case do not show concern for the protection of children. The committee recommended that Fr Ronat be directed to take sabbatical leave for a year and qualify in "*some neutral area of pastoral care while having counselling*". This never happened.

9.18 Bishop Magee told the Commission that, although the committee considered that it was not a case of child sexual abuse, he considered Fr Ronat's behaviour with Ailis to be exploitative behaviour.

9.19 According to Bishop Magee's statement to the Gardaí in 2005, the committee recommended restricted ministry for Fr Ronat but this does not appear in the note of the meeting made by Monsignor O'Callaghan. There is no evidence of any restriction being placed on him at this time. The bishop said he told Fr Ronat that he would be "*placing him on restricted Ministry specifically in regard to working with schools and admitting minors to his residence. He remained in restricted and monitored Ministry until his retirement in November 2005*". The bishop's recollection in 2005 appears to have been mistaken. This occurred after the third complainant, Caelan, came forward in 1997 and not in 1995.

9.20 Ailis had a second meeting with Bishop Magee in late July 1995. She understood that Fr Ronat was being stood down and was going for assessment. The Commission cannot now establish why she came to that understanding. Bishop Magee has no recollection of this meeting and believes that this understanding did not come from him. Ailis then started counselling with a health board psychologist.

⁴⁹ It later became known that Fr Ronat had been involved in a sexual relationship with an adult woman around the time these inquiries were being made.

9.21 Meanwhile, Monsignor O’Callaghan was in touch with Ailis’s father. It is not clear to the Commission why he contacted her father and not Ailis herself. The question of informing the Gardaí does not seem to have been considered. The parents told the Commission that no one in the Church ever suggested to them that the Gardaí should be told. The *Framework Document* was not yet in operation.

Psychological assessment

9.22 In May 1995, Ailis was assessed by the consultant psychologist.

9.23 In December 1995, the consultant psychologist replied to Monsignor O’Callaghan’s query about Ailis’s age when the alleged abuse occurred. He said that there did not appear to be abuse against a minor. However, he did say that Ailis first started to visit Fr Ronat when she was 15 or 16 and continued to see him until she was 17 or 18. She had subsequently met him abroad when she was 19 or 20.

9.24 In September 1995, Fr Ronat also was assessed by the consultant psychologist. Fr Ronat was a reluctant participant in the assessment. The written report states that the psychologist “*cannot say he is an ephebophile*”, that is, someone who is sexually attracted to post pubertal minors, and that he seemed to be heterosexually orientated. The psychologist could not say whether or not Fr Ronat was truthful. He said that he would welcome an opportunity to develop his observations.

9.25 In February 2009, 13 years later, the consultant psychologist wrote to the diocese outlining his involvement. He explained to the Commission his reasons for doing this. He was contacted by the diocese in late January/early February 2009 about the release of his reports to this Commission. He had destroyed his own copies of the reports and his related notes in the early 2000s. He did this because he had had no further involvement with either Ailis or Fr Ronat after 1995 and it is his practice to destroy such notes and reports after about five years.⁵⁰ He asked the diocese for sight of the reports and these were provided to him together with a copy of his December 1995

⁵⁰ The Commission recognises that it is normal and approved practice for medical and associated professionals to do this.

letter to Monsignor O'Callaghan. He then realised that they did not fully reflect his involvement in the matter and he wanted to ensure that this Commission was aware of his wider involvement.

9.26 In his February 2009 letter to the diocese, the psychologist said that he had explained to Fr Ronat at the time of the assessment that the report of the assessment was for the use of the diocese. Fr Ronat had then reserved the right to see the report in the event of civil litigation. The psychologist said that this "*altered the context*" of his written report. As a result he met Monsignor O'Callaghan shortly afterwards "*to clarify and elaborate on its contents*". He asked that Bishop Magee be informed that he believed the complainant to be credible and truthful. He "*did not repose similar confidence in Fr [Ronat's] account of his relationship*" with Ailis. The psychologist considered that Fr Ronat was in need of therapy but that he would resist any such intervention. He further asked that Bishop Magee be made aware that "*fundamental questions surrounded Fr [Ronat] and priesthood and that should he continue to work as a priest, his ministry should preclude any contact, formal or informal, with schools or any youth work. In addition, I suggested he be directed not to visit unsupervised teenagers in their homes or invite unaccompanied teenagers to his*".

9.27 There is no contemporaneous record in the diocesan files of this elaboration and clarification. The psychologist was surprised by this because he said that Monsignor O'Callaghan regularly took notes of their discussions. Bishop Magee told the Commission that he had no knowledge of any further information imparted by the psychologist to Monsignor O'Callaghan and that he was surprised by the content of the psychologist's letter of February 2009. Monsignor O'Callaghan told the Commission that he has no recollection of the specific conversation referred to by the psychologist in his February 2009 letter. Monsignor O'Callaghan said he did have numerous conversations with the psychologist over the years including within the advisory committee. However, as stated above, the psychologist told the Commission that he has no recollection of attending any advisory committee meetings in 1995 and there is no documentary evidence that he did at any time before 2005.

9.28 Mr Ó Catháin, the solicitor member of the advisory committee, told the Commission that he could not recall whether or not this elaboration of the

psychologist's views was conveyed orally to the advisory committee. He did say, however, that he was very concerned about Fr Ronat and that he expressed this concern to Monsignor O'Callaghan on a number of occasions subsequently. The Commission considers that it is very regrettable that this elaboration and clarification was not put in writing at the time, either by the psychologist or by Monsignor O'Callaghan. The failure to do so meant that, at the very least, there was an inadequate record on file of the nature of the problem.

9.29 Monsignor O'Callaghan rang Ailis's father sometime in 1996 to say that Fr Ronat was having treatment and was "*grand*". The Commission has not seen any evidence that he was having any treatment. Her parents told the Commission that, in 1996, there was a report of an interview with Monsignor O'Callaghan in a local newspaper, *The Corkman*,⁵¹ in which he was quoted as saying that there were no complaints of child sexual abuse in the Diocese of Cloyne. Ailis's father told the Commission that he challenged Monsignor O'Callaghan about this quote and Monsignor O'Callaghan said the reporter was wrong. There seems to have been no further interaction with Ailis or her family until 2000. By then, the diocese was aware of two further complaints in relation to Fr Ronat.

Civil legal action, 2000

9.30 Fr Ronat called to the home of Ailis's parents in 2000 and threatened to sue them for defamation. This was in the context where he had been interviewed by the Gardaí in relation to Caelan, the third complainant, and was threatening defamation proceedings against her as well. Monsignor O'Callaghan was informed. He visited Fr Ronat who accepted that his threats might have been ill advised. Monsignor O'Callaghan stressed to him that the only realistic option was to let matters settle down and that, if he minded himself, he would be offered a parish. Fr Ronat wanted the restrictions which had been imposed on him after Caelan came forward lifted (see below).

9.31 Bishop Magee told the Commission that he spoke to Fr Ronat around this time and told him he should not have any contact with Ailis's family.

⁵¹ The Commission asked *The Corkman* for a copy of this report but it does not have copies of issues dating back to then.

9.32 In September 2000, Ailis started civil legal proceedings. Mr Ó Catháin replied, on the instructions of the diocese, expressing concern for her but denying any liability. The civil proceedings were not pursued.

9.33 The *Framework Document* was not in place when Ailis made her complaint in 1995 but it was in place when the civil proceedings started in 2000. The diocese did not report the complaint to the Gardaí or the health board as was required by the procedures set out in that document. Monsignor O'Callaghan spoke to Archdeacon Twohig in October 2000. He noted that there was no question of going to the Gardaí as Ailis did not want publicity of any kind. It is not clear if this reflects Archdeacon Twohig's dealings with Ailis in 1995 or if he had been in touch with her again in 2000.

2002

9.34 Nothing further happened until June 2002 when Monsignor O'Callaghan was asked to "*enquire about Fr [Ronat's] circumstances and what his intentions were*". This arose from a meeting about diocesan assignments. Monsignor O'Callaghan asked Fr Ronat to come to meet him but Fr Ronat said he was ill. They spoke on the phone. Monsignor O'Callaghan set out the options which were open to Fr Ronat. The option of remaining where he was indefinitely was not acceptable to the diocese. The "*option of retiring on sick leave seemed the better choice*" according to Monsignor O'Callaghan but Fr Ronat rejected this; he "*did not see a reason for giving up his ministry on the basis of what he described as unfounded allegations*". The option of transferring to another diocese was not considered viable because of the allegations; Fr Ronat wanted to go to the USA. The option of taking action to clear his name was considered to be fraught with difficulties but Fr Ronat thought it was the only option open to him.

9.35 A few days later, Monsignor O'Callaghan met Ailis for the first time. According to his contemporaneous note of the meeting, Monsignor O'Callaghan said she wanted to be assured that Fr Ronat would not make contact with her. He had told her that Bishop Magee had so directed. She

was also concerned about the audit⁵² and Monsignor O’Callaghan “*assured her that the names of complainants would not be revealed*”. According to a statement made to the Gardaí in February 2006, four years later, Monsignor O’Callaghan said that he had assured her that Fr Ronat had “*been instructed not to make contact with her or with her family. At that stage she still did not want a report made to Garda*”. The question of reporting to the Gardaí is not mentioned in the contemporaneous note. In any event, whether she wanted it or not, reporting was required by the procedures in the *Framework Document*.

Report to Gardaí, 2005

9.36 In January 2005, Ailis made a complaint to the Gardaí. The Gardaí formally notified the health board of the complaint in accordance with the *Children First* procedures. By then there were four other complaints in relation to Fr Ronat. Her complaint was investigated during 2005 and 2006 together with some of the other complaints (see below). The DPP decision in relation to Ailis was given in February 2007. Regrettably, Ailis had died in November 2006 so a prosecution was not possible.

Second complainant, Bretta,⁵³ 1996

9.37 Bretta made her complaint in September 1996. She alleged that Fr Ronat had behaved in a sexual way towards her son, Matthew.⁵⁴ Monsignor O’Callaghan met her and recorded the details. Bretta described how the priest was a family friend. He used to take her son away to various sporting events and she thought that he was a sort of father figure to him. She saw him kissing her son on the back of the neck when the son was about 14 or 15.

9.38 Monsignor O’Callaghan concluded that there was “*no evidence of any sexual abuse. However, the relationship does seem to have been obsessive and unhealthy...*”. He told the Commission that he does not dispute that Fr Ronat’s behaviour raised concerns and that he should have consulted the health board to establish whether or not any harm had been caused to

⁵² This was the proposed nationwide audit of clerical child sexual abuse complaints, announced by the Irish Bishops’ Conference in April 2002, which did not proceed because of the government’s announcement that it intended to introduce the legislation which subsequently became the *Commissions of Investigation Act 2004*.

⁵³ This is a pseudonym.

⁵⁴ This is a pseudonym.

Matthew. Monsignor O'Callaghan met Fr Ronat who expressed outrage and said that he was going to get Matthew to sign an affidavit saying that nothing improper had occurred. Monsignor O'Callaghan told Fr Ronat to abide by Bretta's wishes and stay away from her son. Nothing further was done. There was no meeting of the advisory committee and no reference of the complaint to the Gardaí or the health board as was required under the *Framework Document* procedures; these procedures had come into effect in January 1996.

9.39 Monsignor O'Callaghan told the Commission that he did not consider there was any allegation of child sexual abuse in this case in 1996. Matthew himself came forward in 2003 to complain of child sexual abuse. Between 1996 and 2003, another complainant had also come forward.

2003

9.40 In 2003, Matthew, who was now an adult, told his mother that he had in fact been abused by Fr Ronat. They both went to see Monsignor O'Callaghan in January 2003. Matthew told him that he had been in Fr Ronat's bed and the priest had been sexually aroused. Monsignor O'Callaghan offered Matthew counselling and told him and Bretta that Fr Ronat was not working with children, for example, not taking first communion classes. Monsignor O'Callaghan then met Fr Ronat who agreed that Matthew had been in his bed but denied any inappropriate behaviour of any kind. Fr Ronat threatened to sue all three complainants (Ailis, Matthew and Caelan, the third complainant who had come forward in 1997); he said he had already prepared cases against Ailis and Caelan. Monsignor O'Callaghan told Fr Ronat that he would have to be withdrawn from ministry; this did not happen.

9.41 In evidence to the Commission, Monsignor O'Callaghan accepted that Fr Ronat should have been taken out of ministry at this stage. Bishop Magee told the Commission that he did not consider removing Fr Ronat from ministry in 2003 because he did not have concrete proof that anything untoward had happened as he was not in possession of the full facts.

9.42 Bishop Magee told the Commission that he was not told about Matthew's case in 1996. He did not hear about it until 2003. He said that, at

some point after the Caelan complaint became known in 1997, Monsignor O’Callaghan had mentioned a “*relationship within a family*” but Monsignor O’Callaghan did not consider it serious and said that he was monitoring the situation.

9.43 Bretta told the Commission that she thought that the restrictions on Fr Ronat’s ministry which were described to her by Monsignor O’Callaghan were a consequence of her earlier complaint; she was not told in 1996 or in 2003 that there were other complaints. She said that the handling by the diocese was “*bumbling, inept, unprofessional*”. Monsignor O’Callaghan told the Commission that he considered that his duty as the delegate precluded him from telling her that there were other complaints. The Commission recognises that he could not have told her the detail of other complaints but he certainly could have told her of the fact of other complaints. Many complainants have told the Commission that such knowledge is helpful to complainants as they feel they have been validated. Bretta found out about the other complaints only when the Elliott report was published in December 2008 (see Chapter 6). She had no contact from the diocese when the report was published. She was upset about that because her complaint was described in it and her son did not know certain details of the case. Fr Bill Bermingham, who was the delegate in 2008, told the Commission that this was the one aspect of the publication of that report that he regretted. In June 2009, Fr Bermingham did contact Bretta. She felt he dealt with her professionally and kept her informed of developments. He told both Bretta and Matthew that the diocese would pay for counselling if they wanted it.

Garda involvement

9.44 Shortly after their meeting in January 2003, Monsignor O’Callaghan wrote to Matthew about reporting to the Gardaí. He said that: “*An issue that arises from the church protocol is the question of reporting to Garda. The complainant may make the complaint himself or the diocesan contact may facilitate him in doing so. Let me know your mind on this*”.

9.45 This, of course, is not a correct reading of the Church protocol. The *Framework Document* requires that the diocese report to the Gardaí. This is not an option to be exercised in accordance with the wishes of a complainant.

9.46 Monsignor O'Callaghan did report this case to the Gardaí in February 2003. His letter also stated: "*The behaviour complained of would not amount to child sex abuse in terms of our understanding of same but the Garda will be in a position to determine the issue for themselves*".

9.47 Matthew was interviewed by the Gardaí in March 2003 and made a statement. He told the Commission that he was surprised that he had heard nothing about his complaint, either from the Church or the Gardaí, between 2003 and 2009. The Gardaí told the Commission that Matthew did not wish to pursue the complaint; he simply wanted the Gardaí to be aware of Fr Ronat. The garda who interviewed Matthew said that he recorded the incident on the PULSE system (see Chapter 5) in the category which records matters of a non-criminal nature. This clearly indicates that the Gardaí had taken the view that there was no criminal activity disclosed. The documents relating to this case were not furnished to the Commission by the Gardaí in their initial discovery. When their absence was brought to the attention of the Gardaí, further searches were conducted and Matthew's statement was found in the filing cabinet used by the now retired garda who had interviewed him. The Gardaí also told the Commission that they were continuing to investigate the complaint and it remained an "*ongoing investigation*". The Commission does not accept that there was any investigation after the initial taking of the statement. When the statement was found, a file was submitted to the DPP in 2010 and the DPP directed that no prosecution be brought.

Becoming a parish priest

9.48 As already stated, the question of Fr Ronat becoming a parish priest was discussed by the advisory committee in November 1995. In a letter of August 1999, Monsignor O'Callaghan said that Bishop Magee offered Fr Ronat appointments as parish priest to two parishes but the offers were declined. It is not clear when exactly the offers were made but it is clear that it was before Caelan's complaint was made in 1997.

9.49 Bishop Magee told the Commission that he was put under a lot of pressure by Fr Ronat who threatened to sue him (the bishop) for defamation. His threats to sue the bishop over the failure to make him a parish priest were "*self-evidently a bluff*" according to Monsignor O'Callaghan. However, it is clear that promotion was offered by the diocesan authorities. Monsignor

O’Callaghan told the Commission it was never going to happen; he implied that Fr Ronat was offered only parishes that the diocese knew he would refuse. He had been offered what Bishop Magee described as an “*insignificant parish*” in the expectation that he would decline it. He did – he said it was too far from his doctor.

9.50 Bishop Magee told the Commission that priests were commenting on why Fr Ronat had been left in the same appointment for such a long time since it was the practice to move priests every six or seven years. The matter had been mentioned by members of the personnel board. This board advised the bishop on appointments. Bishop Magee told the Commission that the members would have known the circumstances. The Commission considers it shocking that members of the board would consider promoting Fr Ronat if they were aware that there were unresolved allegations of child sexual abuse. The question of promotion was considered again in 2005 (see below).

Third complainant, Caelan,⁵⁵ 1997

9.51 In December 1997, Caelan wrote to the diocese alleging that she had been abused by Fr Ronat when she was attending a residential retreat organised by the Cloyne Federation of Youth Clubs between 1979 and 1981. She alleged that he conducted confessions in a bedroom and that she was instructed by him to lie on the bed. He then touched her body and made reference to “*the heat of the Holy Spirit*” descending upon her. She also told the diocese that she had made a statement to the Gardaí.

9.52 Bishop Magee telephoned Caelan but there is no record of their conversation. Monsignor O’Callaghan met her. She told him that she was about 18 when the incident occurred and that there was another girl who was also involved. At Monsignor O’Callaghan’s suggestion, she contacted this other girl who told her that she was examining her options. The other girl did not come forward.

9.53 In February 1998, Monsignor O’Callaghan met Fr Ronat. Fr Ronat recalled the complainant and the retreats in question. He said confessions were usually held in the chapel but that counselling was carried out in the

⁵⁵ This is a pseudonym.

bedrooms and might have involved confession. He denied ever instructing anyone to lie on the bed or using the words quoted by Caelan. He said he was going to sue the first two complainants, Ailis and Bretta, for defamation.

9.54 Monsignor O’Callaghan clearly believed Caelan. Bishop Magee told the Commission that there was a meeting of the advisory committee and that they recommended that Fr Ronat be put on “*restrictive ministry*” and should have no contact with young people or with schools. There is no documentary evidence of any such meeting of the advisory committee or of any recommendation made by it. In fact, the evidence available shows that there was no advisory committee functioning at this stage. Bishop Magee disputes the fact that there was no advisory committee functioning at the time. He said he understood that any advice he received from Monsignor O’Callaghan was coming from the committee. Decisions of the advisory committee were communicated to him by Monsignor O’Callaghan. He did not have any direct contact with any other committee members. Monsignor O’Callaghan told the Commission that the advisory committee did have meetings in his house and they “*were unstructured in terms of timing and minute taking*”. The two other surviving members of the committee, the solicitor and the psychologist, say they were not asked to attend any meetings.

9.55 Soon afterwards, there was a meeting between Bishop Magee, Monsignor O’Callaghan and Fr Ronat. Fr Ronat handed in a letter in which he accepted that confessions took place in his bedroom in the retreat house but denied that the alleged incident occurred. At the meeting the bishop set out the serious issues raised by the fact that the alleged incident took place during confessions. (Under canon law, solicitation in the confessional is treated in the same way as child sexual abuse regardless of the age of the person concerned.) Fr Ronat said he was taking legal advice about what to do. He was told that any civil action he would take was a matter for himself but that the bishop would deal with the matter “*within the canonical sphere and within the established guidelines in the matter of sex abuse*”. Fr Ronat told the Commission that holding confessions in bedrooms of retreat houses was not unusual at the time.

9.56 The bishop and Monsignor O’Callaghan drafted a letter to Fr Ronat and Monsignor O’Callaghan read out the draft to Fr Ronat over the phone. Fr

Ronat asked that the proposed restriction on his access to schools be limited to secondary schools as he was the chairman of the board of management of a national school and his retiring from this post would be “*seriously compromising and a matter for public comment and suspicion*”. He did not have any involvement with secondary schools at this time. The bishop and Monsignor O’Callaghan decided not to accede to this request because they considered that would not be in keeping with the guidelines. “*There was the further matter that, if the whole issue became public, as it certainly would if action were taken in the civil court, the Diocese could be pilloried as putting children at risk and could be seen to be in breach of its policies as expressed in the guidelines.*”

9.57 The letter which was subsequently sent by Bishop Magee in February 1998 stated that: “*Pending the pastoral decision which I may eventually take in your regard I require that you do not engage in visitation of schools nor have young people under the age of 18 alone in your house*”. The letter went on to instruct him to retire as chairman of the board of management of the primary school. The bishop said that he was advising the parish priest, “*in strict confidence*” of the measures being taken. In a letter in August 1999, Monsignor O’Callaghan said that Fr Ronat’s retirement from the board of management “*occasioned no admiratio*⁵⁶ – *his poor health was seen as the reason*”. Bishop Magee did tell the parish priest of the restrictions being imposed and he said that the parish priest was responsible for the enforcement of the restrictions.

9.58 The parish priest told the Commission that he was told of the restrictions. He was not told the nature of the complaint but he understood it to involve child sexual abuse because of the nature of the restrictions. He was not told that there were other complaints against Fr Ronat. He did all he could to ensure that the restrictions were observed. He told Fr Ronat that he could not visit any of the schools and he insisted that he step down from the board of management of a school. He also asked Bishop Magee to tell his then curate and all curates appointed in the future about the restrictions and this was done. He told the Commission that he frequently met Bishop Magee and, when he did, the bishop always inquired about Fr Ronat. He had no

⁵⁶ Surprise, astonishment or wonder; the word can also mean admiration but not in this context.

evidence that the restrictions were ever breached by Fr Ronat. Apart from the restrictions in relation to schools, Fr Ronat continued to operate as a priest in the parish and was perceived by the parishioners as a priest in good standing.

9.59 Fr Ronat's solicitor wrote to Bishop Magee to state that he was acting on behalf of the priest. After consultation with Mr Ó Catháin, Monsignor O'Callaghan decided that the diocese should not engage with Fr Ronat's solicitor but should deal directly with Fr Ronat.

Garda investigation

9.60 The Gardaí investigated Caelan's complaint and interviewed her, Fr Ronat and people connected with the retreat house. Fr Ronat denied assaulting any person in the manner alleged. The Gardaí did not interview Bishop Magee or anyone in authority in the diocese. A garda was in touch with the bishop's office but this was purely in order to locate Fr Ronat. The garda said, in February 1999, that he spoke to the bishop's secretary about this but did not tell the secretary why he wanted to locate Fr Ronat. The investigating garda said he had no knowledge of other or similar types of incidents having taken place at the retreat centre. He also said that, to the best of his knowledge, Fr Ronat had not been convicted and had not been accused of this type of offence before this incident. He recognised that "*as this alleged incident took place in 1980 there may well have been similar type allegations made but I have no knowledge of them*". The Commission finds it surprising that the garda did not ask the diocese about any similar complaints. The garda told the Commission that there was no protocol in place at that time for contacting the diocese. He said that, while he did not go into the details, he did tell the bishop's secretary that he was investigating an incident and he would have expected the bishop's secretary to tell him if there were other incidents. The Commission does not consider it reasonable to expect the bishop's secretary to have done this. Apart from not knowing the nature of the incident being investigated, the bishop's secretary may not have been aware of any other incidents.

9.61 The Gardaí concluded that there was insufficient evidence for a prosecution. The complainant was an adult at the time of the alleged incident and there was no clear evidence of either a sexual or physical assault. The

file was sent to the DPP who agreed with the garda assessment. The Gardaí were not obliged to report this case to the health board as the complainant was an adult at the time the alleged abuse occurred.

Threatened defamation proceedings

9.62 In July 1999, Monsignor O’Callaghan met Fr Ronat. Fr Ronat told him that he had been interviewed by the Gardaí in relation to Caelan’s complaint and that the DPP did not proceed with the case. Fr Ronat said he had issued defamation proceedings against Caelan and complained generally about his treatment by the diocese. When asked, he said that he had not yet issued proceedings against the other complainants (Ailis and Bretta) – he would “*take them on one at a time*”.

9.63 Fr Ronat’s solicitor wrote to the bishop requiring that he be fully reinstated but it was decided not to make any change. It is clear that Monsignor O’Callaghan believed that Fr Ronat intended to pursue the defamation proceedings. In February 2000, Monsignor O’Callaghan spoke to Caelan and told her that Fr Ronat intended to sue her unless she withdrew the allegations. She replied that she could not withdraw what she knew to be true. There is no evidence that the threatened defamation proceedings were ever issued by Fr Ronat.

Involvement in confirmation ceremonies

9.64 In spite of the restrictions which had been placed on him in respect of involvement with children, it seems that Fr Ronat acted as the master of ceremonies at confirmation ceremonies. Clearly, this was known to Bishop Magee and Monsignor O’Callaghan. In April 2002, Monsignor O’Callaghan wrote to Fr Ronat stating that it “*would seem best that you not be present*” at the confirmation ceremony in his (Fr Ronat’s) parish. The letter went on to state that: “*It might just be all that is needed, given the current furore, to be seen to be tempting fate and challenging a response*”. At this time, Bishop Brendan Comiskey had resigned as Bishop of Ferns, the Government had just announced the appointment of Mr George Birmingham SC to advise on an inquiry about matters which had arisen in the diocese of Ferns and the Irish Bishops’ Conference was holding an emergency meeting to discuss a nationwide audit of clerical child sexual abuse. This letter was not provided to the Commission in the diocesan discovery. Monsignor O’Callaghan

explained that he did not necessarily keep a copy of every individual letter and there was no obligation on him to do so.

Fr Ronat's health

9.65 Fr Ronat seems to have suffered ill health for much of the 1990s and the early 2000s. At times he stayed in his house for months on end and did not do any work in the parish. Bishop Magee understood that he had been diagnosed with ME.⁵⁷ He was being provided with lunch by nuns from a local convent. A former postulant from this convent became the sixth complainant, Fenella, against Fr Ronat. The superior of this convent was aware of Fenella's allegations since 1992.

9.66 Monsignor O'Callaghan thought that he suffered from "*some condition of a bi-polar nature which confines him to house for long periods*". Neither Bishop Magee nor Monsignor O'Callaghan sought any independent evidence of his medical condition.

Fourth and fifth complainants, Donelle⁵⁸ and Edana⁵⁹

9.67 The complaints of the fourth and fifth complainants came to a head in the diocese in 2005. However, the fourth complainant, Donelle, gave evidence to the Commission that she first complained to a priest of the diocese in 1999/2000. The fifth complainant, Edana, first complained to a nun in 2004. The handling of these two complaints was linked from 2005 onwards.

Fourth complainant, Donelle, 1999/2000

9.68 Donelle first contacted the Church in around 1999/2000. In evidence to the Commission, she said that she had contacted the parish priest where Fr Ronat was serving (and who, as described above, was aware of the restrictions imposed on him) to tell him that he had a very dangerous man in the parish. She was unsure of the timing of this contact but thought it might have been around 1999/2000. She told the Commission that the parish priest told her not to be wasting his time unless she had very strong evidence and he then put down the phone. She said she later told Bishop Magee about this

⁵⁷ Myalgia Encephalomyelitis; sometimes called chronic fatigue syndrome.

⁵⁸ This is a pseudonym.

⁵⁹ This is a pseudonym.

phone call but the bishop has no recollection of being told about it. The parish priest denies that he received such a telephone call. He said he did receive many anonymous calls but none was in connection with child sexual abuse.

Complaint to the Gardaí, October 2005

9.69 In October 2005, Donelle complained to the Gardaí that she had been abused by Fr Ronat between the ages of 15 and 20. Her statement was completed in December 2005. She told the Gardaí that the abuse included full sexual intercourse. Fr Ronat had been a family friend who was frequently in her house. She had kept a diary in which some of the abusive incidents were recorded – mainly in the early 1970s.

Complaint to diocese, November 2005

9.70 In November 2005, Donelle told another priest of the diocese that she had been abused by Fr Ronat. He told Monsignor O'Callaghan who initially assumed, wrongly, that this was the as yet unidentified complainant who had been in touch with a nun (Edana - see below). Monsignor O'Callaghan wrote to Fr Ronat informing him of this complaint. He also informed Bishop Magee. Monsignor O'Callaghan was in touch with the nun who was dealing with Edana. He asked the nun if the initials of the person she was dealing with were those of Donelle and was taken aback when he discovered that they were not.

Fifth complainant, Edana, 2004

9.71 Meanwhile, sometime in 2004 the fifth complainant, Edana, told a local nun that she had been abused by Fr Ronat. The alleged abuse occurred when she was aged between 15 and 17 in around 1981/2. This nun told Monsignor O'Callaghan but Edana did not want her name to be given at this stage. Edana told the Commission that the nun told her that Monsignor O'Callaghan accepted the truth of her story and offered to help in any way, including funding therapy. Edana did not want to meet him at this stage. The nun also offered a meeting with Dean Goold but Edana declined that as well. Edana said that Monsignor O'Callaghan had told the nun that Fr Ronat was in restricted ministry. However, the nun saw him officiating at a funeral and realised he was not really restricted. In September 2005, this nun

wrote to Monsignor O'Callaghan to say that Fr Ronat had officiated, alone, at a funeral. The nun was clearly annoyed by this.

Inter-diocesan case management advisory committee, September 2005

9.72 Fr Ronat's case was discussed at an extraordinary meeting of the new inter-diocesan case management advisory committee in September 2005. The committee had been established earlier in 2005 and was the advisory panel or committee as outlined in the *Framework Document*. At this stage, Donelle had not yet come forward to the diocesan authorities and, while Monsignor O'Callaghan was aware of the existence of Edana, he did not yet know her name.

9.73 There were only four members of the committee present at this meeting, the chairman, Fr Garrett who was the Limerick delegate, Monsignor O'Callaghan, the secretary who was a Cloyne priest and one lay member. There are considerable differences between what is recorded in Monsignor O'Callaghan's note of the meeting and what is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. It is notable that Monsignor O'Callaghan was present at the subsequent meeting when these minutes were approved.

9.74 According to the minutes, cases involving two priests were discussed at this meeting:

"The first involved a priest against whom allegations had been made about 1995. The matter was resolved to the satisfaction of the various parties and the priest is currently in restricted ministry. Recently a religious sister wrote to Mgr. O'Callaghan concerning the priest indicating continuing disquiet for one complainant. The issue under discussion and on which advice was sought from the committee was whether the priest ought to be left in his present ministry or considered for promotion to parish priest. The meeting agreed that the priest ought to remain in his current ministry."

9.75 It is not clear what exactly the members of the committee were told about the complaints. Monsignor O'Callaghan's note of the meeting records that two girls had submitted formal complaints and there was also the girl who had been speaking to the nun. The boy was not mentioned. *"There is compelling evidence of inappropriate behaviour with a number of girls in their*

later teens.” Fr Garrett, the chairman of the committee confirmed, in evidence to the Commission, that the committee had been told that the 1995 complaint (Ailis’s complaint) had been resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned and that they were not initially told about the other complaints. The committee does not seem to have been told that, not only was the 1995 complaint not resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned, but that Ailis was pursuing civil proceedings and had reported to the Gardaí in January 2005. Monsignor O’Callaghan argues that the committee was told of other complaints. Whether this is so or not, the fact remains that the minutes of the meeting show that the committee was misinformed about Ailis’s situation and Monsignor O’Callaghan did not correct this.

9.76 Monsignor O’Callaghan’s note of the meeting does not mention the question of promoting Fr Ronat. It says that “*The Committee advises that he continue in his restricted ministry as heretofore*”. It also says that the committee agreed that the decision to allow restricted ministry was a benign judgement on the basis of what had emerged.

Removal from ministry, November 2005

9.77 On 25 November 2005, Bishop Magee wrote to Fr Ronat withdrawing his faculties for ministering in the Diocese of Cloyne. The bishop said he was not to engage in any ministry, public or private and he could say mass privately in his house and there only. Fr Ronat told the Commission that he had no recollection of being told that he could say mass only in his house. However, he also told the Commission that he spoke to Monsignor O’Callaghan about the letter so it seems likely that he did receive Bishop Magee’s letter.

9.78 Bishop Magee told the Commission that he acted after he knew of Donelle’s complaint because “*the allegation was very clear. She had a diary of notes detailing the allegation ... it was a clear case of child abuse*”. He said that he immediately removed Fr Ronat from ministry, even before referring the matter to the inter-diocesan case management committee. Bishop Magee said he “*should have*” referred this case to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in Rome but did not because of Fr Ronat’s denials. It is not clear to the Commission why Fr Ronat’s denial of an allegation should be a factor in a reference to Rome particularly when there

was clear evidence of child sexual abuse and evidence of abuse in the confessional. Bishop Magee told the Commission that Fr Ronat's denials resulted in the slowing down of the investigation. He said an added factor in the delay in referring to Rome was that other allegations soon emerged and it was decided to conclude the investigation into all complaints against Fr Ronat before referring to Rome.

9.79 When Fr Ronat was stood down from ministry in 2005, he was not asked to stop wearing clerical dress; this was not done until 2008. Bishop Magee said this was not considered in the diocese before that time. He said he had never heard the issue raised at meetings of the Irish Bishops' Conference. No public announcement was made. When asked why, Monsignor O'Callaghan said he disapproved of the policy of making public announcements. This practice ensured that only a small group of people were aware of Fr Ronat's changed status. It also allowed Fr Ronat to continue to present himself to the general public as a priest in good standing.

9.80 A few days later, Fr Ronat contacted Monsignor O'Callaghan and offered to resign on grounds of ill health. In effect, this offer was accepted although there is no formal record of this. Bishop Magee told his parish priest that there were further complaints and that he was being removed from ministry. The parish priest was asked to monitor Fr Ronat.

Another unidentified complainant, 2005

9.81 In November 2005, another unidentified woman rang Monsignor O'Callaghan and told him that she had been abused by Fr Ronat in 1978 when she was 18 years old. She said that she had telephoned Fr Ronat who denied everything. Monsignor O'Callaghan invited her to come and see him and he would see his way to help her. She telephoned again but again declined to give her name. Monsignor O'Callaghan offered to pay for the counselling she was undertaking but she said this was not necessary.

Inter-diocesan case management advisory committee, December 2005

9.82 The inter-diocesan case management advisory committee again considered the case at its December 2005 meeting. The minutes record:

"A priest who had been in limited ministry is now ill and will probably be retired. A complainant has been to the Gardai and will make a

statement to them in due course. It was reported that two more complainants will be presenting to the Gardai but no one has reported in person to the Diocesan Designated person as yet.”

9.83 There is no indication that the members of the committee were aware that they had already discussed Fr Ronat at their September meeting. At this stage, four complainants had been to the Gardaí. The minutes suggest that the committee was informed of the imminent retirement and the complaints. They do not seem to have been informed that he had been removed from ministry. There is no evidence that the committee was asked for its views on the management of the case. Monsignor O’Callaghan told the Commission that the minutes of the meetings are not an account of everything that went on. He said it was agreed that decisions taken would be recorded but not the detail of the discussion.

Garda investigation, 2006

9.84 Meanwhile, the garda investigation in relation to Ailis, who had made a complaint to them in January 2005, was continuing. In January 2006, the Gardaí met Monsignor O’Callaghan and told him they wished to interview various diocesan personnel including himself and Bishop Magee.

9.85 Monsignor O’Callaghan took advice from the solicitor and from the retired garda who was a member of the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee about how to deal with these interviews. The advice, as transmitted by Monsignor O’Callaghan to the people concerned, was that *“each should make himself available for interview and on request sign a statement which should be minimal”*. Monsignor O’Callaghan added a handwritten note *“Minimal is the key in any statement”*. (Emphasis in original.) The further advice, also as transmitted by Monsignor O’Callaghan, was that *“The Bishop should admit that the complaint was received, procedures were put in place, even though the allegation was strenuously denied a decision was made to restrict the ministry of [Ronat]. (If the Garda raises the question of possible other complaints the response should be that if he has any evidence we would be concerned to know about it)”*. Monsignor O’Callaghan further said that the ex garda who was a member of the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee *“was concerned that we be seen to co-operate – his hope is that the DPP will act as in [Caelan’s] case”*.

Donelle meets Monsignor O'Callaghan, February 2006

9.86 Donelle, the fourth complainant, met Monsignor O'Callaghan in February 2006. She told the Commission that, initially, she thought he was quite sympathetic but she later changed her mind. It was clear to her from the start that he knew of other complaints about Fr Ronat:

“He said that there were always complaints about him, but he almost laughed them off: Oh, sure, we have had kind of rumblings and rumours about Fr [Ronat] for years, girls falling in love with him and falling out of love with him and having crushes on him. It was made very, kind of, the girls were the problem anyway. And I sort of said: As far as when? And he actually mentioned the date 1981. He can deny it all he likes but I actually wrote it down.”

9.87 Monsignor O'Callaghan denies that he said that there were rumours dating back to 1981. He told the Commission that he was not aware of any such rumours and he could not, therefore, have stated this.

9.88 Monsignor O'Callaghan told Donelle that Fr Ronat was on restricted ministry. She later met Bishop Magee who also told her that there had been other complaints. She asked about the monitoring of Fr Ronat and was told he was being monitored by his former parish priest. She pointed out that he was actually in the USA at the time of the meeting. She said that Bishop Magee raised the questions of drink and hypnosis with her. Bishop Magee disputes that he had any knowledge of Fr Ronat's use of hypnosis but he agrees that he would have raised the question of drink.

Inter-diocesan case management advisory committee, February 2006

9.89 The case was discussed again at the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee meeting in February 2006. Fr Ronat was described in the minutes as being “*in limited ministry*”; he was, in fact, supposed to have been removed from ministry in November 2005. The meeting was told that another complaint had been made, that both complainants were aged 12 or 13 at the time of the alleged abuse, that the Gardaí were involved and that more complaints may emerge. There is no evidence that the committee was asked for or gave any recommendations.

Fr Ronat's "retirement"

9.90 In February 2006, Monsignor O'Callaghan wrote to Fr Ronat warning him against accepting a public gesture from a voluntary organisation to mark his retirement. The letter notes that "*Some of the complainants are already highly sensitive that the Diocese seems to have ignored their concerns by allowing you to be seen as a priest in good standing*". Monsignor O'Callaghan said that he had spoken to the bishop and the bishop ordered that Fr Ronat decline any such offer and, if necessary, he would issue a canonical precept to that effect.

9.91 A local newsletter noted, in its Spring 2006 edition, that "*our beloved dedicated senior curate*" had to retire from active ministry for health reasons.

9.92 In March 2006, Bishop Magee met Fr Ronat at the latter's request. Fr Ronat denied any improper relationship with Donelle. He said that he was in a state of limbo even though nothing had been proven against him. He said the proceeds of the voluntary organisation fundraising would be given to him privately; he could not stop them. Bishop Magee told him that he would have to report the allegations to Rome. There was some discussion, but no decision, about his future housing arrangements. Bishop Magee told him that there would have to be a system of control and monitoring wherever he went. Bishop Magee still did not report the case to Rome at this time.

Activity by Gardaí

9.93 Meanwhile, the Gardaí were pursuing their inquiries. Fr Ronat's solicitor arranged for medical assessments to be carried out. In May 2006, a report from his GP said that Fr Ronat was suffering from chronic sero-negative myalgia: "*This condition has been recurring and he is often confined to bed for lengthy periods. At times he would be confined to his house for up to three to four months*".

9.94 Fr Ronat's solicitor also arranged for a psychiatric assessment to establish his capacity to be interviewed by Gardaí. This was carried out in June 2006. The psychiatrist described his basic problem as "*chronic fatigue syndrome*". He said that he was suffering from this condition for 15 – 17 years. The psychiatrist outlined the problems that could arise if he was

questioned and recommended that there be breaks in questioning if he was distressed.

9.95 In June 2006, Monsignor O'Callaghan again met Donelle. She was very angry that Fr Ronat had not been brought to justice. Monsignor O'Callaghan pointed out to her that "*with so much troubles blooming ahead for him he must be in a living hell - a life sentence in effect*". She was concerned that he was evading the Gardaí by using medical certificates and was around the town in public view.

9.96 In frustration, Donelle then started civil proceedings. Fr Ronat was interviewed by the Gardaí in November 2006 in respect of Donelle's complaint. He denied the abuse.

9.97 In February 2007, the DPP decided not to prosecute in Donelle's case. He concluded that, while there may have been an inappropriate relationship between Donelle and Fr Ronat, there was no evidence that it was criminal. Donelle was very annoyed at the failure to prosecute and she later sought, unsuccessfully, to have the case reopened. She was complimentary of Detective Garda Colman Murphy's handling of the case.

Fr Ronat's housing arrangements, 2007

9.98 In spite of the efforts of his former parish priest, it is clear that Fr Ronat was not being monitored in any meaningful way during 2006. It is also clear that the bishop's control over him was limited. In January 2007, Bishop Magee discovered that Fr Ronat had moved into a vacant parish house in August 2006. He did this against the bishop's express wishes and the specific instructions of the parish priest of the area. Bishop Magee said he was concerned about the isolated position of the house and the difficulties this would pose for monitoring. Fr Ronat told the Commission that his former parish priest, who was in charge of monitoring him, knew of the move and did not object. The local parish priest did not know of the reason for his retirement when he moved in. He was told in January 2007 and was asked to be his support priest. Bishop Magee remonstrated with Fr Ronat but allowed him to continue occupying the house. He wanted a caretaker's agreement signed but it is not clear if this occurred. Bishop Magee wrote to Monsignor O'Callaghan saying that it appeared they would have to work with the

situation as it was and that a monitoring system must be put in place. Monsignor O'Callaghan replied saying that the parish priest of his former parish was to continue in his monitoring role and that the parish priest of the area into which he had moved should be asked to fill the role of support priest. The parish priest of his former parish told the Commission that he was more limited in his monitoring of Fr Ronat once he moved away from the parish.

9.99 Monsignor O'Callaghan met Fr Ronat in March 2007 and subsequently wrote to him. The letter dealt with the issue of his behaviour in moving to the new house against the express orders of the bishop. It also stated that the diocese was not required to fund his legal costs. Monsignor O'Callaghan also told Fr Ronat that the civil and canonical processes operated on parallel lines. Monsignor O'Callaghan told Fr Ronat that he had been authorised to proceed with a preliminary investigation under canon 1717. (The Commission notes that an instruction to conduct such an investigation was first issued 12 years earlier in 1995 and was never concluded.) Monsignor O'Callaghan explained to Fr Ronat that this investigation prepares the way for the formal judicial process which the bishop is empowered to put in place under canon 1718. He then added "*...it is best for reasons of expediency to hold over the question of initiating the formal judicial process while the civil law was taking its course*".

Edana complains to Gardaí, May 2007

9.100 Edana, the fifth complainant, complained to the Gardaí in May 2007. Fr Ronat was interviewed by the Gardaí in October 2007. He denied the allegations.

9.101 In February 2008, the DPP decided not to prosecute in this case. The DPP considered that there was not sufficient evidence to warrant a prosecution.

Inter-diocesan case management advisory committee, September 2007

9.102 Fr Ronat's case was mentioned at the September 2007 meeting of the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee. Monsignor O'Callaghan told the committee that there was a civil action against Fr Ronat, that the DPP was not proceeding and that another allegation against him had

been made to the Gardaí. There is no evidence of any discussion or recommendations by the committee.

Donelle complains to Archbishop Clifford, 2008

9.103 On Good Friday in 2008, Donelle rang Archbishop Dermot Clifford of Cashel and Emly. She told the Commission that she did this because she found her dealings with Bishop Magee and Monsignor O'Callaghan very unsatisfactory so she decided to go to the person who was, in her words, "*next up the pyramid*". Archbishop Clifford told the Commission that she told him that Fr Ronat was turning up at supermarkets and funerals and that he was not being controlled by Bishop Magee and Monsignor O'Callaghan. Archbishop Clifford, although he was concerned about trespassing on Bishop Magee's territory and had no jurisdiction over him, arranged for the diocesan delegate in his diocese to contact her. The Cashel and Emly delegate had a number of conversations with the complainant. The complainant and the delegate each gave the Commission an account of these conversations. The Cashel and Emly delegate told the Commission that his primary concern was to establish if the statutory authorities had been informed and he understood from his conversation with Donelle that they had been. Donelle's concern was on what was being done about Fr Ronat. She was under the impression that the Archbishop had some supervisory power over Bishop Magee. This is not the case (see Chapter 3). She thought that they were all covering up for each other. The Commission has not found any evidence of a cover up. The delegate reported to Archbishop Clifford and the Archbishop contacted Monsignor O'Callaghan. Monsignor O'Callaghan told the Archbishop that Fr Ronat was out of ministry but was a most difficult man to control.

9.104 When Archbishop Clifford became Apostolic Administrator (in 2009) Donelle said she rang him again. The Archbishop does not recall that telephone call but he did meet Donelle in April 2009. At this meeting, Donelle castigated him for doing nothing for her. He explained that he had had no power at the time she contacted him in 2008 and told her what he was doing in 2009. He also met Fr Ronat and issued a precept placing further restrictions on him, including an injunction not to wear clerical dress.

2008

9.105 Monsignor O'Callaghan had a telephone conversation with Fr Ronat in January 2008. This was mainly concerned with the civil case being pursued by Donelle. Fr Ronat was not very forthcoming but did express the view that the case would not go to court but, as Monsignor O'Callaghan noted, he did not provide any reasons for this opinion. Also in January 2008, Monsignor O'Callaghan informed the HSE about Donelle's complaint. This had been made to the diocese in November 2005. During 2007, the question of the diocese's failure to report to the health authorities had been raised (see Chapter 6).

9.106 In February 2008, Mr Ian Elliott of the National Board for Safeguarding Children became involved in investigating the handling of child sexual abuse complaints in Cloyne. His general involvement is described in Chapter 6. His involvement resulted in significant changes being made in the handling of the many complaints against Fr Ronat. Donelle met Mr Elliott in April 2008. Among other things, she told him that Fr Ronat was still dressing as a priest, was officiating at weddings and on the altar for funerals and was "*a very present figure in the community*". Fr Ronat told the Commission that he was dressing as a priest but was not officiating at weddings and funerals. He said that he was not on the altar for funerals but would sit in the pews with other priests.

9.107 In September 2008, Monsignor O'Callaghan met the HSE to discuss a number of cases. According to his note of the meeting, he told the HSE that Fr Ronat was being monitored by a parish priest and that he himself remained in constant contact with him. There is no documentary evidence that Monsignor O'Callaghan was in contact with either Fr Ronat or the parish priest. Monsignor O'Callaghan told the Commission that he did maintain contact with the parish priest but accepts that these contacts did not constitute an adequate monitoring of Fr Ronat. The child care manager from the HSE, Mr Mike van Aswegen, told the Commission that he understood that Monsignor O'Callaghan had said that he (the Monsignor) took the monitoring role for all the priests in question. He said that Monsignor O'Callaghan seemed vague about the details of the monitoring. Mr van Aswegen then arranged for Monsignor O'Callaghan to have talks with the HSE team leader about a more structured approach to monitoring.

Change in handling

9.108 In November 2008, Edana made a civil claim against the diocese. The matter was referred to the delegate and the solicitor who was the diocese's legal advisor and a member of the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee. By this stage, Fr Bermingham had been appointed as the delegate. He immediately notified this complaint to the Gardaí and the HSE.

9.109 The solicitor wrote to Fr Bermingham as follows:

"The success of the Diocese of Cloyne in responding to such complaints in the past has been grounded in an immediate pastoral response offering to arrange professional counselling and to have the cost of it defrayed (by an independent, charitable trust). This is very difficult where the first contact is made through a Solicitor but nevertheless, the offer, even if rejected, shows the Christian emphasis at the heart of the Diocesan response.

I need to respond urgently and would be glad if you would reflect on the following and contact me.

The first thing that needs to be clarified is what protocol is operative. If it has not been superseded by enactment of a new protocol, the Green Book is operative. I do not know if "Our Children Our Church" was ever formally approved and made operative. As you will recall, a new draft document in various forms has been in circulation for the last six or eight months, I am not aware that it has been finalised, approved, and made operative."

9.110 The solicitor went on to make other comments on the handling of the case and the difficulties of dealing with Fr Ronat and asked that a meeting of the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee be held. The solicitor also sent this letter to Bishop Magee.

9.111 Fr Bermingham advised Bishop Magee in detail, and accurately, about his (the bishop's) responsibilities under the *Our Children, Our Church* procedures which had been introduced in 2005.

9.112 Among other things, Fr Bermingham told Bishop Magee that he (the bishop) should meet Fr Ronat and direct him not to get in contact with Edana or her family. This direction should be by means of a precept. Fr Bermingham said that it had been brought to his attention by Mr Elliott that Fr Ronat had, in other cases, paid visits to complainants accompanied by another priest. Mr Elliott had been told this by Donelle, the fourth complainant, when he met her in April 2008. She said that she had been told this at a meeting with Bishop Magee and Monsignor O'Callaghan. Monsignor O'Callaghan told the Commission that he had no knowledge of Fr Ronat visiting complainants accompanied by another priest and so this information could not have come from him. Bishop Magee also said that he had no knowledge of this. The Commission is aware that Fr Ronat had visited some complainants but has no independent evidence that he had been accompanied by another priest.

9.113 Fr Bermingham went on to say that Mr Ó Catháin had written to him suggesting that the inter-diocesan case management advisory committee be convened to discuss the case. Fr Bermingham made the following points in respect of this request:

- The civil legal response should be kept entirely separate from the following of Church procedures and the canonical investigation.
- The case management committee included people who should not properly be giving such advice, for example, the diocesan solicitor and a psychologist who had assessed the accused in relation to a previous complaint.
- Recent events had given rise to strong feelings among the committee members and any such meeting would provide a forum to vent these rather than deal in a calm manner with the case in hand. This is a reference to the draft report issued by Mr Elliott to which the members of the committee took serious exception (see Chapter 6).
- He (Fr Bermingham) would find it very difficult to work with the committee in such circumstances.
- The National Board for Safeguarding Children had offered to act, through its CEO, Mr Elliott, as the Cloyne diocesan advisory committee pending the establishment of a new committee under

the forthcoming guidance document and Fr Bermingham wanted him to so act.

9.114 Fr Bermingham then reminded Bishop Magee that he had established a canonical investigation under Monsignor O'Callaghan in March 1995 and that this was put in abeyance pending civil proceedings. Fr Bermingham said that, as soon as the current civil proceedings were concluded, the canonical investigation should proceed "*but with personnel who have not had any previous involvement in the cases*".

9.115 Fr Bermingham offered counselling to Edana.

9.116 Bishop Magee and Fr Bermingham discussed the issues arising and Bishop Magee decided that changes needed to be made in the way complaints were handled in the diocese. Accordingly he replied to the solicitor as follows:

"I agree wholeheartedly that the response of the diocese should be a pastoral one in accordance with the policies and procedures at present in force.

Having given great consideration to these matters and having received advice from my brother bishops, I find it necessary to make some changes in the manner of dealing with such complaints.

Firstly, I am advised that it is best to keep the areas of pastoral response, canonical investigation and civil proceedings entirely separate. The reporting procedures and pastoral response have already been put in place in this case. The question of liability is the matter on which I wish you to represent me in this and other cases. It is with this intention of keeping these areas of the case separate, that I do not intend to convene a meeting of the Case Management Committee in this case. The case does not provide circumstances which differ from those already occurring.

In view of the forthcoming Standards and Guidance document, a new form of Advisory Panel will need to be formed for the diocese and I will contact the members of the committee regarding this in due course.

Fr. Bermingham is dealing with the reporting issues and, together with Dean Goold, will follow through on the Church guidelines.

I shall be grateful if you will prepare a response to [solicitor for Edana] in the manner which you replied in other cases regarding liability.”

9.117 Mr Elliott wrote to Fr Bermingham confirming that he had followed the correct procedures. He added that *“as there seems to be a lack of clarity concerning both the Canonical process and whether any information has been forwarded to the CDF in Rome, in relation to [Ronat], I believe it is appropriate to review and reactivate these two processes”*.

9.118 Bishop Magee then wrote to Fr Ronat informing him of the civil action by Edana. He specifically directed him not to have any contact with her or her family while the proceedings were going on. He also said:

“In view of this further case against you, I wish to restate that you are not to exercise the ministry of a priest in public in any form. This prohibition includes the attendance at any part of Funeral Services in the role of a priest. If you wish to attend any part of funeral or other public liturgies, you may only do so privately as a member of the congregation and you should not place yourself among the clergy. In view of these restrictions on your exercise of the priesthood, I direct also that you do not in future wear clerical dress in public. You may continue to celebrate Mass privately and without the participation of the faithful in your residence and in no other place.”

9.119 These instructions were incorporated in a formal precept soon afterwards. A new supervisor was also appointed as the previous supervisor had retired.

Publication of Elliott report

9.120 In December 2008, the Elliott report was published by the Diocese of Cloyne (see Chapter 6).

Sixth complainant, Fenella,⁶⁰ 2009

9.121 Another adult complainant, Fenella, came forward in January 2009. She had first met Fr Ronat when she was in the novitiate preparing to become a nun. He used to have lunch there. While there she had befriended Ailis and the girl who Ailis thought might also have been abused. Fenella was aware that they were allowed to drink and smoke at Fr Ronat's house. In 1990, after she left the novitiate she went to Fr Ronat for advice. She alleged that he gave her drink and then seriously sexually assaulted her. She was 21 years old at the time. In 1992, she had told the superior of the novitiate. This nun accompanied her to see Fr Bermingham in 2009.

9.122 Fr Bermingham recognised that this was not child sexual abuse but, nevertheless, he offered her any help he could provide and suggested that she should report the matter to the Gardaí. He offered to accompany her to the Gardaí. She did report to the Gardaí soon after.

9.123 Fr Ronat denied any sexual assault took place. The Gardaí recommended that Fr Ronat be prosecuted for sexual assault under Section 6 of the *Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1935*. The DPP decided not to prosecute. Delay was a major factor in this – the DPP's letter points out that *"the same considerations as apply in cases in respect of delay involving children do not apply to those involving adults"*.

9.124 An anonymous complaint of sexual abuse by Fr Ronat was received at the end of January 2009. There were no details given and it is not known what age the complainant was. Also in January, Bishop Magee wrote to Mr Ó Catháin saying he wished to reach settlements in a number of the outstanding civil cases, including that of Donelle.

9.125 The government made the decision to refer the Diocese of Cloyne to this Commission in January 2009.

Referral to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

9.126 At the end of January 2009, Fr Ronat's case was finally referred to the

⁶⁰ This is a pseudonym.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. The bishop's *votum*⁶¹ included a short description of all the allegations then known. It recognised that, while Fr Ronat's name had not been publicly linked with the allegations, the Elliott report "*can be linked to him by many people without difficulty*". It also stated that it had come to the bishop's attention in recent days that he had celebrated mass in a private house at which young people were present in blatant disregard of the restrictions placed on him. The bishop asked that "*a derogation from prescription be granted so that a penal judicial process may be initiated, or that he be dismissed from the clerical state ex officio et in poenam*".⁶²

9.127 Fr Bermingham travelled to Rome to meet the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was advised that the full files on Fr Ronat (and the other two priests whose cases had also been referred) would need to be sent to Rome. In February 2009, Bishop Magee wrote to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith undertaking to provide the full files as soon as possible. He said that "*as the documentation which we have appears to be as yet incomplete I will send them to you in the coming week...*".

Seventh complainant, Keita,⁶³ February 2009

9.128 In February 2009, another complainant, Keita, came forward to the diocese and the Gardaí. She alleged that she had been abused when she was aged 15 in 1973. She suggested that there was hypnosis involved. This was the first time this was mentioned to the investigating garda. A number of complainants have said that it was mentioned by Bishop Magee but he denies this. Fr Bermingham reported to the Gardaí and the HSE in accordance with the procedures and offered counselling to Keita.

9.129 The Gardaí recommended prosecution. The DPP declined to prosecute on the basis that the alleged incident occurred 35 years earlier and a prosecution would be unsafe based on the available evidence. Keita told the Commission that, despite the claimed restrictions on his ministry and despite the claimed monitoring of his behaviour, Fr Ronat had celebrated mass in her family home in either June 2006 or 2007. Fr Ronat told the

⁶¹ Prayer or wish; it is the word used when the bishop applies to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for some action to be taken.

⁶² Involuntary laicisation approved personally by the Pope.

⁶³ This is a pseudonym.

Commission that he did say mass in her house but he did not realise he was restricted from doing so as it was not a public mass. He said that he had said one other mass in a private house and this was with the permission of the local parish priest.

9.130 Bishop Magee wrote to Fr Ronat telling him of the two recent allegations. He also told him of the diocese's plans for reviewing and reassessing all child abuse complaints and sought his co-operation with this process. Bishop Magee issued a further precept dealing with contact with the complainants and the limits on Fr Ronat's ministry.

9.131 In March 2009, a new supervisor was appointed. The full files on Fr Ronat were sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Eighth and ninth complainants, Muirín⁶⁴ and Naveen⁶⁵

9.132 In May 2009, the eighth complainant, Muirín, made a statement to the Gardaí complaining that she had been abused by another priest of the diocese. This was the first complaint against this other priest to a Church or State authority and so he does not come within the remit of this Commission. She also complained that she had been sexually assaulted on one occasion by Fr Ronat when she was about 14. The Gardaí notified Fr Bermingham of both complaints. They also notified the HSE.

9.133 Meanwhile, Fr Bermingham had been informed of a complaint by the ninth complainant, Naveen, a few days before he heard from the Gardaí. This had come through the National Board for Safeguarding Children. In June 2009, Naveen made a statement to the Gardaí. She complained that she had been abused by Fr Ronat when she was about 16. She also complained about the other priest who is not in remit. Fr Bermingham notified the Gardaí and the HSE. Naveen told the Commission that she had told a diocesan priest about the abuse in 1992. The diocesan priest told the Commission that she had told him that a priest had made obscene remarks to her while she was in confession or while she was at a retreat to the effect that he was sexually aroused by her presence. He said she told him the explicit terms of the remark which was made. She did not tell him the name of the

⁶⁴ This is a pseudonym.

⁶⁵ This is a pseudonym.

priest and he did not ask. He did not see this as a complaint. The Commission cannot understand how a priest could regard such a comment made in the confessional to be other than a gross violation which ought to be seriously addressed.

Tenth and eleventh complainants

9.134 Another adult complainant also came forward in 2009. In 2010, The Commission was informed by the Gardaí that another complainant had complained that she had been abused as a child.

HSE involvement

9.135 Ailis, the first complainant, was treated by a health board psychologist in the 1990s but there does not appear to have been any social worker involvement then. She was also treated by the health board psychiatric services in the 2000s but, again, there was no social worker involvement. HSE social workers contacted her in 2005 after her sister made them aware of the alleged abuse. A social worker accompanied Ailis when she made her statement to the Gardaí in April 2005. The Gardaí formally notified the HSE of Ailis's complaint in May 2005 in accordance with the *Children First* procedures. There is no evidence that the HSE made any inquiries about Fr Ronat.

9.136 The HSE was not aware of any other complaints until 2008 because, until then, it was not the practice of the diocese to report complaints to the health authorities. The social workers contacted a family whom Fr Ronat visited in order to ensure that they were aware of the risk to their children.

Commission assessment

Diocese

9.137 This case clearly illustrates the failure by the Diocese of Cloyne to deal properly with allegations of child sexual abuse up to the year 2008. Not only were the procedures, voluntarily agreed by the diocese, not followed but two of the complaints – those of Ailis in 1995 and Bretta in relation to Matthew in 1996, were not classified as child sexual abuse. The failure rests mainly on Bishop Magee and Monsignor O'Callaghan. However, at least three priests of the diocese appear to have ignored complaints. Bishop Magee mainly left

the handling of complaints to Monsignor O'Callaghan and did not exercise his authority over Fr Ronat in any effective way.

9.138 In the case of Ailis, more energy was expended on establishing that it was not child sexual abuse than on dealing with the problem of having a priest who allegedly engaged in, at minimum, exploitative behaviour while engaging in counselling.

9.139 There was plenty of evidence that she was well under 18 when her interaction with Fr Ronat began. Even if it was not child sexual abuse, it was a clear breach of professional boundaries which, in any counselling profession, would constitute professional misconduct.

9.140 Complaints were not reported to the Gardaí when they should have been. They were not reported to the health board/HSE by the diocese until 2008. The advisory committee/inter-diocesan case management advisory committee was not given adequate information on which to base its advice. In fact, it is not at all clear that it was asked for advice; it appears to be more the case that it was told what had been decided.

9.141 There were no proper Church investigations of the complaints. The canonical process which was ordered in 1995 was effectively stalled for 14 years and does not seem to have been completed.

Restricted ministry

9.142 The term 'restricted ministry' is used to describe the limitations in respect of young people which were placed on Fr Ronat in 1998. The Commission does not accept that there was any real restriction on his ministry. He remained the senior curate in the parish, he carried out all the usual priestly functions, he was involved in confirmation ceremonies and the only people who were aware of the 'restrictions' were himself and the priests of the parish. The people of the parish were aware that he had health problems and assumed that his absence from any activity or event related to that. Bishop Magee told the Commission that "*In my heart of hearts I was not happy with the restrictive ministry ... It was always a problem to me. How can you monitor a person like that?*". Nevertheless, he continued with it as he said that it was recommended by the advisory committee. The bishop

acknowledged that there were no formal monitoring reports but, whenever he was in the parish, he would speak to the parish priest about it.

9.143 Monsignor O'Callaghan told the Commission that he believed most of the priests of the diocese knew about the restrictions on his ministry: "*any kind of gossip would move around fairly quickly*". It is, however, very clear that the people of the parish were not aware of the restrictions.

Retirement

9.144 While Fr Ronat was removed from ministry in late 2005, he was allowed to present himself as having retired on health grounds. He continued to wear clerical dress. This meant that, again, there was no public knowledge of his real situation.

The Gardaí

9.145 The female complainants who gave evidence to the Commission were very pleased with the way they were dealt with by the Gardaí. There was considerable praise for Detective Garda Colman Murphy. The Commission considers that he in particular and the other Gardaí involved carried out thorough investigations while being sensitive to the needs of the complainants.

9.146 Matthew considered that he had been well treated by the Gardaí but was surprised that they did not communicate with him after he made his statement. The Gardaí have given three different explanations of what happened in this case. They said that:

- They did not proceed because the statement did not disclose a criminal offence;
- They did not proceed because Matthew did not want to do so, which suggests that it was a criminal matter;
- The investigation was on-going.

The Commission does not accept any of these explanations; the statement seems to have been put in a drawer and forgotten about until raised by this investigation.

9.147 The Commission is surprised that no attempt was made by the Gardaí, when investigating the complaint by Caelan, the third complainant, to establish with the diocesan authorities if there were any other similar complaints.

The DPP

9.148 The complainants are deeply unhappy that there have been no prosecutions in this case. Some are furious. The Commission recognises that there are legal issues relating to age and consent in most of the cases.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ A full description of the law on sexual offences is in Appendix 2 of this Commission's *Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin*.

Appendix 1 The Elliott report and responses to it

Part 1: The Elliott report

The following is the final Elliott report which was published on the Diocese of Cloyne website in December 2008. Fr A is Fr Caden (see Chapter 21). Fr B is Fr Ronat (see Chapter 9).

“The Elliott Report

Strictly Confidential

Report on the Management of Two Child Protection Cases in the Diocese of Cloyne

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a review of two child protection cases which arose within the Diocese of Cloyne. The review was primarily records based but was supplemented by interviews with Bishop Magee, his delegate Monsignor O’Callaghan, and Dean Goold. Each case involved members of the clergy as the alleged perpetrators. Child protection practice was examined through the case records provided by the Diocese of Cloyne and found to be inadequate and in some respects dangerous. There was no evidence that risk had been appropriately identified or managed, thereby potentially exposing vulnerable young people to further harm. Deficits in practice are identified and recommendations listed to address these.

Please note that the allegations referred to in this report are not proven and this report makes no determination as to their veracity.

The Identification of the Two Cases

1. On the 15 February 2008, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church (NBSC) met with two senior officials within the Department of Health and Children. The purpose of the meeting was to update the Department on the ongoing initiatives that the NBSC had embarked upon in order to embed best practice in the field of safeguarding children within the Church.
2. At the conclusion of that meeting, the CEO was informed that a complaint had been made to the Minister regarding the practice of the Diocese of Cloyne in a

transferring to a Diocese in America was considered not viable because of the allegations.

10. In January 2003, ZW and her son V, who was then twenty one years old, returned again to complain about B. Further detail is noted of the alleged abusive sexual relationship between B and V. The matter was referred to the Gardai for the first time for investigation. Consideration was given and noted in the file to the possible withdrawal from ministry of B.

11. On 17th November 2005 NM, a new complainant made contact with the Diocese and alleged serious sexual abuse by B. She alleged that the abuse began when she was thirteen years of age and involved full sexual intercourse. She also alleged that the abuse lasted until she was eighteen years of age and B was frequently seen by the victim in the community wearing priest's clothes. The matter was reported to the Gardai for investigation.

12. On 13th January 2006, Monsignor O'Callaghan wrote to Bishop Magee regarding how he might respond to the request from the Gardai investigating the complaints against B. It is clear from the papers contained in the file that the policy of the Diocese in their contacts with the Gardai was to give "minimal" information. In particular, it is indicated that no information was to be volunteered in respect of any previous complaints involving this priest.

Interview with Bishop Magee and Monsignor O'Callaghan

1. On 6th May 2008, the Chairman and CEO of the NBSC met with Bishop Magee and Monsignor O'Callaghan to address questions to them arising from the review of the case papers. Eight questions had been identified for discussion. These comprised:-

- What is the reporting policy for Child Abuse in the Diocese of Cloyne?
- How many priests are currently living in the Diocese against whom a child protection allegation has been made?
- What information would normally be given to the Gardai or the HSE when making a child protection referral?
- What preventative actions would normally be taken when information comes to light that a priest is accused of causing harm to a child or young person?

THE CASE OF Father [Ronat]

2. The request for this file was at very short notice. Otherwise a time-line would have been provided. This was admitted on the handing over of the file.
4. The victim's age at 18 was a factor but that did not affect the Pastoral Care Policy being put in place.
6. This complaint was certainly a cause of concern to the Diocese as totally inappropriate in the context of a sacrament. It did not matter whether or not that amounted to formal sex abuse in terms of age or otherwise. The complainant was seriously disturbed by the memory. Following on report to the Garda the DPP did not proceed.
8. [Ronat]'s solicitor was constantly and aggressively pressing for his return to full ministry. The Case Management Committee discussed the context on how to answer this in a way that would make sense to the solicitor. *No One* in the Committee regarded return to full ministry as an acceptable option.
9. These options had been raised by [Ronat] himself - He was particularly keen on transferring to an American Diocese where he had priest friends.
10. All this referred back to the situation described above at n.5.
12. Legal advice was to the effect that the Diocese, a party to civil proceedings, was not obliged to incriminate itself.

Interview with Bishop Magee and Monsignor O'Callaghan.

[Paragraph not in final report]. The minutes of the Committee barely mention the names of members and are expressed in summary form. The members were well qualified in their various disciplines and had a wealth of experience. They all engaged actively in the discussion of cases.

[3]. The letter forwarded to CEO by Bishops Magee and Murray on 2 November 2007 accepted that this was a pressing need. In that letter they requested guidance on how to proceed with meeting the concerns.

ASSESSMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICE.

1. The [Ronat] case has been far and away the most troubling in the Diocese, dating back to 1995 before the *Framework for a Church Response* was published. In ongoing discussions with HSE we are seeking guidance on how best practice operates in this context. It is evident that the particular circumstances of each case rules.
2. Our meetings with HSE and Garda in recent times have proved most helpful and informative. We have committed ourselves to an active partnership in meeting all issues of common concern.
4. As noted above the minutes do not provide a full picture of the discussions at committee meetings. For instance, the measures taken about removal from ministry and ongoing supervision of the accused would have focussed on the protection of children.
5. That is well understood by us and here we will depend on HSE experience for guidance.
6. The distinction between the advisory role of the Committee and the decision making role of the Bishop was well understood. The Committee, typically through the Designated Person, would revert to him when decisions needed to be taken.
9. The level of "preventative actions" is taken account of in 4 and 5 above.

CONCLUSIONS.

[2]. This perception should be put in the context of the measures taken by the Diocese in regard to removal from ministry, supervision of accused, appointment of Support Person and notification to the particular parish priest. This last intervention would have been most effective in our circumstances.

[3 & 4] We have already provided background in terms of the qualifications and levels of relevant experience of Committee members. We have explained above the standard procedures in place for minimising risk.

and Ronat case, 9.15–9.19, 9.27, 9.28, 9.54

handling of individual cases: Calder, 12.66, 12.70; Naal, 23.14–23.15; Ronat, 9.43, 9.108–9.118, 9.121–9.122, 9.127, 9.128, 9.133; Tarin, 16.17–16.18

Ronat case, 9.30–9.32, 9.33, 9.55, 9.75, 9.96, 9.99, 9.102, 9.105, 9.108, 9.113, 9.114, 9.116,
9.118, 9.124

individual cases: Caden, 21.55, 21.100; Drust, 15.29, 15.30–15.32; Ronat, 9.36, 9.47, 9.61, 9.97, 9.101, 9.123, 9.129, 9.147

individual cases: Caden, 21.72–21.81, 21.82, 21.91; Drust, 15.42; Naal, 23.11–23.13;
Ronat, 9.106, 9.112, 9.113

individual cases: Caden, 21.65–21.71; Calder, 12.74; Drust, 15–40–15.43; Moray, 13.9;
Naal, 23.21–23.24; Ronat, 9.36, 9.105, 9.132, 9.135–9.136; Zephan, 25.5

Ronat, 9.54, 9.72–9.76, 9.82–9.83, 9.89, 9.102, 9.108, 9.113

Ronat case, 9.2, 9.3, 9.8–9.10, 9.16, 9.18–9.20, 9.26, 9.27, 9.31, 9.41, 9.42, 9.48–9.50,
9.52–9.59, 9.64–9.66, 9.88, 9.92, 9.98, 9.103, 9.110–9.119, 9.128, 9.130;

Ronat case, 9.10, 9.13, 9.14, 9.15–9.19, 9.21, 9.25, 9.26–9.29, 9.62–9.64, 9.66, 9.85, 9.95, 9.99, 9.103, 9.105, 9.107, 9.137, 9.143; 2nd complainant, 9.37–9.47; 3rd complainant, 9.52–9.59; 4th complainant, 9.70, 9.86–9.88; 5th complainant, 9.71, 9.73–9.76; parish priest appointment, 9.48–9.50; reporting to Gardaí, 9.44–9.45; 'retirement,' 9.90; unidentified complainant, 9.81, 9.83

and Ronat case, 9.28, 9.32, 9.59, 9.113, 9.124

Ronat case, 9.22–9.29, 9.94

and Ronat case, 9.11–9.12, 9.15, 9.33