

4.5 FR SEAN FORTUNE (Deceased)

4.5.1 STEPHEN

Stephen alleged the following:

Stephen was a boarder in St Peter's in the 1970s and alleged sexual abuse by Sean Fortune who was a seminarian there at the time. Stephen was 13 years old when the abuse started. Inappropriate touching and sexually explicit conversations led to oral sex and masturbation and eventually, after 3 or 4 months, to full and violent rape. The first such rape occurred in a shower cubicle in St Peter's and subsequently five or six incidents occurred in a bedroom in the College. Sean Fortune made Stephen swear on a bible not to tell anyone and warned him that if he did, he would be expelled from St Peter's which would cause great hurt to his parents.

Close to the end of the school year, Stephen told the principal of St Peter's of the abuse. The school Principal reacted angrily to what Stephen said and refused to believe him, telling him that Sean Fortune was going to be a good priest and that if he persisted in saying those things about him, he would be thrown out of the college. Stephen dreaded going back to the college the following year. However, no further abuse occurred and he had no further contact with Sean Fortune and only minimal contact with the Principal. Stephen told the Inquiry that he continued to be affected by what had happened to him in his early days in school. He has now started counselling and is hopeful that that will help. Stephen contacted the Diocese in March 2003 and is pursuing a civil claim against Bishop Eamonn Walsh and the Diocese of Ferns.

4.5.2 MAURICE

Maurice alleged the following:

Maurice was a pupil in St Peter's secondary school whilst Sean Fortune was a seminarian. During nocturnal visits to the dormitory, Sean Fortune would masturbate himself whilst fondling Maurice. This happened three or four times. Maurice got to know Sean Fortune through his involvement with the Boy Scouts. As a result of what happened with Sean Fortune, Maurice engineered his own expulsion from St. Peter's. The effect of expulsion from a highly regarded boarding school on Maurice's life was significant.

4.5.3 DAVID

David alleged the following:

Whilst he was a Seminarian, Sean Fortune frequented the secondary school in St. Peter's because of his association with the boy scouts group in the school. David was a 17 year old student in St Peter's College and he went on a camping trip in early 1979 with the St Peter's College unit. David was rousing the patrols one morning. He opened a flap of a tent and found Sean Fortune lying on top of a scout and feeling his private parts. The boy in question told David that Fortune had abused many other boys as well. Some of the scouts wanted to report the incident to the President of the College at the time, but David asked them not to and they didn't.

David also reported that, on a trip to the Isle of Man in 1979, a scout leader told him that Sean Fortune had made advances towards him and that he believed that he made advances towards another leader as well. David reported a number of other incidents involving sexual advances and inappropriate behaviour by Fortune in a full report to the national headquarters of the Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland in December 1979. He told the Inquiry that he believed the scout leader at the time, Mr Joe Cuddy (deceased), gave the document to the rector of St Peter's, who in turn passed it on to Bishop Herlihy. The rector at the time does not recall receiving such a report. Two officials from the scouting movement confirmed to the Inquiry that they had made contact with Bishop Herlihy about Fr Fortune's behaviour in the boy scouts.

When posted to Belfast, Fr Fortune was prohibited from any contact with The Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland although he did form his own scout group which was independent of the CBSI.

4.5.4 CARL

Carl alleged the following:

Carl had two sons who were involved in the boy scouts in St Peter's College. In 1978, one of his sons told him that during a camping trip, Sean Fortune had abused or attempted to abuse some of the boys. At the same time, a neighbour reported to Carl that she was removing her sons from St Peter's because of the activities of Sean Fortune. Carl had a meeting with the then president of St Peter's and another senior staff member at the seminary. According to Carl, the president of the college refused to listen to what he had to say but the senior staff member was shocked and said that something would have to be done and some sort of investigation would have to take place. However, a year later, Sean Fortune was ordained and no action appeared to have been taken.

Carl said that at the time of speaking to the authorities in St Peter's, there were a lot of rumours circulating that Sean Fortune was interfering with children and, according to Carl, the *"dogs in the street seemed to know that he was a homosexual"*. Approximately a year after Fr Fortune was ordained, Carl went to see Bishop Herlihy about another matter and was asked whether he had an opinion on Sean Fortune. Carl said that he told Bishop Herlihy that Sean Fortune had abused his son and that he would never allow him into his house again. Bishop Herlihy made it clear to Carl that he had heard other complaints about Sean Fortune from Belfast and Dundalk.

4.5.5 DECLAN

Declan alleged the following:

In his evidence before the Inquiry, Declan described an incident that he alleges occurred at a scout camp in Duncannon in 1978 before Sean Fortune's ordination. During that camp, Fortune masturbated a boy until he ejaculated in front of a number of other boys. Sean Fortune treated it all as a prank. Declan told the Inquiry that everybody was shocked and appalled.

Declan described being in his home while his parents were on holiday and being cared for by his aunt and uncle. Fr Fortune invited him out and although Declan pleaded not to be made go, his aunt did not wish to refuse a priest and insisted that Declan go. Fr Fortune told his aunt that if they were late they would stay overnight in Poulfur which they did.

Sean Fortune told Declan to sleep in a single bed in his Fr Fortune's bedroom. Fr Fortune quickly brought the conversation around to homosexuality and spent the night flattering and attempting to physically assault and rape Declan over a ten hour period. Declan resisted a constant barrage of a sexual nature from Sean Fortune and demanded to be brought home the next day. Declan told his parents about what had occurred.

Declan's father was extremely angry and spoke with Bishop Herlihy about the incident. Declan's father did not raise the problem of Fr Fortune with Bishop Comiskey until the end of the 1980s.

4.5.6 CHARLES

Charles alleged the following:

In his statement to the Gardai, Charles alleged that in the late 1970s he was an altar boy at the Holy Rosary Church, Ormeau Road, Belfast. He was also involved in the boy scouts. One night he was doing paperwork at a room in the priests' house while Fr Fortune was present. Fr Fortune asked him to play a game. He started to tap him on his private parts and told Charles to do the same back, which he did. After a short period of time both lay on the couch and Fr Fortune started to fondle Charles' private parts. When Charles tried to get away, they both fell on the floor and Fr Fortune held him down. When he eventually got away from Fr Fortune he threatened to tell the parish priest and left the house. Charles went on to allege that approximately one month later the boy scouts from Belfast were on camping trip to Gorey, Co Wexford. Whilst there, Charles witnessed Fr Fortune doing the same thing (i.e., tapping of the private parts) to two younger boys. He called the boys away from Fr Fortune as he knew what was going to happen to them. After this, Charles left the scouts. Charles did not speak to anyone about his experience with Fr Fortune until after Fr Fortune's arrest in 1995 when he made a statement to the Gardai.

4.5.7 STUDENTS FROM ST MARY'S COLLEGE, BELFAST

The Spiritual Director at St Malachy's College in Belfast, was approached by a student who was known to him from another school, St Mary's College. The

student was approaching on his own behalf and on behalf of a fellow student. Both of them had been importuned by Fr Fortune. The Spiritual Director was not clear as to the details of the allegation, though he believes it involved an attempt by Fr Fortune to get them into bed.

The Spiritual Director said he reported the allegation immediately to Dr Philbin, Bishop of Down and Connor. Dr Philbin said "*leave it to me*". He says that by the next day Fr Fortune was out of the Diocese. Even before this complaint, Dr Philbin was taking steps to remove Fr Fortune from the Diocese. There was anxiety that he was inveigling people into donating money to him and was not sufficiently sensitive to the political and social situation in which he was operating.

4.5.8 PETER

Peter alleged the following:

Peter was born and educated in Dundalk and met Sean Fortune through a group called Youth Encounter. Sean Fortune asked the group to seek their parents' permission to go on a Youth Encounter weekend to a neighbouring parish. Peter was about 13 or 14 at the time and his parents were happy to let him go. Originally, the arrangement had been that he would stay with a host family but when he arrived, he was told by Fr Fortune that he would be staying with him for the night. Peter was not concerned about this change of plan and even felt flattered that the priest, whom he admired and respected, would elect to have him stay with him.

Peter alleged to the Inquiry that the first night of the retreat was uneventful but on the second night, he awoke to find Sean Fortune naked and getting into bed beside him. Fr Fortune told him there was nothing to worry about and began having oral sex with him. Peter begged Fr Fortune to leave him alone but he refused to do so.

Peter alleged that over the next few days, Fr Fortune met him after school and told him that he was the one with a problem and that if he did not let Fortune help him, he would have to tell his parents. Peter said that that frightened him more than what Fr Fortune did. After Fr Fortune moved away from Dundalk in 1981 he returned at least once a month and for the next two years engaged in sexual activity including rape with Peter between ten and twelve times.

In the early 1990s when Peter was 25, Fr Fortune contacted him, apologising for everything that had happened and telling him that he would help him get a job. Peter visited Fr Fortune in Ballymurn and said that on one occasion he visited Bishop Brendan Comiskey with Fr Fortune in his residence in Wexford. During that visit to Ballymurn, Peter met with two men who, according to him were in a sexual relationship with Fortune. This meeting prompted him to disclose his abuse to Bishop Comiskey. The Bishop wrote back enclosing Stg£400 and assuring Peter that his concerns would be looked into. Bishop Comiskey has told the Inquiry that he has no memory of receiving any letter from Peter; he also denies sending Peter any money. Peter told the Inquiry that he received a further letter and payment of Stg£100 from Bishop Comiskey in 1997, but again Bishop Comiskey denies that such a letter or money was ever sent. No records of these transactions appear in the diocesan files furnished to the Inquiry.

4.5.9 SIMON

Simon alleged the following:

It is important to note that this is an allegation of sexual abuse and not of child sexual abuse as Simon was 21 years old at the time of the alleged offence. It was the first recorded complaint made to Bishop Brendan Comiskey about Sean Fortune. The young man in question visited Fethard-on-Sea in 1984 with a group of friends. Fr Fortune invited them to his house for a meal and invited the group to speak to him about any personal problems that they might have had. Simon was concerned that he might be homosexual and at Fr Fortune's suggestion, stayed behind after the group left to discuss his difficulties further. That night Fr Fortune asked Simon to join him in bed and intercourse took place. Simon described being terrified by what had occurred.

In December 1985, Simon met with Bishop Comiskey under a false name and told him what had happened. Bishop Comiskey has told the Inquiry that although he had had concerns about Fr Fortune before then, this account by Simon was the first definite complaint he had received, and even though Simon was not willing to make a formal recorded statement, it gave Bishop Comiskey the moral certitude to act against Fr Fortune. The result of Simon's complaint was that Fr Fortune was sent by Bishop Comiskey to a psychiatrist in Dublin who recommended residential treatment for Fr Fortune. Although Bishop Comiskey has said that Simon's complaint led directly to Fr Fortune's removal from Poulfur, this did not occur until October 1987, almost two years after meeting the complainant. Simon did not report the incident with Fr Fortune to the Gardai until 1995. No prosecution occurred because, by then, homosexual activity had been decriminalised and there was a perceived difficulty in establishing a lack of consent.

4.5.10 WILLIAM

William alleged the following:

William originally made his complaint of child sexual abuse to the Diocese by writing directly to Bishop Comiskey on 17 October 1987. This was done at the suggestion of Fr Sean Devereux who succeeded Fr Fortune as curate in Poulfur. William began his letter by saying that he was sexually abused by Fr Fortune for some years during his term of ministry in Poulfur. William explained how he had had a great deal of respect and trust for Fr Fortune before the abuse occurred and that he had been a very religious boy. He said that Fr Fortune's initial approaches involved him touching his genitals and asking William to touch him. He said that, although he was sickened by this, he was terrified to tell anyone because he did not think he would be believed. Sean Fortune arranged with his mother that William would spend a week with him in Dublin. On the first night he was abused so badly and was so disgusted that he was violently ill. He made Fr Fortune bring him home the next day and threatened to tell his parents and the Gardai about what had occurred. Although Fr Fortune continued to contact him, William avoided him from that time onwards. He told Bishop Comiskey in his letter that whilst he had recovered from the trauma himself, he worried about what Fr Fortune could do

with other young boys. Almost two years after William's initial complaint, he was asked to attend a meeting with a Canon lawyer, Fr Robert Noonan, in All Hallows. This meeting was part of a Canon law process that Bishop Comiskey had commenced in order to determine Fr Fortune's future in the Diocese. Fr Noonan spoke with William and reported that he found his story capable of being true. Some months later he met with Fr Fortune and reported that he found Fr Fortune's denial of the allegations brought by William also capable of being true.

When William's story was reported in the press, Bishop Comiskey specifically and vehemently denied two aspects of it. Firstly, he repudiated William's statement that a meeting had taken place between William and a Canon lawyer in Maynooth. In fact, the meeting had taken place in All Hallows. By his denial, the impression was given by the Bishop that no meeting had taken place at all. This had the effect of discrediting William and increasing the media spotlight on him. When asked by this Inquiry why he had not simply clarified the location of the meeting, Bishop Comiskey said that he did not consider it the media's business where such a meeting took place.

Secondly, Bishop Comiskey denied writing to William to apologise for the abuse perpetrated by Sean Fortune. William's mother informed the Inquiry that a letter was received by William in reply to his letter of 17 October 1988 and that it expressed regret for what had occurred with Fr Fortune. Bishop Comiskey has acknowledged that a letter of regret could have been sent to William although no letter of apology would have been sent. This is in keeping with Bishop Comiskey's position throughout his episcopacy that he could not apologise for the activities of priests who either were deceased at the time of the allegation or were denying it. However, by denying rather than clarifying the story, Bishop Comiskey caused additional suffering to the young man and his family. The media attention became so oppressive that William's mother informed the Inquiry that of everything that had happened to her and her family arising out of this matter, the media attention was the most difficult to cope with. She expressed a view to this Inquiry that Bishop Comiskey had a responsibility to William to ensure that by making the complaint to him and to the Gardai, he did not suffer adversely. The Inquiry shares this view and would emphasise the importance of all abuse allegations being treated sensitively and confidentially by all parties concerned. Proceedings issued by William against the Diocese were eventually settled.

4.5.11 IAN

Ian alleged the following:

At about 16 years of age, Ian attended a communications course organised by the Mater Hospital in conjunction with other hospital radio stations. Fr Fortune was conducting the course and he was presented as the Church's leading communications expert. Ian got a job in the same building as was being used by Fr Fortune to make a recording for broadcast and Ian was delighted to learn as much as he could from him. Ian said that one day while he was working on the sound desk, Fr Fortune bent over him to show him how to do something and pressed down on him. He then fumbled with his belt and Ian shouted "no, no", struggling for breath. He said that Fr Fortune took down his trousers, fondled his genitals and buggered him. He said this was brutal and painful and occurred despite struggles

to get away. Ian says that Fr Fortune left him “*in a mess on the floor, bleeding heavily*”. Fr Fortune proceeded to carry out sound mixing in the studio while Ian was sobbing. He says that Fr Fortune came back and told him it would be better for him not to tell anyone and Ian promised that he would not tell anyone about the abuse. Ian issued proceedings against the Bishop of Ferns in 2002 which were settled by the Diocese.

4.5.12 FRANK

Frank alleged the following:

Frank was abused by Fr Fortune from the early 1980s for a period of two years. Fr Fortune became friendly with Frank’s family and was a regular visitor to their home. He invited Frank to spend a weekend in Poulfur with him. Fr Fortune sexually assaulted Frank during that weekend by intimate touching and mutual masturbation. Fr Fortune then threatened to tell Frank’s parents what had occurred if he did not return to Poulfur for visits and this started a pattern of abuse which lasted for a period of two years. Frank was collected from his home and brought to Poulfur. During these weekends sexual assaults including touching genitals, oral sex and masturbation took place. During one of these visits, Fr Fortune buggered him. Fr Fortune did not ejaculate but masturbated himself. Fr Fortune tried to force Frank to have anal sex with him but Frank found that he was unable. Three years after the abuse had started, Frank asked Fr Fortune for financial help. Fr Fortune agreed on condition that Frank found a young boy to sleep with him. Frank ceased contact with Fr Fortune at that point.

In the mid 1990s after his sister attended a family wedding, Frank was made aware that Fr Fortune had been paying a lot of attention to the teenagers there. This alerted Frank to the possibility that what had happened to him might be happening to other boys.

He complained to Garda Patrick Mulcahy of Wexford Garda Station in February 1995 and in March 1995 Fr Sean Fortune was interviewed. Once that Garda investigation commenced, more witnesses came forward to tell stories of abuse by Sean Fortune.

Bishop Comiskey placed Fr Fortune on administrative leave in March 1995 but Frank said that the Bishop did not remove the authority that Fr Fortune had as a priest and as someone who effectively had dominion over children. Although Frank feels outraged at the way Bishop Comiskey handled his allegation against Sean Fortune, he does acknowledge that this was a problem inherited by Bishop Comiskey from his predecessor. Frank claims that the wider Church had serious questions to answer about how a priest like Fr Fortune could have been ordained and placed in a parish given the amount of information available about him. He said that although Bishop Comiskey made public expressions of care, compassion and support, they were never addressed directly to him.

Frank instituted civil proceedings against Bishop Comiskey as the only method available to him of securing a public apology for the abuse that occurred. The case was settled on the payment of substantial damages and the reading out of an apology in open court.

4.5.13 PATRICK

Patrick alleged the following:

Patrick was hitching home from Wexford hospital where he had received treatment for a facial injury when he was picked up by Fr Fortune in his car. Fr Fortune spoke to him about relationships and sexual preferences. Towards the end of the journey he asked Patrick about the scarring on his face. Patrick said Fr Fortune masturbated himself throughout the journey and then smeared his face with semen telling Patrick that it would heal his face. Patrick said that he felt physically and psychologically intimidated. Patrick told the Inquiry that Fr Fortune later sought him out at his work place. Patrick was raped and abused by Fr Fortune approximately three times a week for two to three years.

Once, Patrick saw his cousin Brendan (4.5.21) being called away by Fortune. Patrick tried to warn his own mother of the danger to Brendan. She dismissed the suggestion outright and physically attacked Patrick. Patrick said that Fr Fortune heard that he had tried to speak to his, Patrick's, mother and that night he was subjected to a particularly brutal rape. After that, Patrick said he did not dare to speak to anyone about his abuse especially not the Bishop.

Patrick told the Inquiry that *"half of the village was pro-Fortune and the other half anti-Fortune"*. Despite this division, he feels that Fr Fortune had total control of the village. He believes that everyone was aware of allegations against Fr Fortune.

Patrick has said that words could never describe the devastating impact this has had on his life for decades.

Patrick first made a complaint to the Diocese in 2002 and has now settled proceedings against the Diocese.

4.5.14 MARK

Mark alleged the following:

Mark first came into contact with Fr Fortune when he was a member of a youth club which was held in the basement of Fr Fortune's house in Poulfur in Co Wexford. He attended a retreat weekend in the early 1980s when he was twelve years old during which Fr Fortune sexually assaulted him. Mark was pre-pubertal and was not sexually aware at the time. He was frightened and bewildered by what had occurred. Fr Fortune told him not to tell anyone what had happened. On two further occasions Fr Fortune sexually assaulted Mark in his, Fr Fortune's house in Poulfur. Mark told Fr Fortune that what he was doing was wrong. Fr Fortune told him that because he was a priest and could not get married what he was doing was not wrong but that it must be kept a secret. Mark never disclosed this abuse to anybody because he thought he would not be believed. His parents were very religious and involved in the Church and he felt confused and guilty because he believed he had allowed the incidents to happen.

As a result of the abuse, his relationship with his parents deteriorated and he eventually left home and went abroad. During an argument on a visit home, he told his parents about the abuse. His parents took his allegations very seriously. Mark and his parents went to see a priest of the diocese in 1990 and told him that

Mark had been interfered with by Sean Fortune. The Inquiry has heard evidence from this priest who confirmed that this meeting with Mark's family took place and that he spoke with the diocesan secretary, the following day. Bishop Comiskey was apparently absent from the diocese at the time. This priest informed the Inquiry that he told the family that they should seek counselling for Mark if necessary and he identified a counselling source for Mark. He also advised them that they should consider going to the Gardai.

Bishop Comiskey said that he had never heard anything about Mark's complaint before 1995. In response to this, the priest in question went to a solicitor in 1995 and swore an affidavit confirming that he had relayed the complaint to diocesan offices. He told the Inquiry that he had never mentioned the allegations again and never asked the family about Mark. The diocesan secretary has attended this Inquiry and has confirmed that he is completely satisfied that he brought this complaint to the attention of the Bishop although he confirmed to the Inquiry that he could find no written record of a communication of this complaint to Bishop Comiskey.

4.5.15 THOMAS

Thomas alleged the following:

Thomas alleged that he was abused by Fr Fortune in the early 1980s when he was 16 years of age. He went to Poulfur to join the youth club where he met Fr Fortune. On one occasion, Fr Fortune suggested Thomas spend the night in Fr Fortune's house. Twice during the night, Thomas awoke to find Fr Fortune touching him and when he realised what was happening he tried to jump out of the bed. His sister confirmed to the Inquiry that she and her mother realised that something had happened with Fr Fortune but did not know exactly what. The family stopped attending mass in Poulfur and went to a neighbouring parish instead. Thomas made this allegation known for the first time to the Gardai in 1995.

4.5.16 RONAN

Ronan alleged the following:

In the early 1980s, Ronan was an altar boy at Poulfur church where Fr Fortune was a curate. He describes driving in a car with Fr Fortune and two elderly people who were sitting in the back of the car. Ronan was in the front passenger seat when Fr Fortune began to feel his private parts, so much so that it hurt Ronan. Ronan said that Fr Fortune was always offering inducements like a stereo, large sums of money, or a motor bike to sleep with him. Ronan first reported this abuse to the Gardai in 1995.

4.5.17 GRAHAM

Graham alleged the following:

Graham was holidaying in Wexford in the early 1980s when he was befriended by Fr Fortune who asked him to paint his house. He was offered food and lodgings at the house. Whilst there, he was sexually assaulted by Fr Fortune. He described how shock and fear froze him into immobility. Fr Fortune forced him to swear on the Bible not to tell anyone. He first reported this allegation to the Gardai in 1995.

4.5.18 GARY

Gary alleged the following:

Gary was born in the early 1970s and was employed by Fr Fortune in the grounds of Poulfur church in the late 1980s. Gary states that on one occasion, Fr Fortune brought him into the office and asked him if he would go to bed with him, and told him that he could have anything he wanted if he did so. Gary refused this proposition and also refused to kiss Fr Fortune. As he was leaving the office, Fr Fortune handed him a £10 note and told him to say nothing about what had happened. After this incident, Gary stopped working at the church and never returned to it. Gary first reported this incident to the Gardai in 1995.

4.5.19 ADRIAN

Adrian alleged the following:

Adrian was born in the early 1970s and was a member of the youth club at Poulfur run by Fr Fortune. When he was in his mid-teens, Fr Fortune offered him work on a FÁS scheme. Adrian called to the priests' house at Fr Fortune's request to discuss this. During the discussion, Fr Fortune offered Adrian £20 for a "*blow job*". Adrian refused and left as quickly as he could.

Adrian says that he told a curate in the diocese after Fr Fortune had been removed from Poulfur of the incident between himself and Fr Fortune. This priest has stated that although he asked "Adrian" whether he had been abused by Fr Fortune, Adrian did not state positively that he was so abused. Adrian reported this abuse to the Gardai in 1995.

4.5.20 LUKE

Luke alleged the following:

Luke was a member of the youth club which met in Fr Fortune's house in Poulfur. Fr Fortune called Luke into his office and questioned him on his sexuality and on his relationship with girls. The conversation then turned to sleeping with boys. Fr Fortune asked Luke "would you sleep with me if I asked you to", but before Luke could answer, the doorbell rang and Fr Fortune left the room. When he returned, Luke told him he wanted to leave immediately. Fr Fortune forced Luke to swear on the Bible that he would not mention their conversation to anyone. Luke first reported this allegation to the Gardai in 1995.

4.5.21 BRENDAN

Brendan's parents alleged the following:

Brendan's parents attended the Ferns Inquiry to speak about their son who committed suicide in the late 1980s. They said that they were convinced that Brendan was driven to suicide by Fr Sean Fortune with whom he had a lot of contact. Brendan's parents told the Inquiry that when Fr Fortune came to Poulfur, Brendan was about 14. He got involved in one of the FÁS schemes which Sean Fortune introduced to the area.

Brendan's mother told the Inquiry that Brendan accompanied Fr Fortune on different outings. He went to Loftus Hall and on a religious course to Maynooth for a week. Brendan's mother told the Inquiry that on one occasion when Brendan returned from a weekend away with Fr Fortune, he was unable to walk properly and there was a great deal of blood on his clothes. He told his mother that he had haemorrhoids but that he did not want to go to a doctor. Brendan's mother said that she asked Brendan if Fr Fortune had interfered with him and he said no, but she said he did give her a strange look as if to say, "*What do you know?*"

Brendan's parents confirmed to the Inquiry that they had heard that some of the boys in Poulfur were alleging that Fr Fortune was abusing them. However, they said they thought that it was a terrible thing for the boys to be saying about a priest and did not understand it. Brendan's parents contacted the diocese after Fr Fortune's suicide.

4.5.22 KEITH

It is alleged as follows:

Keith committed suicide in the mid 1980s. He was very friendly with Brendan (4.5.21) who also committed suicide. A number of people who came before the Inquiry mentioned Keith and his association with Fr Sean Fortune and made the connection between Keith's death and his abuse by Fortune. Patrick (4.5.13) confirmed that Keith was one of a group of boys who frequented the old castle in Fethard and that Fortune used to "hunt them down" and on occasion, rape particular boys that he would catch. Keith was regularly in the company of Fr Sean Fortune and went away on retreat weekends with him. Keith became more and more depressed and the family became convinced that there was some problem with Fr Sean Fortune.

The family wrote to Bishop Eamonn Walsh who said a Mass on the anniversary of Keith's death. The family also instructed solicitors to bring proceedings against the diocese but these were later discontinued. The family still maintains a close connection with the Church but believes that Keith's death was directly caused by the abuse perpetrated on him by Fr Sean Fortune

4.5.23 KIERAN

Kieran alleged the following:

Kieran said that in the mid-1980s when he was 15 or 16 years of age, he joined a FÁS scheme which was run by Fr Sean Fortune in Poulfur. He was working in the graveyard when he heard screaming from Fr Fortune's house. He went to the back door, opened it and saw Fr Fortune abusing a young teenager. Two other adults were there. He told the child afterwards that he should go to the Gardai and get help.

Kieran told the Inquiry that he spoke with another priest in a neighbouring parish about what he had seen. Kieran said that the priest asked him for a detailed account of the abuse and a demonstration of how the abuse occurred. He said the priest put his hand on Kieran's penis. Kieran said he hit his hand away. He said that the priest put his, Kieran's name into a book in the church and said that he would tell the Bishop what had happened. Many years later when he met the priest again, the priest told him that he had told the Bishop what had happened with Fr Fortune and also apologised for what he himself had done. The said priest is now deceased and there is no information in the diocesan file in connection with the matter.

4.5.24 DANIEL

Daniel alleged the following:

Daniel first encountered Fr Sean Fortune in the late eighties when he was 13 or 14 years of age. Daniel was in a cubicle of the public toilet beside his school when a tall, dark man whom he subsequently identified as being Fr Fortune, forced his way into the cubicle and buggered Daniel. Daniel returned to school but was clearly upset and broke down when asked what was wrong with him. Daniel told his teacher that he had been approached by a man in the toilet. He did not say that he had been raped. The teacher reported the matter to An Garda Síochána. A Garda interviewed him at home. Daniel said that he was unable to disclose what had happened because his father was present while he was being questioned. He merely said he was grabbed by a man – no mention was made of a priest as he did not know Fr Fortune at that time and would not have known his assailant was a priest. He never met the Garda again.

Daniel says that Fr Fortune hung around outside his school for a few weeks after that. Some time later, Daniel started working in a shop. On one occasion Fr Fortune stopped at the shop and casually told Daniel that he had had an AIDS test in recent weeks in St James's Hospital and that he, Daniel, had nothing to worry about.

On his 18th birthday, Daniel and his employer opened a business in a Wexford town. Less than a year later, Fr Fortune was still harassing Daniel and on one occasion after drinking alcohol, Daniel drove to the top of Vinegar Hill in Wexford and cut his wrists with a Stanley knife. A Garda found him and he was taken to hospital by ambulance.

Shortly after this, in the early 1990s, Daniel had to close his business leaving debts of £15,000. Fortune offered him a job and in desperation, Daniel accepted. Daniel went to Fortune's house three days a week and on each occasion sexual activity occurred. Daniel received £100 a week for the first three weeks only, although the period of abuse continued over a four year period.

Daniel claims that he saw Bishop Comiskey with other people at Fr Fortune's house in Ballymurn on a number of occasions. The Inquiry asked Daniel whether Fr Fortune talked about Bishop Comiskey. He said that he talked about him all the time and was initially very fond of him and "*thought he was God*".

On one occasion when Fortune was chasing him, Daniel telephoned the Bishop's house at two in the morning. He spoke with Fr Tommy Brennan and can remember being very frightened but said that the conversation was very short. He told Fr Brennan he was in Wexford and that Fr Fortune was chasing him. He was speaking to Fr Brennan from his mobile telephone and Sean Fortune was in his car driving up and down the streets. Fr Tommy Brennan told Daniel to call the Bishop the following day. Daniel felt that Fr Brennan had taken his complaint seriously enough and that he seemed quite calm. Fr Brennan has confirmed this account of Daniel's telephone call to the Inquiry,

The next day Fr Fortune pleaded with Daniel not to see Bishop Comiskey. He promised to leave Daniel alone so Daniel agreed.

In 1995 Daniel met Fr Fortune who was in a very agitated state. He had been charged with more than sixty counts of sexual abuse. Fr Fortune told Daniel that Daniel would have to appear in court as a character witness and that their relationship would be made public. It was a constant threat of Fr Sean Fortune's that if Daniel did not do what he said; he would tell his parents how much in love he was with Daniel. Fr Fortune claimed that the Bishop had advised him to go to Brussels although Bishop Comiskey has strongly denied to this Inquiry that he gave such advice. Under pressure from Fr Fortune, Daniel tried to escape on a ferry to France. Fr Fortune telephoned the captain of the vessel and had Daniel detained at Cherbourg. Daniel was returned home and Fr Fortune continued to harass him. According to Daniel, Fr Fortune gave him £7,500.

Three weeks before Fr Fortune committed suicide, Daniel wrote to Bishop Comiskey seeking a meeting. They met on ten occasions although only once before the death of the priest. He said that the first thing that Bishop Comiskey said to him was "*Fortune is an abomination*". Daniel said he felt really at ease because he felt that Bishop Comiskey hated Fortune as much as he did. As a result of his meetings with Bishop Comiskey, Daniel received counselling paid for out of diocesan funds.

In February 2002, the Diocese contacted Daniel. The diocesan spokesperson said that a newspaper had been informed that there had been a settlement with somebody who had been abused by Fr Fortune in the previous year. According to Daniel's testimony to the Inquiry, he was told by a spokesperson for the diocese that they had received a fax from a newspaper and that there was a possibility that his name would be revealed to the press. This caused him great worry and anxiety as he had not disclosed the alleged abuse to his parents. In fact no reference to him appeared in the papers and he subsequently revealed the abuse to his parents.

4.5.25 VINCENT

Vincent alleged the following:

Vincent was not a native of Wexford. When he was 17/18 years old, he decided to look for summer work in Rosslare. He arrived in Wexford by bus at about six o'clock one Friday evening in the late 1980s. He was looking for a hostel when he noticed a priest from whom he asked directions. The priest offered to help Vincent find work and invited him to stay in his house until after the weekend. This priest was Fr Sean Fortune and Vincent described how relieved and safe he felt under the protection of a priest. All of his experiences of priests until that time had been good.

Both attended a choir practice on that first evening and Vincent described that night that he spent in Fr Fortune's house as being "*absolutely fine*". At approximately 2 o'clock on Saturday morning, Fr Fortune came into the guest bedroom where Vincent was sleeping and, after undressing himself, removed Vincent's clothes. A series of sexual assaults took place that night mainly involving masturbation and oral sex. Vincent was frightened and stunned. He remembers Fr Fortune saying "*this is natural*". He said to Vincent that he must not tell anyone what had happened as nobody would believe him because Fr Fortune was a well respected priest. On Sunday night Fr Fortune raped Vincent which he described as extremely painful and shocking. On the Monday, Fr Fortune handed Vincent his bus fare home and instructed his housekeeper to drive Vincent to the bus station. Vincent returned home and told nobody about what had occurred. He said he was too ashamed to go to the Gardai. Vincent realised that what had happened him had happened to many other people when the television documentary "Suing the Pope" was aired. This gave him courage to speak about his experience which he did for the first time in 2003.

Vincent was not in a position to confirm where this abuse occurred. If Vincent was indeed seventeen years of age, it was probably in Poulfur but if, as he believes, the abuse occurred in Ballymurn, Vincent would have to have been older.

Vincent commenced proceedings against the Diocese of Ferns in July 2003. These proceedings were settled in July 2004.

4.5.26 COLIN

Colin alleged the following:

Colin described an incident of child sexual abuse involving Fr Sean Fortune which occurred when he was twelve in 1979 in Wexford. The incident occurred in a public toilet. Fr Fortune pushed him into the cubicle and bolted the door. He then raped Colin. When he was finished he adjusted his clothing, unlocked the door and left, saying that he would see Colin again, and that he was a good boy. Colin left the toilet and ran home. He removed his bloodied and stained underclothes. He never spoke of the incident to anybody.

Because Colin came from a difficult family background, he felt he could not disclose any of the abuse he had suffered to his parents or to anyone else.

Colin married in 1987. The priest who married him mentioned that they had a mutual acquaintance. Colin knew immediately that he was referring to Fr Fortune and also that this priest knew what had happened to him. Some years later, in 1992, Colin was standing at the side of the main street in Wexford with his baby son when Fr Fortune came up behind him and spoke to him. Colin said that he barely recognised him physically because he had gained so much weight but that he immediately recognised the voice. Fr Fortune said to him that he needed work done in his house in Ballymurn and that if Colin was not prepared to do it, he would tell Colin's wife and other people what he had done when he was 12.

Colin told the Inquiry that he was terrified that his wife would hear about what had happened and so he agreed to go to Ballymurn. He worked there for 10 months.

Colin said that on almost every occasion when he attended Fr Fortune in Ballymurn he was obliged to perform oral sex. He said that he was not raped again by Fr Fortune. He said Fr Fortune telephoned him up to three times a week demanding that he visit Fr Fortune at Ballymurn. He was working full time at this stage and Fr Fortune paid him very little for the work he did so he borrowed money to convince his wife that he was making extra money by working for Fr Fortune.

During this period, he met two priests of the diocese who, when they heard that Colin had been working with Fr Fortune, warned him against it although according to Colin it was acknowledged by them that Fr Fortune was more of a danger to young boys than to adults. This was the first indication Colin had that Fr Fortune might be involved with people apart from himself. Within a month, Colin stopped visiting Fr Fortune. One of the reasons he broke off contact was that Fr Fortune regularly asked him to leave his son with him when he ran errands. Colin never did this and had grave concerns about Fr Fortune asking it.

Colin told the Inquiry that when he was in Ballymurn he never saw Fr Fortune with anybody else. He said that Fr Fortune would often be in a very bad temper after a meeting and he would take it out on whoever was present. He said Fr Fortune slapped and punched him on these occasions.

Colin did not report this abuse to any of the State or Church authorities before attending the Inquiry. He said that had his family situation been different, he might have considered going to the Gardai, but in his circumstances he felt so alone and isolated that he had nobody to turn to. He said that when "Suing the Pope" television documentary was broadcast, he was very tempted to come forward but was unable to do so. He explained that it is only after two years of counselling that he is able to speak about what happened.

He said that the shame, guilt and isolation he felt as a result of his abuse deeply affected his life but that with counselling, he was managing to cope. He is happily married with children and was dealing with what had happened to him as well as he can.