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## Ireland orders priest abuse inquiry



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Father Fortune's case increased pressure on the Church

The Irish Government has ordered a state inquiry into allegations that a Roman Catholic priest who committed suicide three years ago sexually abused children.

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Pressure for the authorities to investigate the priest, Father Sean Fortune, has increased since the Bishop of Ferns, Dr Brendan Comiskey, resigned this week over criticism of how he handled the case, following a BBC television documentary last month.

Fortune died shortly before he was due to stand trial on charges of abusing boys three years ago.

The Minister of Health and Children, Micheal Martin, announced the appointment of George Birmingham, one of Ireland's top lawyers, to examine how best to proceed with an inquiry into the Ferns case.

"There is a need, I think, to try and bring some closure to this because it's doing nobody any good," Mr Martin said.

"It's causing a lot of trauma and grief out there and I think for the country's sake and society generally we do need a resolution of these issues."

Although people cannot be forced to testify, Mr Martin said he hoped all the parties involved, including the Catholic Church, would co-operate.

“ There is a need to try and bring some closure to this because it's doing nobody any good ”

Children Minister  
Micheal Martin

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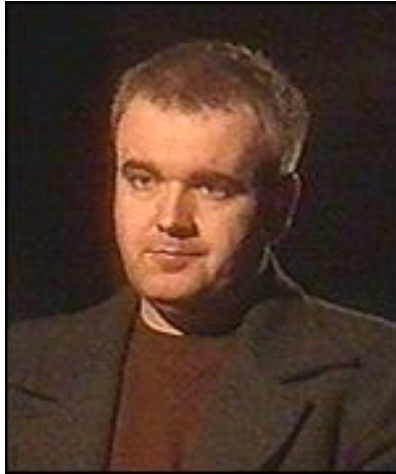
A preliminary report on how the inquiry will proceed and how the wider subject of abuse by clergy might be addressed is expected in three months.



Bishop Brendan Comiskey admitted he had not protected children

### Victims

Colm O'Gorman, one of four men who revealed in the BBC Correspondent programme how he had been abused by Fortune in the southern county of Wexford in the 1980s, welcomed the decision.



Colm O'Gorman said he hoped for the "full truth" to come out in the inquiry

"This is the best way to achieve what we all want - the full truth coming out as to why the church protected abusers for so long, and why others in authority did not intervene," he said.

The Ferns case has triggered fresh disclosures of clerical sex abuse incidents and a flood of anger in overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Ireland, where the Church's image has been severely damaged by a string of scandals in the last decade.

### Crisis summit

Dr Comiskey admitted he had not done enough to protect children in his County Wexford diocese.

And Bishop Donal Murray of Limerick has announced he has given police reports of sexual abuse involving priests in his south-western diocese.

Pressure on the Roman Catholic Church has also increased elsewhere in recent months, with a number of abuse allegations in the United States culminating in legal action against some of the most senior figures in the Church's hierarchy.

The Church's 30 bishops in Ireland are due to hold a crisis summit on the past month's events shortly.