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Tuesday, 19 March, 2002, 17:05 GMT

## Suing the Pope



Fr Fortune was charged with 66 counts of sexual, indecent assault and buggery relating to eight boys.

**This Correspondent special exposes the scandal of a Catholic Bishop who knew about a paedophile priest's 20 year reign of terror over young Irish boys, and failed to stop it.**

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### The new priest

Fr Sean Fortune, a newly ordained priest, appeared dashing and energetic when he first arrived in the small Irish village of Fethard-on-Sea in County Wexford.

But what the locals did not know was that Fr Fortune already faced mounting allegations of child sexual abuse.

The Catholic Church kept this knowledge to itself.

Fr Fortune soon ensnared young boys of the village, relentlessly abusing and blackmailing many of them into silence.

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## A desperate community

When he was not controlling children in a myriad of carefully set up "youth groups", he was pressuring their parents for money, stripping the elderly of their savings and extorting millions of pounds from government employment schemes.



“

The Bishop thought it was ludicrous that a man of the cloth would act like that

”

Patrick Jackman

In Ireland, such was the power of the Catholic Church, no one would dare to complain about a priest. But Fr Fortune's behaviour had become increasingly bizarre and dangerous.

In desperation his parishioners organised a delegation to two Bishops and, after getting no real response, wrote to the Papal Nuncio, the Pope's ambassador to Ireland.

Still nothing was done to stop this bullying, predatory paedophile.

## Painful memories

Colm O'Gorman was 14 years old when Fr Fortune raped him for the first time. His torment lasted for two and a half years. This year Colm returned to Fethard-on-Sea with Correspondent.

He wanted to understand how a priest could have a series of young boys stay overnight in his parochial house without questions being asked.

"He would pick me up and be the priest in front of my mother and my family and five minutes later in the car he would make me perform oral sex on him and then five minutes after that ended, stop off and again be the priest and walk into somebody's house with me in tow behind him. I just remember the real sense of shock of it all."

“

He would pick me up and be the priest in front of my mother and my family and five minutes later in the car he would make me perform oral sex on him

”

Colm's journey back to Fethard has been incredibly revealing. Many locals did not appreciate his questions and he was made to feel unwelcome.

Colm O'Gorman

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But those who did open their doors to him admitted that the abuse was well known both in the community and the church.

### **The courage to tell**

Patrick Jackman was 11 years old when he witnessed Fr Sean Fortune sexually abusing a young boy scout in a tent. Four years later, the priest appeared at Pat's home and asked if he could take the young boy to stay at his house for the weekend.

Pat had a premonition of what was about to happen, but was powerless to stop it.

"There wasn't a phone in the place. If I ran out screaming in the middle of the night, I didn't know where the nearest place was. I didn't know if I went and knocked on the door if they would wake up or if they did wake up whether they would believe me or not. I had a terrible sense of being trapped and caged. It was bloody horrible, absolutely horrible."



Patrick Jackman will never leave his children alone with a catholic priest

Unlike many of the boys abused by Fr Fortune, Pat had the courage to tell his parents. His father was and still is close to the Catholic Church. He complained personally to Bishop Herlihey. "The Bishop thought it was ludicrous that a man of the cloth would act like that."

After the Bishop died, Pat's father complained to his replacement Bishop Comiskey.

To this day no one from the church has asked Pat Jackman about Fr Fortune or the events of that night.

### **Allegations mount**

Dr Brendan Comiskey, the Bishop of Ferns, was informed of allegations of abuse against not just Fr Fortune but a number of priests, when he was first appointed.

Throughout the 80s, those allegations increased. On at least two occasions, Bishop Comiskey investigated, but came to no conclusions and did nothing to stop Fr Fortune.

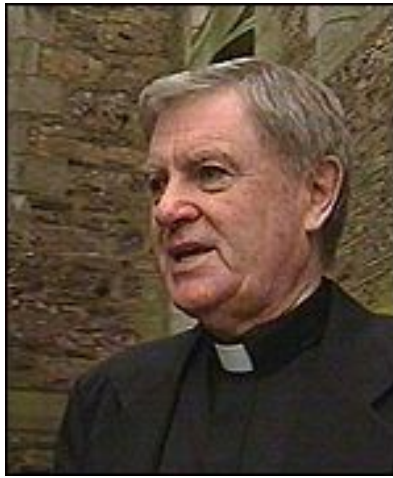
Fr Sean Fortune was left in Fethard-on-Sea for six years before Bishop Comiskey finally removed him. He then sent Fortune to London to study media and communications and to seek therapy with a number of psychiatrists.

Two years later, Fr Fortune was brought back to Ireland, and given not only another parish and curacy, but also made the director of a Catholic media organisation, the National Association of Community Broadcasting.

Fr Fortune quickly turned his new role to his financial and sexual advantage. He raped a 15 year old boy in a studio booth where he recorded religious programmes.

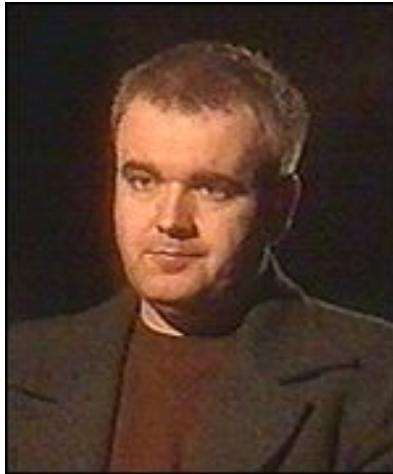
### **The search for answers**

Colm O'Gorman finally brought Fr Fortune's reign to an end in 1995. Aged 29, he decided to tell the Irish police about his experiences as a young boy. Colm feared Fr Fortune was still abusing.



Bishop Comiskey failed to stop Fr Fortune's abuse

The ensuing gardai investigation resulted in Fr Fortune being charged with 66 counts of sexual, indecent assault and buggery relating to eight boys. 18 years after the first complaint, the Catholic Church was finally forced to remove him from duties.



Colm O'Gorman wants answers from the Catholic Church

But instead of reaching out to Fr Fortune's many victims, Bishop Comiskey disappeared from his palace without explanation. It was discovered he had fled to an alcohol treatment clinic in the US.

He returned to his diocese six months later. Bishop Comiskey claims that the ongoing litigation prevents him answering the many questions about his and the Church's knowledge of Fr Fortune's child sexual abuse.

### **The response so far**

Bishop Comiskey did, however, tell Correspondent that he maintains an open-door policy for all victims of child abuse in his diocese and this is where he can make his best contribution.

Fr Sean Fortune killed himself in 1999 in the first week of the criminal trial denying his many victims their first chance to be heard.

The Catholic Church has never reached out in any way to the men in this film.

Colm O'Gorman, still hoping for some answers, is suing Bishop Brendan Comiskey, the Papal Nuncio and the Pope.

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## **CONTACT DETAILS**

## **One In Four**

Helpline: 020 8697 2112

An organisation run for and by people who have experienced sexual abuse, One In Four offers one to one counselling, group therapy, advocacy, support and information to women and men. All therapists, members and workers themselves identify as having experienced sexual abuse. The organisation is London based but works nationally. We also offer training and information to professionals working to support people who have experienced sexual abuse.



Fr Fortune committed suicide in the first week of his trial

## **Fire In Ice**

Helpline: 0151 707 2614

A Merseyside self help project run by and for the adult men who have experienced childhood abuse, especially those who have suffered while in residential care. Fire in Ice aims to enable men who have suffered child abuse and their families to make positive change in their lives, also aims to make the care experience safe for children and young people. Fire in Ice offers one to one, group and telephone support in a friendly empathic environment also works with non-abusing survivors in prisons. Fire in Ice is made up of ordinary men who have overcome their abuse and want to help others do the same.

## **Derby Rape Crisis**

Helpline: 01332 372545

Derby Rape Crisis aims to promote the recovery of any adult of any gender who has experienced rape or sexual abuse at any point in their lives.

Face to face counselling

Phoneline counselling and support

Accompanying clients to court, police, GP's, clinics, hospitals, etc

Counselling in minority languages

Sign language & Minicom system

Counselling room and facilities available for disabled clients

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