

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

The Observer (England)

August 6, 2006

Paedophile priest was given post at school for the deaf: Campaigners demand inquiry into 'reign of sexual terror'

BYLINE: Antony Barnett and Ali Beach

SECTION: OBSERVER HOME PAGES; Pg. 6

LENGTH: 777 words

THE ROMAN Catholic Church covered up the criminal past of a paedophile priest and gave him a job in a school for deaf children where he went on to sexually assault vulnerable young boys, an Observer investigation can reveal.

The church is now facing a massive compensation claim from the victims of the priest, Father Neil Gallanagh, who accuse the authorities of 'wilful neglect'. Child abuse campaigners are calling for a public inquiry into the case, which they claim led to a 'reign of sexual terror' for some boys at the school .

Last year Gallanagh, 75, pleaded guilty to indecently assaulting two pupils of St John's Roman Catholic School for the Deaf in Wetherby, West Yorkshire. The school was under the control of the diocese of Leeds, which employed Gallanagh. A further 11 charges against him of indecently assaulting five other boys aged under 16, including an 11-year-old, were left on file.

The attacks took place while Gallanagh was a resident chaplain at St John's during the Seventies. Many of the pupils at this residential school were deaf and dumb. The victims are mainly now in their forties and the assaults came to light only recently after one alleged victim spoke to his doctor and another attended a reunion party and spoke with other pupils.

The Observer has obtained evidence showing that Gallanagh was given the job by the Catholic church at St John's despite having been caught abusing children as a priest more than a decade earlier while working at Craighane church in Derry, Northern Ireland. It has emerged that, while he was on a day-trip to the Isle of Man in June 1960, he sexually assaulted a nine-year-old boy. A report from the Isle of Man Daily Times on 27 June 1960 described how Gallanagh sat with 'bowed head clasped to his hands' in the dock at Douglas Court House after he was arrested.

'I realise it was a horrible thing to do,' Gallanagh said in a statement to police at the time. 'I have been worried with this sexual trouble for some time, and recently it has become an obsession with me.'

Gallanagh was not jailed but fined £ 30 after he promised to seek medical treatment. A short report of his arrest appeared in the Belfast Telegraph

It appears that rather than throw Gallanagh - who was related to the then Bishop of Derry, Neil Farren - out of the church, he was moved to Leeds and allowed to continue preaching. The then Bishop of Leeds, William Wheeler, made him resident chaplain at St John's School for the Deaf in 1974. Gallanagh's previous conviction was not made known to the court in the 2005 case and his victims at St John's were unaware of his history until The Observer uncovered the

Paedophile priest was given post at school for the deaf: Campaigners demand inquiry into 'reign of sexual terror' The Observer (England) August 6, 2006

earlier press reports from newspaper archives.

One of his victims at St John's expressed his outrage at the latest disclosures. 'I am more than livid and feel totally let down by a so-called Christian organisation. How could the church have allowed this to happen? How could they have put a paedophile into a school for deaf children who were unable to speak out? This man ruined many people's lives, including mine. At the very least the church is guilty of wilful neglect; at the worst it is something unimaginable,' he said.

David Greenwood, a solicitor acting for eight of Gallanagh's victims, confirmed he is suing the diocese of Leeds. 'We were unaware of this previous conviction, and it will certainly add strength to our case,' he said.

Margaret Kennedy, chair of Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS), said: 'We now call again for a public inquiry into the sexual abuse of deaf children in St John's School. The new evidence suggests a cover-up scandal of sexual abuse of disabled children.'

Last year The Observer revealed how dozens of young children at a deaf school in south-east England were subject to brutal sexual abuse by the headmistress's husband over three decades.

Kennedy, along with other abuse campaign groups such as Phoenix Survivors, claims that deaf victims of sexual abuse are not getting proper justice. Phoenix was outraged that, even after his latest crimes, Gallanagh received only a six-month suspended sentence and a £ 1,500 fine. Judge Norman Jones said that Gallanagh's age, recent poor health and good character for the last 30 years meant jail was inappropriate.

A spokesperson for Leeds diocese said: 'The two bishops and the vicar-general of that period died some considerable time ago and written records from the time are scant. The diocese of Leeds has developed good policies and practice in regard to all aspects of the protection of children and vulnerable adults and has co-operated fully when approached by statutory authorities in regard to historical cases.'

LOAD-DATE: August 8, 2006

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

Copyright 2006 Guardian Newspapers Limited
All Rights Reserved