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'GARDAI MUST INVESTIGATE ST JOHN OF GOD CHIEF'

Finlay and German funders call for probe into abuse cover-up

THE leader of the St John of God order in Ireland should face criminal investigation for the reckless endangerment of children who were abused by a notorious paedophile, internal and external critics believe.

By **Michael O'Farrell**

INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

Speaking to the Irish Mail on Sunday this weekend, former HSE board member Fergus Finlay said this newspaper's revelations about a St John of God cover-up that allowed children to be abused in Africa should be criminally investigated.

'Gardaí should be investigating that with

Turn to Page 8 ››



DJ Carey conned woman by saying he had 'same cancer'

PAGES 6 & 7

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‘Order’s Provincial

›› From Page One

the view to bringing charges of reckless endangerment,’ he said.

Mr Finlay is just one of the growing ranks of critics of the order’s response to the revelations in the MoS last weekend.

These include international funders of the order Kindernothilfe (KNH), a senior medical consultant Paul Moran who works for the order, and victims of St John of God Brother Aidan Clohessy.

Together, they have demanded that Donatus Forkan, the Provincial of the St John of God order, resign or be removed from any service provision role pending the outcome of any criminal inquiry.

KNH is one of Europe’s largest children’s charities and a vital funder to St John of God’s operations in Africa. But when the main Irish funder of St John of God (SJoG) – the HSE – was asked for its view on our revelations and Br Forkan’s position, they instead directed our questions back to the order.

The MoS last week published harrowing stories of child abuse victims from Malawi who had been abused by serial paedophile Clohessy, who was sent into their midst by Br Forkan in 1993 until his removal from public ministry in 2012.

On June 23 and 24, Clohessy was sentenced to more than five years in prison for the historical abuse of six children at St Augustine’s, a school for the intellectually disabled in south Co. Dublin where Clohessy was a teacher and then principal between 1969 and 1993.

Our reporting revealed that while in Malawi, Clohessy continued to abuse as his superiors oversaw secret settlements to victims back home and told the authorities he had no access to children.

Knowingly placing children in danger has been a crime in Ireland since the enactment of the Criminal Justice Act 2006.

By law, a person can be prosecuted for recklessly endangering a child ‘by causing or permitting any child to be placed or left in a situation which creates a substantial risk to the child being a victim of serious harm or sexual abuse.’

Mr Finlay – a former CEO of children’s charity, Barnardos – said that, in his experience of the St John of God order, ‘money matters to them almost more than anything else.’ He called on Br Forkan to step down immediately from any role involving services to vulnerable children and adults.

As Provincial of his order, Br Forkan remains a long-standing board member of the St John of God Hospitaller Services Group. This entity is a parent company to St John of God Community Services, a charity for intellectually disabled children and adults, funded entirely by the HSE to the tune of hundreds of millions annually.

Mr Finlay told the MoS: ‘I strongly believe – strongly believe – that he should step down or step aside from or be removed from every position of authority in relation to the provision of services.

‘What the order does is entirely a matter for the order, as far as I’m concerned, but the service provision end of it, the publicly funded companies that are involved in providing services, he should not be a director of those under any circumstances.’

Asked if the HSE should insist Br Forkan be removed, Mr Finlay replied: ‘If necessary yes, but I think the board, in the first instance, should address that, if they have the wherewithal to do that.’

However, as of last night, both the board of the St John of God Hospitaller Services Group and the HSE were refusing to address the issue. When asked about Br Forkan’s position, the HSE said we should redirect our questions to St John of God itself. St John of God, meanwhile, had no comment to make about Br Forkan’s position.

‘Forkan’s role needs to be investigated’

This silence is in stark contrast to the willingness of international funders and senior medical staff within the St John of God group to speak up – even at some risk to themselves.

Paul Moran, a consultant psychiatrist employed by St John of God, told the MoS: ‘I am aware that in coming forward, I may be putting myself at risk, professionally, but in light of the inadequate response from the organisation, I feel I must speak out and ask questions.

‘I am anxious not to scare current service users and want to reassure them that the service safeguards are better now than they were, but we have a situation where, in the shadows, we have this order which sits above the management of these services and has power and control and is basically under the direction of one of the main guys who allowed this to happen.

‘So, while the service is committed to protecting people, the people they report to have a record of not doing so, and that raises a question as to who is in a position to guarantee that the required standards are met.’

Mr Moran questioned whether Br Forkan should be allowed to have a role in governing services.

‘In light of what has been revealed and what has been proven in court, his role needs to be investigated. And until such time as these investigations are concluded should he be allowed an active role in governing services for vulnerable people?’

Mr Moran also criticised the manner in which the St John of God order had spent millions on private settlements with Clohessy’s victims in Malawi and Ireland. He said the order ‘appears more committed to looking after the interest and reputation of the order ahead of everything else, including the rights and safety of victims’. He added: ‘Paying off of victims to prevent court cases happening is not consistent with any of the policies or safeguarding guidelines, or the stated values of the order.’

One of the order’s main international funders – German children’s charity KNH – last night welcomed Clohessy’s prosecution. ‘It is crucial that cases of sexual abuse are consistently pursued through legal channels and that perpetrators are held accountable, regardless of when or where the offences were committed,’ a spokesperson said. ‘Our deepest sympathies go out to the victims. Their voices deserve to be heard, justice must be served, and their protection ensured. Protecting children must always be the highest priority in any society and institution.’

KHN also called for Br Forkan to be investigated for recklessly endangering children.

‘With regard to Brother Donatus, it is in our view now urgent that an independent and transparent review of all related events be conducted,’ a KNH spokesperson told the MoS. ‘We think an independent investigation into Donatus Forkan’s role in sending and tolerating Brother Aidan’s presence in Malawi is a necessary step after the court ruling. This is essential not only to clarify responsibility but also to draw structural consequences and improve systems for child protection,’ the charity said.

KNH added: ‘Religious institutions, like all other institutions, must never evade responsibility or



HARROWING: Last week’s MoS stories of abuse victims in Malawi

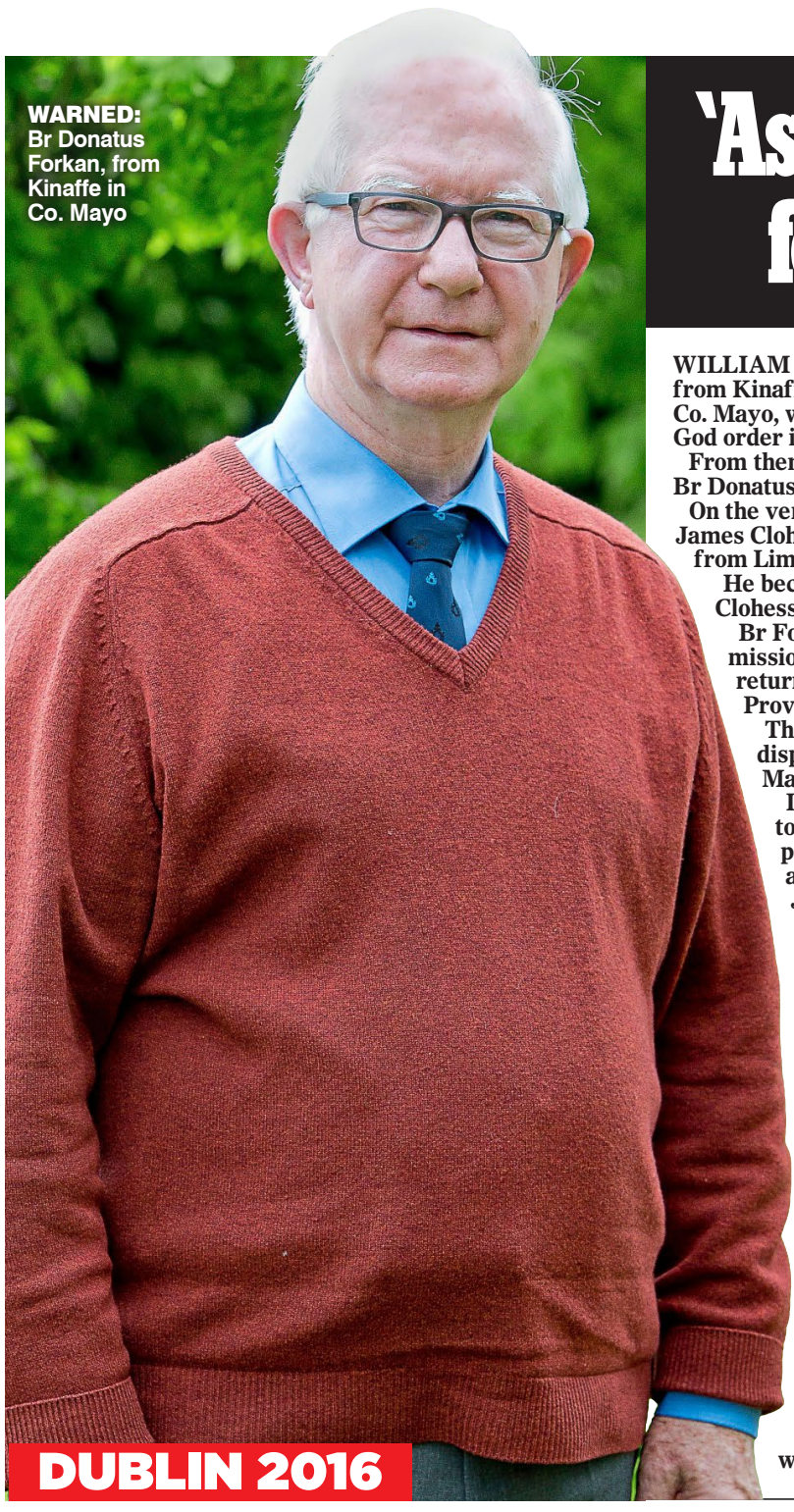




ALL SMILES: Br Donatus, left, with Br Aidan, second from right, celebrating their Golden Jubilee and, below, with the paedophile, centre, in Malawi



needs to step aside'



WARNED: Br Donatus Forkan, from Kinaffe in Co. Mayo

DUBLIN 2016

'As Prior General, he was responsible for the order's response to abuse'

WILLIAM Forkan is a farmer's son from Kinaffe, just outside Swinford in Co. Mayo, who entered the St John of God order in 1960.

From then on, he became known as Br Donatus Forkan.

On the very same day another man, James Clohessy– an engineer's son from Limerick – was also professed.

He became known as Br Aidan Clohessy.

Br Forkan spent 21 years as a missionary in Korea before returning home to become Provincial in Ireland in 1992.

The following year, he dispatched Br Aidan to Malawi.

In advance of his departure to Africa, Br Forkan presented his alumnus with a small bronze statue of St John of God.

The date was October 22, 1993 – the official start of Br Aidan's new mission.

At that point, Clohessy had already been accused of abuse once.

Those accusations would soon mount up substantially.

Despite this, Br Forkan left Clohessy in Africa as victims here were paid off in secret.

At home, meanwhile, Br Forkan's career took off.

In 1994, he moved to Rome as one of the five most senior members of the St John of God order globally.

In 2006, he became Prior General, the order's worldwide leader.

By **Michael O'Farrell**
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

At this point, the number of allegations against Clohessy had exceeded a dozen – yet he remained free to prey on others in Malawi. As Prior General, Br Forkan was responsible for shaping the order's response to child abuse.

Clohessy wasn't his only problem.

In 2007, a safeguarding consultant hired to help St John of God deal with a tide of abuse allegations in Australia and New Zealand, wrote to him in Rome.

Dr Michelle Mulvihill, a psychologist and former Sister of Mercy nun complained: 'Regretfully it has been my experience that when I have tried to raise matters of a challenging or unpleasant nature, the consistent response has been one of rejection and vilification of a personal nature.'

'A deeply engrained culture of collusion'

She also warned Br Forkan of a 'deeply engrained culture of collusion' within his order.

This, she told him, 'makes it almost impossible for the truth about these matters to be dealt with'.

Ultimately, Dr Mulvihill resigned in protest.

She later went on to testify about her dealings with St John of God and Br Forkan at the Australian Commission into clerical child abuse.

Dr Mulvihill told the Commission that she resigned because she 'could no longer deal with the corruption and systemic abuse that was my experience of what was happening inside that organisation'.

She added: 'It's all about power, isn't it? All roads lead to Rome. It's all about who's in charge.'

Dr Mulvihill was not alone in warning Br Forkan about child abuse concerns.

The Irish Mail on Sunday has also obtained a 2007 letter to Br Forkan from Australian Bishop Michael Malone.

Bishop Malone was particularly concerned that the Australian Provence of St John of God had elected a new leader and council, which included some members who had been the subject of abuse complaints.

'I understand that you were present for the Chapter and election,' he wrote to Br Forkan in Rome.

'Something serious needs to be done to address the matters which have been reported to me.

'I am confident that you will share my concern and attend to what has the potential to become already greater scandal than already exists.'

Ultimately, with the backing of Br Forkan in Rome, the order in Australia paid millions in compensation and legal fees to protect accused brothers who would later be jailed.

The MoS has previously asked Br Forkan about his role in Australia, but he has never responded.

remain silent. Instead, they must implement effective child protection systems. All known abuse cases must be fully investigated and published, regardless of the perpetrator's position or rank.

'Those who have failed – whether through active cover-up or neglect – must be held accountable. Abuse must never be dealt with internally. External, independent bodies are needed to investigate and monitor incidents.'

Clohessy's victims this weekend said more investigations and prosecutions are required.

Abuse survivor Joe Devine said Clohessy should be prosecuted for the abuse he committed in Malawi.

'There should be a trial, the same way there was a trial here in Ireland,' he said. Mr Devine's wife Sally also said Br Forkan should be investigated. 'Although I know he wasn't actually carrying out the abuse, he was complicit in allowing it to go on.'

Another survivor, Patsy Carville, criticised the Church authorities.

'It's the Catholic Church you have to blame,' he said. He [Clohessy] was told not to go near children and he was there for 20 years. It's a disgrace nobody checked up on him,' he said.

Victim Wayne Farrell said the abuse of children in Africa was 'horrendous'.

'I think justice should be done for them here and I'd like to hear something from the Irish Government on it,' he said.

Another victim, Gerry Quinn, said the role of Br Forkan needed to be exposed.

'He needs to be exposed and the people who backed him, they need to be exposed as well. That monster [Clohessy] was left roam free over there.'

The State child and family agency Tusla said it could not comment on any individual case.

However, a spokesperson said: 'Organisations who are providing services to children have a statutory responsibility under the Children First Act 2015 to keep children safe from harm while availing of those services, carry out a risk assessment, prepare and publish a Child Safeguarding Statement and to refer any concern regarding a child to Tusla.

'Seek support and talk with the authorities'

'When Tusla suspects that a crime has been committed, and a child or children have been wilfully neglected or physically or sexually abused, Tusla notifies An Garda Síochána where they investigate the crime.'

The MoS also contacted the Department of Health, whose spokesperson advised that the Department of Children should be contacted for comment. However, that department did not respond.

A spokesperson for the Association of Leaders of Missionaries & Religious of Ireland declined to comment last night – but confirmed that the matter would be referred to the next meeting of the executive.

Last week, the SJoG order refused to comment on its role in the cover-up of Clohessy's crimes in Ireland and Africa.

Instead, Br Forkan posted a brief statement on the St John of God website. He said in the statement: 'I apologise to anyone who has experienced hurt in our services in the past.

'As a community, we unequivocally condemn any action that harms or diminishes others.

'These recent times have reflected pain for so many and brought emotional turmoil for all affected. We think especially of those who came forward to report hurt that they had experienced, we acknowledge their bravery and courage and we think of their families and loved ones.'

This week, a spokesperson for St John of God declined to specifically address queries about the role of Br Forkan.

'The order encourages anyone who has experienced hurt to seek support and talk with the authorities,' he said, before providing abuse helpline phone numbers.

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BEHIND THE LIES Pages 30 & 31

Beneath the lies and

IT STARTED with an investigation into €1.6m of secret pay top ups for Saint John of God executives in 2016. That investigation led this newspaper to question in 2017, why the order had given false evidence to the Ryan Commission about when they received their first allegation of sexual abuse. In response, a legal threat in the face of incontrovertible facts hinted at something more. What that something was would take a further eight years to fully bring out to the light, and convict a serial paedophile who the order had spent years and millions of euro trying to cover up. Br Aidan Clohessy's abuse spanned decades and continents. Here the journalist, whose dogged pursuit finally revealed the pain and damage Clohessy inflicted on his silenced victims, relates his part in the almost decade-long journey to justice.



LEGACY: Michael O'Farrell with John Simwawa in Malawi

By **Michael O'Farrell**
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

BROTHER Donatus Forkan has a story he likes to tell. It involves an encounter he once had with an impoverished street girl in Mexico who was shunned by others. Feeling sorry for her, he intervened and bought the sweets she was selling.

Ever since, he has kept them on his desk as a reminder that many children are denied the 'dignity that every human being is entitled to'.

I too have a momento like that.

It is a simple bracelet, made by a homeless addict from Malawi called John Simwawa. He made the bracelet by stripping wires from scrapped cars and wrapping the copper around itself to form a wristband.

John is dead now. But his legacy lives on. He is one of several people without whom this story could never have been told. So when Br Aidan's trials began in May, I slipped on John's bracelet and wore it throughout.

When photographer Sean Dwyer and I first travelled to Malawi in 2017 to track down Br Aidan's victims there, John was the key who unlocked everything else.

As an orphaned street child, he had been one of those Br Aidan routinely collected in his pickup truck by the People's cafe.

He'd then bring them home to bathe and beat – and worse.

Strung out as he was when I met him, John was still able to lead me to others who had been taken from the streets by Br Aidan.

It was a similar role to the one that another person vital to this story, Con Carroll, performed in Ireland.

Long before I went to Malawi, I had to prove the St John of God order knew Br Aidan was a danger to children before they sent him to Africa.

That meant finding victims here, something that was only possible because of Con.

From 2003, the Redress Board had begun compensating those abused at St Augustine's. But that process was entirely behind closed doors. Even today it remains a crime for anyone to breach this seal.

Think about that for a moment.

It goes to the heart of how St John of God was able to cover up the crimes of a serial paedophile, allowing him to continue abusing.

In fact, it is likely that for many victims, they did succeed in wiping the abuse they suffered from history. We don't know how many claims were secretly settled at the Redress Board – because St John of God won't tell us.

All we can trace is how the order inserted itself into the redress system at the very last moment, just as it was being passed by the Dáil. That was achieved thanks to secret, backroom negotiations

'For €1m, Br Aidan got a free pass to abuse kids'

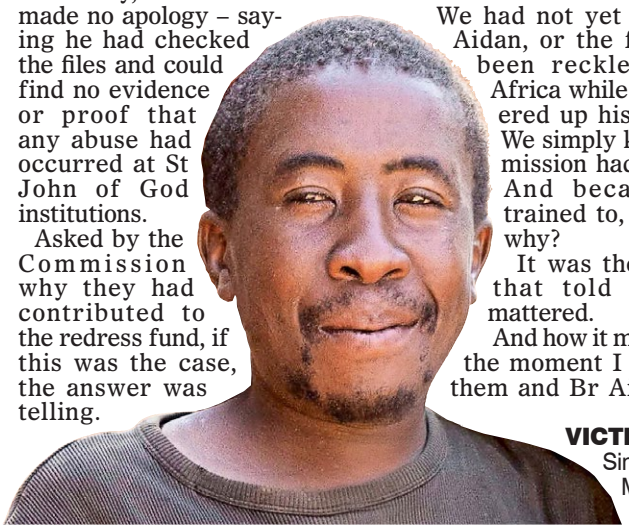
conducted by the powerful Church and political figures St John of God was able to marshal in the order's favour.

What this all means is that in return for a contribution of €1m to the Redress Board by his order, Br Aidan got a free pass to continue abusing kids.

Later in 2004, his order was able to mislead the Ryan Commission into clerical abuse. In fact, they made out that child abuse was not an issue for them at all.

At the time of his commission testimony, Br Fintan Whitmore made no apology – saying he had checked the files and could find no evidence or proof that any abuse had occurred at St John of God institutions.

Asked by the Commission why they had contributed to the redress fund, if this was the case, the answer was telling.



VICTIM: John Simwawa in Mzuzu, Malawi

'It was an attractive proposition,' then Irish provincial Br Whitmore answered.

The misleading Ryan Commission testimony of Br Whitmore was the first article this newspaper published in this strand of our investigations into SJoG - as the order became known in our newsroom shorthand.

They tried to stop it, threatening a High Court defamation case. The threat might have worked because at the time we were not aware of the scale of this story, and were still largely focused on the €1.6m in secret top ups to their executives who ran their services for the HSE.

We had not yet identified Br Aidan, or the fact that he'd been recklessly sent to Africa while his order covered up his crimes here. We simply knew the Commission had been misled. And because we are trained to, we wondered why?

It was the legal threat that told us the why mattered.

And how it mattered. From the moment I began to find them and Br Aidan's victims began trusting me with their stories, I knew this was going to be a life-altering assignment.

I knew that if I never got any other story over the line but this one, I'd look back at my career as a journalist with satisfaction.

Each and every one of those abused by Br Aidan – here and in Malawi – were instantly and utterly credible.

I knew they were telling nothing but the truth.

Grown men have nothing to gain by telling a stranger how they still wet the bed and cannot have adult relationships because of what was done to them as a child.

The tears that silently roll down their cheeks as they do so do not lie.

So I knew that if any jury ever heard these people, they too would believe them. No doubt about it.

The further we went the more this became apparent. Victims who never met, on different sides of the world, spoke of the same sinister pattern, the same sick modus operandi.

Every new victim traced gave yet further corroboration that we were dealing with a prolific paedophile who'd been systematically enabled by his superiors.

The challenge was to get as far as a jury at all. All the odds were stacked against it.

But those intent on keeping secrets didn't bargain on Con Carroll – and the enduring presence of obscure internet chat rooms.

Because he was an orphan, Con had been sent to St Augustine's and into the preying hands of Br Aidan.

When he left he became a homeless heroin addict haunting the streets of Dublin. But he somehow pulled through and survived.

Then in September 2005 Con walked into the Five Star Internet Cafe on Dublin's Talbot Street and

'An orphan, Con was sent to St Augustine's'

paid for an hour online. The words he typed out that day with a single finger on his one good hand are online still.

'Aidan Clohessey was involved in child sex abuse,' he wrote, misspelling his tormentor's name.

By then Con had been before the Redress Board. Were he to ever say what happened there, he could be prosecuted as a criminal. But he wasn't afraid to speak up about what Br Aidan did to him.

In fact, he wanted the world to know. Over a decade after he left those words online, I stumbled across them.

Soon Con was leading me to

l abuse, lay the truth



Pictures from Malawi: Seán Dwyer



ST JOHN OF GOD CHILD ABUSE

Br Aidan's mission to prey in Africa

'I feel like I was robbed of my future. It hurts me so much...'

By MICHAEL O'FARRELL

INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

MALAWI

ZAMBIA

ZIMBABWE

EXCLUSIVE: The Irish Mail on Sunday's report on Br Aidan's abuse of children in Malawi, Africa

others across Dublin who had been victims. Con Carroll was the first real breakthrough in this case.

Because of him – and those he led us to – we discovered the abuse of boys at St Augustine's had been covered up in Ireland.

Then, thousands of miles away in Malawi, John Simwawa played the same role. Through him, we learned Br Aidan had continued to abuse.

We knew all this by late 2017 and that Christmas I confronted Br Aidan in person back in Dublin.

He was completely unfazed.

Listening to him I never felt like I was listening to an innocent man. Instead, he sounded every inch a monster who knew he'd gotten away with it.

Perhaps he was right not to be worried. The odds were still stacked firmly in his favour and against those whose lives he had destroyed.

But we had enough to publish and we did.

Although our 2018 coverage was primarily about the cover up that allowed Br Aidan to remain with children in Africa, we were effectively naming a man as an alleged paedophile, which is not without considerable risk.

But naming and picturing him proved to be the next breakthough. As part of that story, we put Br Aidan's photo on the front page.

Other victims, some who could not read or write, saw the photograph – something that would not have worked if it had appeared in an anonymised form or without a photo.

When they came to us we listened to, and published their stories. We then directed them to gardaí as a new criminal investigation of Br Aidan was launched.

Then, with matters in the hands of gardaí and the DPP, we watched and waited. And worked on other stories.

For his part, Br Aidan lawyered up and received the best advice money could buy. When asked, he voluntarily attended several interviews under caution with investigating gardai.

This allowed his defence to later tell juries that their client co-operated fully and had never been arrested.

That defence was funded privately and St John of God have refused to specify if they paid.

(The order did, though, pay for a barrister to keep a watching brief on his trials - something that costs about €750 a day or €15,000 every 20 days.

Whoever paid for his defence, Br Aidan got value for money immediately.

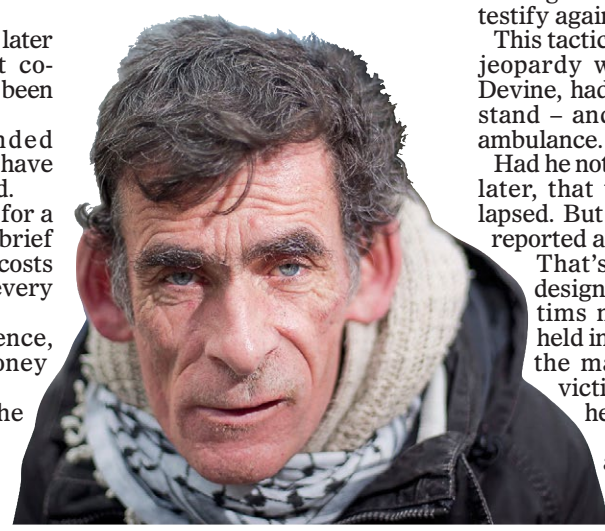
That was evident when he appeared before Dun Laoighaire District Court to be formally charged in February 2022.

This was the first step on the formal road to justice for his victims after decades. Finally, they could feel someone had believed them.

But Br Aidan's defence secured a gagging order, preventing the press from reporting any of the charged against their client.

This reporting restriction was only lifted six months afterwards when we joined forces with other media organisations - including RTÉ, The Irish Independent, News International and The Irish Times – to defeat it.

And still some victims were left behind. Like others, Wayne Farrell had seen our 2018 coverage and had reported his abuse to his local garda station a few days later.



FIRST REAL BREAKTHROUGH: Con Carroll, from Dublin

He was ignored. No one ever got back to him. That was only put right after Br Aidan had been charged when I directed him to the correct garda team.

He was then added to a second case and soon Br Aidan was charged with abusing Wayne and another victim.

Ultimately, Br Aidan did not go on trial until May 2025 – eight years after we'd first exposed him.

The State wanted to run all the victims' cases together in one trial, something that would have led to a great deal of corroborating evidence. But the defence wanted six separate trials, meaning every jury would be unaware there were any more complaints.

'Br Aidan forced each victim to testify'

After legal argument, two trials were ordered, one for four victims and one for two.

By then St John of God had spent millions in Ireland and Africa settling civil actions – of which the juries knew nothing.

In Africa, those who came forward were targeted, threatened and offered cash to drop their claims —- something St John God condemned when we brought it to their attention.

Br Aidan then pleaded not guilty, forcing each and every victim to testify against him.

This tactic put one of the trials in jeopardy when one victim, Joe Devine, had a panic attack on the stand – and was taken away by ambulance.

Had he not returned several days later, that trial would have collapsed. But none of that could be reported at the time.

That's because a new law designed to protect rape victims meant the trials were held in camera – even though the majority of Br Aidan's victims wanted their story heard publicly.

Instead, as the trial and sentencing process continued for the best part of two months, the public were prevented from hearing them tell their story.

Then, for those victims involved in the first trial there was one final blow. In his first trial, Br Aidan was convicted and branded an ogre by the trial judge, Elva Duffy.

She moved to imprison him immediately, pending the second trial and sentencing. However, Br Aidan's defence intervened, arguing this would delay the second trial.

So instead of being lead away in cuffs, something victims had waited decades for, he walked out the front door even though he was a guilty man.

I know, from speaking to them that night, that this traumatised them afresh. To them it felt as if the system had let them down again. Thankfully, this was a temporary glitch, albeit a cruel one.

As I write this today, and as you might have read last week in this newspaper, Br Aidan is in jail and the cover up facilitated by his order has been exposed.

While I am proud of our part to play in that what matters most is children – who became men – who were never believed, have finally been granted that relief.

'They finally believed us,' one victim, not connected to the trial, called me to say afterwards.

He sounded astonished that it could be so.

And given how long it took, and how many twists and turns threatened to prove his doubts correct, maybe he was right to be.

But somehow, I always knew that would be the case. The challenge was getting them heard. That's where the journalism was.

I have a name for this kind of work. I call it 'slow news'. It relies on resources of news organisations, and the expertise (and instincts) of reporters and photographers, and the patience (and instincts) of editors, and the collective belief in the end result, despite whatever setback might make you question the time and effort being funnelled into one story.

Oh and people. Like John Simwawa and Con Carroll. Who fought their demons and proved that no matter what a monster like Br Aidan Clohessy can take away, a sense of shared humanity, and a belief in a fundamental justice, can triumph over the even hugely powerful organisations like SJoG.

And the secrets they still cling to.

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Minister for Education launches inquiry into historical sexual abuse but asked

Deafening official

By **John Lee** and **Michael O'Farrell**

THE Minister for Education last night remained tight-lipped over suggestions the head of St John of God in Ireland should not be allowed to be in charge of an organisation with credible allegations of reckless endangerment of children levelled against him.

Minister Helen McEntee this week announced a commission of investigation, to be headed by Judge Michael MacGrath, after a September 2024 scoping inquiry report revealed thousands of allegations of historical abuse in schools.

At a press conference after confirming the establishment of the commission, she said the religious groups involved in historical sexual abuse 'will be held accountable'.

The MoS understands that now-convicted St John of God (SJoG) paedophile Br Aidan Clohessy is one of the 29 abusers in a SJoG special needs school in Blackrock, St Augustine's, where the 2024 scoping report confirmed 112 allegations.

Two weeks ago the Irish Mail on Sunday reported lifelong predatory paedophile Clohessy was left free to prey on children in Africa as SJoG superiors covered up his crimes in Ireland.

Last week we reported comments by former HSE board member Fergus Finlay, SJoG consultant psychiatrist Dr Paul Moran, and the German NGO Kindernothilfe (the funder of some of SJoG's programmes in Malawi in Africa). They called for a Garda investigation into potential reckless endangerment under the 2006 Criminal Justice Act for Br Donatus Forkan's role in covering up the crimes of Clohessy, and the need for Br Forkan to step aside while that investigation is pursued.

But despite our reporting being directly relevant not just to the commission of investigation but to a current child protection concern over an organisation that receives over €200m in public funding, the Department of Education joins the Department of Children, the Department of Health and the HSE in refusing to comment on SJoG or not directly addressing the questions put to them.

Asked directly about the criticisms from Mr Finlay, Dr Moran and the German NGO – whose statement is reproduced in full on the opposite page – a spokesman for the minister told the MoS: 'The Department of Education and Youth does not comment on individual cases.

'The sexual abuse of a child is a criminal act that is repugnant to the whole community. It is the role of An Garda Síochána to determine if a criminal act has been committed and if an investigation is required.'

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Called for a Garda investigation

By **John Lee** and **Michael O'Farrell**

THE Irish Mail on Sunday reported that critics wanted St John of God chief Br Donatus Forkan to be investigated for alleged reckless endangerment of children under Irish law after the organisation left now-convicted paedophile Br Aidan Clohessy in Malawi, in complete control of all of their services.

Internal and external critics called for Br Forkan to step aside from any role with oversight of service provision while an investigation takes place into why Clohessy was left in situ, providing services to street children, despite mounting allegations against him, and the settlement of cases in Ireland and Africa on his behalf.

Those critics include former HSE board member and ex-Barnardos CEO Fergus Finlay, a St John of God (SJoG) consultant psychiatrist Paul Moran, and Kindernothilfe, the German funders of some of SJoG's programmes in Malawi.

In the past two weeks we have contacted various relevant Irish authorities for their views on the conviction of Clohessy and the alleged reckless endangerment by Br Forkan of street children in Africa and whether he should step aside from any role in service provision given his non-action regarding mounting child abuse allegations.

The following is a description of official Ireland's response to these very serious matters.


JUNE 29

'OGRE' BROTHER ABUSED STREET KIDS IN AFRICA

WE report that lifelong predatory paedophile Clohessy was left free to prey on children in Africa as his St John of God superiors covered up his crimes in Ireland. A SJoG spokesman said 'no comment' when asked about the story. In the subsequent week, we contacted the HSE, Tusla, the departments of Health and Children, and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI). Here are their individual responses:

HSE (the main Irish funder of SJoG's Irish operations): A spokeswoman tells us: 'You should redirect your query to the board of St John of God Hospitaller Services Group.'

Two weeks of asking our politicians questions that they won't answer

TUSLA: A spokeswoman says: 'Tusla – Child and Family Agency does not comment on individual cases.

'When a child or family enters into a relationship with a public service such as Tusla, they are entitled to expect that information generated in that relationship is treated in confidence and remains private. This is critically important in the subject matters [in] which Tusla is involved.

'Organisations who are providing services to children have a statutory responsibility under the Children First Act 2015 to keep children safe from harm while availing of those services, carry out a risk assessment, prepare and publish a Child Safeguarding Statement and to refer any concern regarding a child to Tusla.

In line with our primary legislative duty, when a person comes forward and makes an allegation about something that they experienced in childhood, Tusla's role is focused on the safeguarding of children who may be at risk today or in the future due to abuse that is reported to have occurred in the past.

'When Tusla suspects that a crime has been committed, and a child or children have been wilfully neglected or physically or sexually abused, Tusla notifies An Garda Síochána, where they investigate the crime.

'Anyone who wishes to disclose details relating to retrospective abuse can contact their local duty social work office. Contact details are available at Tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams.

'We are absolutely mindful of the trauma and emotional distress experienced by many people in this particular context of our work, and this informs our approach to the greatest extent possible.'

HEALTH: A spokeswoman says: 'This is not our remit, it is a matter for Department of Children. We have forwarded your queries to them'.

CHILDREN: No response was received.

AMRI: 'I'll refer this to the executive of AMRI.'


PROLIFIC PAEDOPHILE: Brother Aidan Clohessy leaving court in May


JULY 6

'GARDAI MUST INVESTIGATE ST JOHN OF GOD CHIEF'

WE report comments by Fergus Finlay, Dr Paul Moran and the German NGO Kindernothilfe, calling for a Garda investigation into Br Donatus Forkan's role in covering up the crimes of Clohessy and the need for him to step aside while that investigation is pursued. SJoG's only response is to direct us to abuse freephone helplines.

On Tuesday, July 8, Education Minister Helen McEntee announces the establishment of a Commission of Investigation, to be chaired by Judge Michael MacGrath, into historical abuse in schools.

This week we decided to follow up our previous contact with the departments of Health and Children; and to contact the Department of Education, given that Clohessy was convicted of abuse in St Augustine's School, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. The scoping inquiry that forms the basis for the announced commission confirmed 112 allegations involving 29 alleged abusers at that school. Crucially, one of those abusers was Clohessy. Here are their individual responses:

CHILDREN: The MoS queried last week's non-response to be told it was due to an administrative error, but the response would have been that the issue was not in the department's 'remit'. We suggested, strongly, that such a response was not acceptable in that it would mean that two Government departments would be rejecting jurisdiction over issues of child protection and documented child abuse. We contacted the Government Press Secretary to advise him of this concern, and asked the department to revert with a more substantive response.

A spokesman responded: 'While the Department of Children, Disability and Equality cannot comment on individual cases, it takes matters of child protection extremely seriously. Tusla and An Garda Síochána are the two agencies in the State with statutory responsibility for assessing (Tusla) and investigating (An Garda Síochána) allegations of child abuse and promoting the safety and welfare of children. These agencies carry out their responsibilities under a suite of child protection legislation including the Children First Act, 2015, Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, and the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012-2016.

Organisations who are providing services to children have a statutory responsibility under the Children First Act

if current head of Irish order who 'covered up' abuse should be left in charge:

silence descends



HELEN MCENTEE
The Education Minister talks tough on historical sex abuse but had no opinion on whether the current SJoG head should step aside

JENNIFER CARROLL MACNEILL
The Health Minister's office said 'this is not our remit'

NORMA FOLEY
The Children's Minister's office told the MoS child sex abuse was 'not in its remit' and told us to contact Tusla and An Garda Síochána

BERNARD GLOSTER
The HSE had no comment other than to tell us to redirect our query to St John of God Hospitaller Group

2015 to keep children safe from harm while availing of those services, carry out a risk assessment, prepare and publish a Child Safeguarding Statement and to refer any concerns regarding a child to Tusla. When Tusla suspects that a crime has been committed, and a child or children have been wilfully neglected or physically or sexually abused, Tusla notifies An Garda Síochána where they investigate the crime.'

Crucially the statement does not answer whether they believe Brother Forkan should step or be moved aside from his role in SJoG.

HEALTH: We also reverted to the Department of Health. Despite the issue not being in its remit last week, the involvement of the Government Press Secretary apparently affects its answer. Asked if there should be a Garda investigation, a spokeswoman says: 'Anyone with information should contact relevant authorities.' The statement does not answer whether the department believes Br Forkan should step aside or be moved from his role in SJoG.

EDUCATION: Launching the Commission of Investigation, based on the scoping inquiry published in September 2008, Education Minister Helen McEntee says:

'The revelations of the report of the scoping inquiry were devastating, and the survivors' accounts of their experiences have had a profound impact. It is clear that survivors want accountability. I want to sincerely thank all survivors for the bravery they have shown in coming forward. Because of their courage, a light has been shone on a dark period of Irish history. Further recommendations of the scoping inquiry have also been accepted today by Government in relation to matters that are deeply significant to survivors, particularly in relation to child protection.

'The report of the scoping inquiry found that current child protection systems in our schools are robust and effective, but there is always scope for further development. The safety of every child attending school today is of profound importance to survivors who spoke to the scoping inquiry. Work has already begun to implement these recommendations.'

In a subsequent press conference, Ms McEntee adds that the religious groups involved in historical sexual abuse 'will be held accountable'.

As such, the MoS attempts to contact the department to ask about the real and current example of Clohessy's crimes being covered up by SJoG.

We contact five separate mobile phone numbers on the official Government contacts list. We send emails to a number of addresses. We also contact the Government Information Service, which manages overall Government communications. No replies are received by yesterday morning and the MoS again informs the Deputy Government Press Secretary of the situation.

We are subsequently contacted by a civil servant who is not usually in the press office. After a few hours, the temporary spokesman returns, apologises for the delayed response, and says: 'The Department of Education and Youth does not comment on individual cases. The sexual abuse of a child is a criminal act that is repugnant to the whole community. It is the role of An Garda Síochána to determine if a criminal act has been committed and if an investigation is required.'

The statement does not answer whether it believes Br Forkan should step aside or be moved from his role at St John of God.

SJoG's German funder's response

KINDERNOTHILFE (KNH) welcomes the criminal conviction of Br Aidan. It is crucial that cases of sexual abuse are consistently pursued through legal channels and that perpetrators are held accountable, regardless of when or where the offences were committed.

Our deepest sympathies go to the victims. Their voices deserve to be heard, justice must be served and their protection ensured. Protecting children must always be the highest priority in any society and institution.

KNH has been co-operating with St John of God in Malawi for years and has been providing financial support to various projects. However, this funding was temporarily suspended in 2018 after concerns about potential risks and unresolved issues related to child protection came to light. The resumption of funding occurred only after a thorough review, based on the condition that a significantly strengthened child protection strategy, clear institutional reforms, and transparent communication from the partner organisation were put in place. These measures were promptly implemented.

We remain in close dialogue with our local partners to ensure that children's rights and their protection are rigorously upheld.

With regard to Br Donatus, it is in our view now urgent that an independent and transparent review of all related events be conducted. Individuals who held central responsibilities and may have knowingly contributed to the endangerment of children should not be allowed to assume further leadership roles in child-related institutions – whether they are still active or have already left. We think an independent investigation into Donatus Forkan's role in sending and tolerating Br Aidan's presence in Malawi is a necessary step after the court ruling. This is essential not only to clarify responsibility but also to draw structural consequences and improve systems for child protection.

As a children's rights organisation, we have a clear stance on child protection: Religious institutions, like all other institutions, must never evade responsibility or remain silent. Instead, they must implement effective child protection systems.

This includes:

Creating transparency: All known abuse cases must be fully investigated and published, regardless of the perpetrator's position or rank.

Taking responsibility: Those who have failed – whether through active cover-up or neglect – must be held accountable.

Strengthening child protection systems: Every religious institution must implement child protection policies, regularly review them and ensure their application.

Introducing independent oversight: Abuse must never be dealt with internally. External, independent bodies are needed to investigate and monitor incidents.

Listening to and supporting the affected: Their voices must be taken seriously – not only legally but also pastorally, psychologically and financially.

The Irish Mail ON SUNDAY

AUGUST 10, 2025

€4.00 (£2.10 NI)





EXCLUSIVE

Tragic Martha's plans to marry boyfriend after divorce came through

PAGES 8 & 9

30 MORE CLAIMS AGAINST 'OGRE' BROTHER AIDAN

New cases prompt Minister to write to St John of God demanding that child protection measures are met

THE HEAD of the St John of God order is facing mounting pressure to step down as a trustee of seven State-funded special needs schools as 30 more cases of alleged abuse involving serial abuser Brother Aidan Clohessy emerged.

This pressure intensified as Children's Minister Norma Foley, this weekend wrote to St John of God seeking assurances about its safeguarding standards in the wake of decade-long revelations in the Irish Mail on Sunday.

And it comes as more political and public figures added their voices to demands that Br Donatus Forkan, who is at the helm of the order, also face criminal investigation for the alleged reckless endangerment of children.

Sinn Féin and Labour both called on the St John of God provincial to stand aside and for a criminal probe into how the order allowed a lifelong predatory paedophile to prey on vulnerable children.

Concerns about the position of Br Forkan in State-funded roles of responsibility over children were raised after Clohessy, 85, was jailed in June.

EXCLUSIVE

By **Michael O'Farrell**

INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

Clohessy – described by the trial judge as 'an ogre' – was jailed for abusing six boys at St Augustine's school for special needs children in Blackrock, Co. Dublin in the 1970s and 1980s.

Following his sentencing, the MoS revealed how Clohessy was free to prey on children in Africa for decades as his superiors in Ireland covered up his crimes at home.

In the aftermath of our coverage, around 30 more victims have come forward in Africa alleging they were abused by Clohessy, in addition to as

Turn to Page 4 ››



Fleabag's Phoebe looks swell taking a stroll in her denim dungarees

SEE PAGE 11

'Head of the order

›› From Page One

many as 20 civil cases from there that have already been settled.

The St John of God order has privately settled these African cases in the Irish courts without any admission of liability.

Together with recent settlements to Irish victims, the part-taxpayer-funded order has spent more than €3m on civil cases in the past year.

The MoS now understands that, since Clohessy's imprisonment, further victims have come forward in Malawi, bringing the number of alleged victims seeking recompense there to more than 50. The head of the scandal-plagued order dispatched Clohessy to Malawi in 1993 as part of the cover-up of his fellow cleric's crimes in Ireland.

While in Africa, Clohessy remained free to abuse more vulnerable children until he was withdrawn in 2012 amid a Canonical Inquiry. Ever since, the Vatican has remained silent on the outcome of this investigation and no one in Malawi was ever told why Clohessy was withdrawn.

In the past month, the Vatican has continued this policy of silence despite repeated requests from the MoS to answer questions about the cover-up of Clohessy's abuse in Africa.

Meanwhile at home, further criminal complaints from former St Augustine's pupils against Clohessy are also being

'I'm surprised gardaí haven't investigated yet'

considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions, though no new charges have yet been filed.

Despite his role in the cover-up of Clohessy's abuse, Br Forkan remains at the helm of the order. In this capacity, he is a trustee on the board of a charitable company called the St John of God Hospitaller Services Group.

This is the parent company to St John of God Community Services Ltd, which receives more than €200m annually from the HSE to provide services to intellectually disabled children and adults throughout the State.

In their role as trustees of the wider St John of God group, Br Forkan and his fellow trustees exercise considerable control over State-funded resources.

They retain the power to appoint the CEO of St John of God Community Services Ltd and exert considerable influence over the ethos and management of the organisation.

However, pressure is growing for Br Forkan to stand aside as his order is rocked by dozens more alleged abuse cases. Ms Foley has written to St John of Community Services in the wake of ongoing MoS investigations into the abuse scandal and its cover-up.

It is understood the minister's letter acknowledges the work St John of God does to support children and adolescents with intellectual disability and seeks confirmation from St John of God Community Services that all the necessary child protection measures under the Children First Act 2015 are being complied with and implemented.

Ms Foley has also sought assurances that all the necessary child protection measures are in place in the parent company, St John of God Hospitaller Services Group, and that all individuals at all levels of the organisation are in compliance.

Br Forkan is a trustee of seven publicly funded primary schools run by his order.

Four of these are in Dublin – St Augustine's in Blackrock, the Carmona Special School in Dún Laoghaire, the St John of God School, Islandbridge, and St Peter's school in Rathgar.

The other schools of which Br Forkan is a trustee are St Mary's Special School in Drumcar, Co. Louth; St Raphael's school in Celbridge, Co. Kildare; and St Francis Special School in Killarney, Co. Kerry.

Several public figures, including former HSE board member and Barnardos CEO Fergus Finlay, have called for Br Forkan to be removed from any publicly funded role and demanded he be investigated for recklessly endangering children.

So too has Kindernothilfe (KNH), the German children's charity that funds St John of God's operations in Malawi.

The charity told the MoS: 'With regard to Brother Donatus, it is in our view now urgent that an independent and transparent review of all related events be conducted.

'Individuals who held central



PREDATOR: Aidan Clohessy was jailed in June for abusing six boys





PREY: Edward Phiri, who was abused by paedophile Clohessy, with his family in Malawi and, below, fellow victim Makaiko Chimaliro, on right

INSTITUTIONS' SILENCE FURTHER DAMAGES VICTIMS OF ABUSE

THE tendency of religious organisations to close ranks to protect themselves when abuse scandals emerge further damages victims, according to consultant psychiatrist Paul Moran, who works within the St John of God group.

'Where it has become clear that terrible abuse has happened, the responsible organisations, by their silence, are further damaging the victim,' he told the Irish Mail on Sunday.

At considerable risk to his own career, Mr Moran has continued to criticise the approach of the St John of God order, saying that the head of the order, Br Donatus Forkan, should step down until an investigation into his role in facilitating abuse cover-ups is conducted.

'From my experience, the harm caused by the abuse is exacerbated by the social response of the important people, and that could be in a family setting, or it could be in the wider community or society,' Dr Moran said.

'The sense of exclusion and rejection experienced by the abused person, on top of being abused, compounds the damage of the abuse.'

has to step aside'

Cover-up was mandated, required and directed by the Vatican



By COLM O'GORMAN

IN 2005, as founder and executive director of the One In Four charity, I worked to secure a recommendation from the Ferns Inquiry that those who recklessly endanger children should face criminal sanction.

The 2006 Criminal Justice Act made that a crime – yet no one has ever been prosecuted for it.

We fought for this law to ensure accountability for those who wilfully conceal allegations or knowledge of child sexual abuse and enabled further abuse.

It was meant to criminalise conduct like that of St John of God in its handling of convicted paedophile Br Aidan Clohessy.

The cover-up in Clohessy's case allowed him to keep abusing in Africa.

It is clear Br Donatus Forkan – the head of the St John of God order – bears significant responsibility for allowing Clohessy access to enormously vulnerable children for many years, despite extensive knowledge of multiple credible allegations of child sexual abuse. Clohessy continued to abuse with effective impunity.

Br Forkan and other Church leaders must be held accountable. First and foremost, he is not a fit person to serve on the board of any organisation with responsibility for children or vulnerable adults. You don't need a Garda investigation to prove it – although that should happen.

There are only two possibilities: either Br Forkan was unaware of the abuse, which would be gross negligence given the information available, or he knew and actively covered it up. Either is grounds for resignation.

This is not 'just another abuse story'. You may think you've heard it all before, but what has never been acknowledged by the Vatican, or understood by wider society, is that the cover-up was wilful, deliberate and directed from the highest levels of the Church. It wasn't the result of a few incompetent leaders making bad calls or doing bad things. It was the result of deliberate and systematic policy mandated by the Vatican and underpinned by Church law. The first complaints against Clohessy were made in 1985. Yet he remained in a senior position in Malawi until 2012.

The Church acted only then to remove him and launch a Canonical Inquiry – a full 27 years later. It is not credible that they knew nothing until 2012. Under Church law, the Vatican has had exclusive authority over such cases for decades.

This was not mere negligence or a tragic oversight. It was a deliberate, sustained cover-up that protected a known abuser and gave him extraordinary access to some of the most vulnerable children on the planet. It demands accountability – starting with the removal of everyone who facilitated Clohessy's crimes from any position of responsibility involving children or vulnerable adults.

But it must go further.

Br Forkan is responsible for his leadership role and the decisions he made, but many others above and around him share equal responsibility. They too must be held to account.

The facts are clear and well-established: this cover-up was mandated, required and directed by the Vatican. It was wilful, deliberate, forceful, systemic and global. This case is a stark example of that reality.

It is staggering that no one in the Church ever sought to check whether Clohessy continued to abuse in Africa even after they removed him in 2012 – until the Irish Mail on Sunday did. Nor did they make any apparent effort to identify and support his victims there.

Why? Because they simply did not care enough. This is an organisation that knowingly placed a man with multiple allegations of child sexual abuse in a position of immense authority over vulnerable children. If they cared a jot for those children's safety, why would they do that?

'This was a cover-up that protected a known abuser'

The answer is they didn't. They left him in place until the risk of scandal became too great, then removed him quietly – concerned only with protecting their power, position, authority, reputation and money. It's not complicated. They sent Clohessy to Malawi and allowed him access to children because they did not care enough about those children.

They removed him when it served their interests, without regard for his many victims there. Because they did not care.

■ *Colm O'Gorman is a former executive director of Amnesty International Ireland and the founder of One In Four*

responsibilities and may have knowingly contributed to the endangerment of children should not be allowed to assume further leadership roles in child-related institutions – whether they are still active or have already left.'

KNH also confirmed it is engaging directly with St John of God about its concerns.

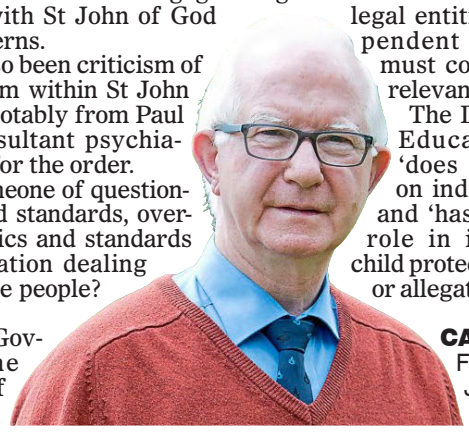
There has also been criticism of Br Forkan from within St John of God, most notably from Paul Moran, a consultant psychiatrist working for the order.

He said: 'Someone of questionable ethics and standards, overseeing the ethics and standards of an organisation dealing with vulnerable people? Can't be right.'

To date, the Government, the departments of Health and Education and the HSE have repeatedly refused to intervene or address the issue publicly.

A HSE spokesman said this weekend: 'This is a matter for the board of Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group. Voluntary organisations are independent legal entities with independent boards that must comply with all relevant legislation.'

The Department of Education said it 'does not comment on individual cases' and 'has no statutory role in investigating child protection concerns or allegations of abuse'.



CALLS: Donatus Forkan of the St John of God order

However, Labour Justice spokesman Alan Kelly told the MoS: 'It's quite clear this all needs to be investigated. I'm surprised that An Garda Síochána haven't investigated this yet. I would hope that will transpire in the near future.

'Many very established people have said this person should stand aside from the provision of services, and that is something I fundamentally agree with.'

The Tipperary North TD said he intends to raise the matter in the Dáil when it returns from the summer recess.

The former Labour Party leader also encouraged the board of management of the schools under the trusteeship of Br Forkan to 'look at their roles'.

Sinn Féin Education spokesman Darren O'Rourke also called for 'a criminal investigation into these extremely serious revelations'.

The Meath East TD said: 'Donatus Forkan should step down or should be removed from those positions. He cannot be allowed continue in roles where children and vulnerable adults are involved, or which are in receipt of State funding, through the HSE, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Youth, or elsewhere.'

Mr O'Rourke added: 'We cannot have deflection, delay, evasion or silence in this regard. History should have taught us that well enough. We cannot have it repeat itself. There must be accountability.'

The Irish Catholic Bishops Conference did not engage with queries relating to the St John of God abuse revelations. A spokesman would only say the conference has no role in overseeing religious orders.

The St John of God order also said it had no comment to make in response to the latest abuse allegations made against Clohessy.

The communal body representing religious orders, the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland, also declined to comment.

michaelofarrell@protonmail.com

'YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS COMING' Pages 6 and 7

The Irish Mail ON SUNDAY
SPECIAL INVESTIGATION



By MICHAEL O'FARRELL
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR



CAN'T FORGET: John Leacy, a victim of Aidan Clohessy at St Augustine's, in his home outside Enniscorthy in Co. Wexford

JOHN LEACY will never forget the nights that he spent lying in his bed as a child, listening for the approaching footsteps of Br Aidan Clohessy.

'It would put the hair up on your back. That's the way it was,' he recalls.

When they came, the footsteps would move up the stairs to the landing, pause and then continue, heading into the nearby bathroom.

Listening in the darkness, John would hear the taps in the bathroom running as Br Aidan prepared himself for what was to come.

Beneath his blanket, John never knew until the footsteps approached his own bedroom door whether it would be his turn – or if he'd be lucky that night.

'You never had a sleep,' the now 66-year-old Co. Wexford man told the Irish Mail on Sunday this week.

'You'd be roaring your head off and you'd be all tensed up'

'You could never settle down in your bed because you didn't know what time he was going to come to you.'

Often – twice a week at times – as John held his breath, it was his door the steps would come to.

Then he knew it was his turn.

'He'd tip you on the head and he would say, "You come with me now."

'He'd get you out of bed and bring you downstairs. He'd be in his jocks.'

Downstairs, Br Aidan would pull John's night clothes off, and the abuse would begin.

'He pulled the pyjamas off me many times. Many, many times…'

Other boys knew about the abuse but no one spoke about it openly.

'How'd you get on with him last night?' was as close as anyone might come to acknowledging the terror that they all lived with.

It was a question no one ever answered straight.

John is the eldest of five children. Because he was a slow learner, he was sent to St Augustine's special school in Blackrock, Co. Dublin, in September 1970 at the age of 13.

He is sure of that date because it was the same month his grandfather – whom he simply called Pa – died.

Pa had never wanted for his grandson to be sent to attend St Augustine's.

But when his grandfather died, John's fate was sealed.

'We went up in a little Mini. My uncle drove the car and my father came and my mother came.'

When they got there, one of the St John of God brothers brought John out to see the playing fields as his parents slipped away.

'I remember I looked around and my parents were gone. I never said goodbye to them. I started crying then.'

He soon came to the attention of the feared school principal. And after some time – perhaps months later – Br Aidan began to abuse the vulnerable boy.

'He'd bring you over by the hands. You'd have your pyjamas on you and he'd pull you across him... He'd beat you on the arse and start rubbing you. He'd say, "open up your legs."

'You'd be terrified, you know. You'd be all tensed up. He'd be at you there for a good 10 minutes.

'You'd be roaring your head off. You'd be crying. You didn't know what was coming. You'd be saying to him: "Stop, stop, stop."'

Another assault occurred in the school library after John broke into a storeroom with another pupil and stole bottles of Guinness.

'At the end of the table he stripped me naked. He stripped all the clothes off me, trousers and all, down to the bare arse and spread me legs out... He used the belt now that time.'

Another brother was present in the room at the time, but he said and did nothing.

'They were afraid of him,' recalls John. 'He was the head man there at that time.

'[Br Clohessy] was the law... No one ever stopped him. Never.'

John was due to go home that weekend but couldn't because of the injuries to his body.

'Me parents would have seen the state I was in.'

As a boarder, John only went home for Christmas and during school holidays.

After each trip home, he would hide to try to avoid being sent back to St Augustine's.

'When I was going back to school, I used to hide my bags and run away. I'd plead with my mother not to go back to school. I didn't want to go back.

'I said: "Mommy, I'm not going back, I'm just not going back."

'People around the area would come to see you to say, "John, go back. For your mother's sake. You'll get on all right." You cried the whole way back on the bus.'

With no other choice, John simply endured what he had to.

'I got strong in the place. I got to hate him and grew harder.

You just get hard then. Strong, tough in your ways because you had to face this for another three or four months, you know.'

When he got older John was moved into a house that had a front door which opened directly onto Carysfort Avenue. Pupils at St Augustine's referred to it as 'the big house'.

Br Aidan had a room there too.

It was in this house – long since demolished – that John would again lie awake at night, listening for the approaching footsteps.

'That's where I got the heavy going with him,' is how John describes this period.

Then, one night after being brought downstairs, John said he simply snapped.

I'll keep my copies of the MoS

By Michael O'Farrell

THERE are two folded copies of the Irish Mail on Sunday sitting on top of the fruit bowl in John Leacy's kitchen.

'They have to stay there,' he says. 'I'll keep them forever.'

Each paper contains recent front-page stories from our ongoing investigation into Br Aidan Clohessy and the cover up of his decades of abuse in Ireland and Malawi.

For John, the newspapers represent recognition. They mean his plight and the abuse he suffered will not be ignored.

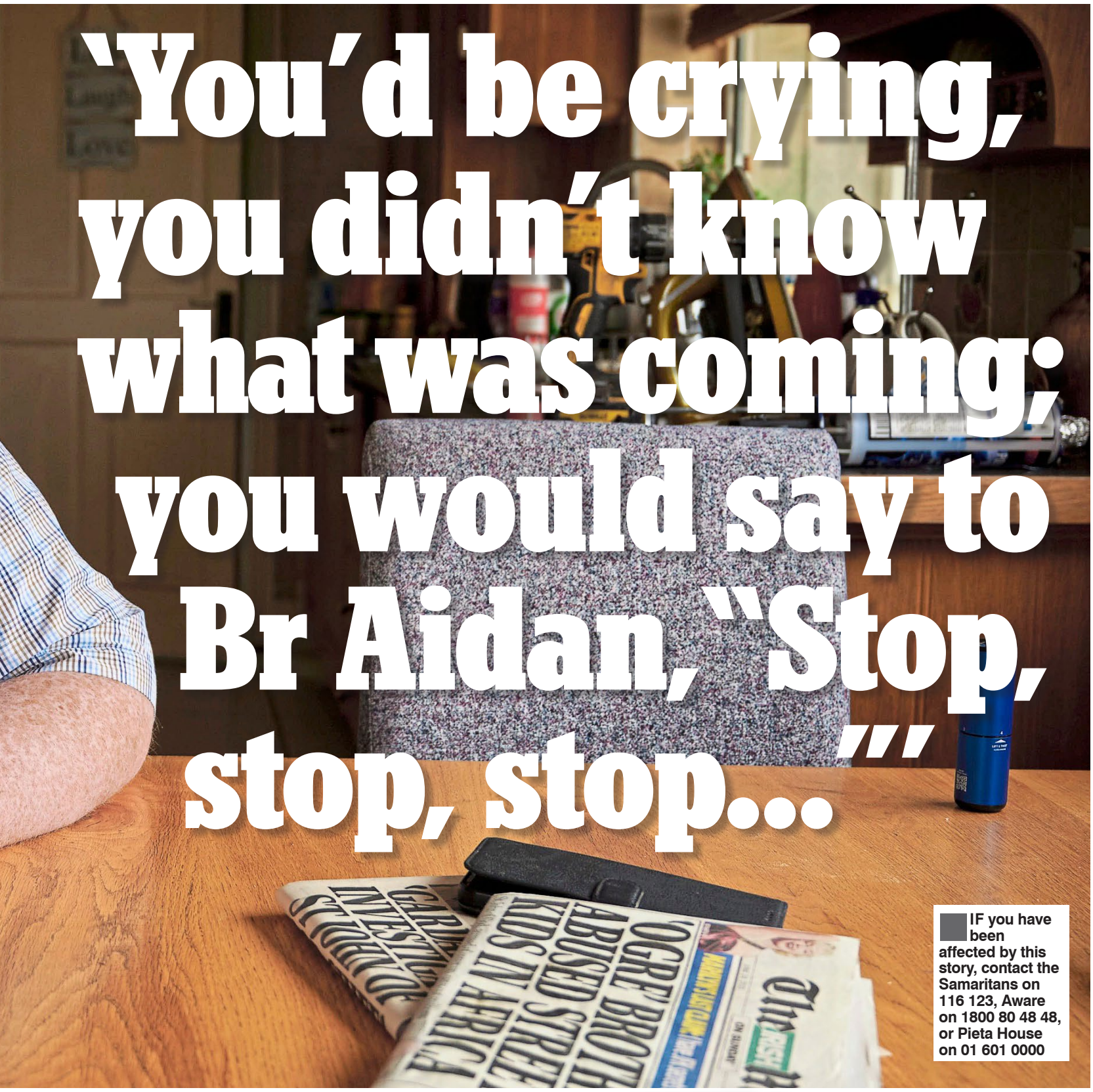
The first time John realised there was a chance of justice was when he saw an RTÉ report of Clohessy being charged, on the TV news on October 13, 2022.

The next day, John bought a copy of the Irish Daily Star and found a story about the case.

Cut out and neatly folded, that original article remains in his wallet to this day.

Although it is now yellowed and brittle, it rests between his cash and photographs of

‘You’d be crying, you didn’t know what was coming; you would say to Br Aidan, “Stop, stop, stop...”’



IF you have been affected by this story, contact the Samaritans on 116 123, Aware on 1800 80 48 48, or Pieta House on 01 601 0000

forever

grandchildren, some of whom he’s never seen.

‘Principal faces trial and sex charges,’ reads the headline.

Asked why he keeps the tattered cutting, John simply replies: ‘To look at it… That is something I’ll always keep.’

TREASURED: The front pages of the Irish Mail on Sunday issues from June 29, above, and July 6, right, that John displays in his kitchen

Naked and terrified, he lunged at Br Aidan, knocking him off his chair backwards.

John then made a run for the house’s front door and burst out into Carysfort Avenue.

‘I had nothing on me at all. I had no underpants or anything on me. I went out the front door. I’ll never forget it.’

Br Aidan coaxed him back inside, and, all this happened in the middle of the night, no one was about. No one saw a thing.

But after that, Br Aidan didn’t come to John’s door anymore.

At the age of 17, John left St Augustine’s and he got a job in Wexford in gardening, then going on to excel in the building trade.

He worked hard. But he drank hard too.

‘I went to drink – heavy drinking. I was drinking 20 pints a day.’

With a now-estranged partner, he had five children. But he wasn’t right. ‘I was never myself, like. I had so much built up inside… I had no love to give, the way that I was.’

He had no love for himself either.

‘I went about committing suicide. I had the rope around my neck.’

But his daughter walked into the garage and saw him: ‘She started crying. She saved my life, really.’

That was 12 or 13 years ago.

He began to get help, but the drinking continued. Eventually, in 2022 it nearly killed him as he was hospitalised in a coma for months.

Sober for the first time and recovering in bed at home, he was dumbfounded when he saw Br Aidan’s face on the television news.

‘I said, “You bastard. You’re back in Ireland.”’

It was October 2022, and Clohessy had just been charged with abusing others at St Augustine’s – a crime he is now in prison for.

Until that moment, John thought his abuser was dead.

Towards the end of her life, when his mother finally began to believe him, she asked John to complain to the local priest. But thinking his tormentor was dead, he told her: ‘No, it’s too late now.’

In earlier years – during his adult life – John even went as far as seeking Clohessy out at St Augustine’s to confront him

‘I remember I met a man. He was actually a caretaker in the school at the time. “Oh,” says he, “Br Aidan is gone out of here. He’s gone to Africa.”’

John asked the caretaker if Clohessy would be coming back.

‘No,’ he was told. ‘He’ll never be coming back here.’

John immediately thought of the children that Br Aidan would inevitably be coming into contact with in Africa.

‘It was a disgrace what they [St John of God] did there – sending a man in that condition to do more damage out there.

‘I was a strong enough fella and it still near put me in a mental home.

‘I thought, “God love those children out in Africa.” I did. He wasn’t going to change.

‘But at that time, you could go no place. The guards wouldn’t look at it. It wasn’t talked about.’

After seeing Br Aidan on the news, John contacted the Wexford Rape Crisis Centre.

‘They were very good to me. I’m with them ever since.’

Soon he was meeting with the same Garda team that have successfully prosecuted Clohessy.

‘I thought, “God love those children in Africa”’

But now, nearly three years later, there has still been no decision from the DPP.

John did not even know that his childhood tormentor had gone on trial: ‘I didn’t know that the case was going on.’

Then, a garda detective friend of John’s from Cork rang and told him Clohessy was in jail.

‘Jaysus, to tell you the truth, I felt a new man.’

John wants the same thing every other victim of Br Aidan Clohessy wants – justice.

He said that he was initially too embarrassed to talk about the abuse he suffered: ‘I was like a f***ing victim’ – but now I don’t give a damn.’

Being from Wexford, John knows all about the scandal of Fr Sean Fortune, which resulted in the Ferns Inquiry.

In that instance, Fr Fortune was moved around by his superiors – who included Bishop Brendan Comiskey – and was subsequently left free to abuse others.

To John’s mind, there is little difference between people like Bishop Comiskey and those who were responsible for sending Br Aidan to Africa.

Ultimately, Bishop Comiskey resigned in 2002 following the airing of the BBC documentary Suing the Pope.

John believes that Donatus Forkan – the head of the St John of God order and the person who had sent Br Aidan to serve in Malawi – should also resign.

‘What went on there was a big cover up, the same as the bishops. The man [Donatus Forkan] shouldn’t still be there. Sure, it’s the same as Brendan Comiskey.’

michaelofarrell@protonmail.com

Board chairman of SJoG charity is also the head of Tusla's audit and risk panel

Calls to stand down from State role after Order's inaction on abuse



By **Michael O'Farrell**
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

THE chair of the main publicly-funded charity run by St John of God – the order at the centre of damning abuse allegations involving dozens of children in Ireland and Africa – is also a key board member of the State agency responsible for protecting vulnerable minors.

The revelation has sparked calls for Charles Watchorn – a private sector finance executive who is the chair of St John of God Community Services (SJOG CS), having been a director since 2018 –

'He should act now to address those concerns'

to stand down from the board of Tusla.

Former HSE board member and CEO of the children's charity Barnardos, Fergus Finlay said that, in light of damning revelations of abuse perpetrated by jailed serial paedophile Brother Aidan Clohessy, Mr Watchorn should have 'no involvement whatsoever with the statutory agency that is responsible for the protection of children'.

Mr Finlay was speaking in the wake of a near-decade long investigation by the Irish Mail on Sunday into an international child abuse cover-up by the St John of God order.

Describing his role on his Linkedin profile, Mr Watchorn speaks of bringing 'expertise in financial management and corporate governance' to the charity that 'guides our strategic direction and operational efficiency'. He also speaks of the importance of 'integrity' and 'compliance' with regulatory rules.

The profile reads: 'My leadership extends to championing change and fostering a culture of accountability with the primary goal of enhancing the experience of our service users and ensuring the ethos of Saint John of God will be continually nurtured throughout the organisation.'

Mr Watchorn has also been a board member of Tusla since 2020, where he is chair of the agency's Audit and Risk Committee.



CONFLICT: Charles Watchorn holds dual Tusla and SJoG roles

According to Mr Finlay, membership of both boards is untenable, given the reported safeguarding concerns about the St John of God order.

He also said the head of the order, Br Donatus Forkan, 'has really serious questions to answer about the protection of a child abuser and therefore about reckless endangerment.'

The former Labour Party advisor told the MoS: 'If Charles Watchorn knows Br Forkan, and if he knows the role Br Forkan has allegedly played, then he has no place having any involvement whatsoever with the statutory agency that is responsible for the protection of children.'

The founder of abuse charity One in Four, former Amnesty International Ireland executive director Colm O'Gorman, added: 'Given his role on the board of Tulsa, and the fact that he chairs its Audit and Risk Committee, it is difficult to imagine that Mr Watchorn is not alive to the significant issues which arise from how the order and Br Forkan managed complaints or suspicions of child sexual abuse perpetrated by Aidan Clohessy.

'In that context, I would expect that Mr Watchorn would act to immediately address those concerns, including the issue of Br Forkan's ongoing role in governance.'

Mr Watchorn did not respond personally to several attempts to contact him this week, via registered post, as well as emails via St John of God and Tusla.

Tusla also would not comment on concerns raised about Mr Watchorn's dual role.

As part of the cover-up of Br Aidan Clohessy's crimes, the predatory paedophile was dispatched to Malawi as the St John of God order secretly settled cases back home. Meanwhile, Clohessy, now 85, was left free to continue abusing in Africa fordecades.

30 MORE CLAIMS AGAINST 'OGRE' BROTHER AIDAN

REVELATIONS: MoS reported last week on more claims against Clohessy

Our reporting contributed to the recent prosecution of Clohessy, who was branded an 'ogre' by the judge who imprisoned him.

It has also sparked calls for the head of the St John of God order to step down and be criminally investigated for the reckless endangerment of children.

Aside from Mr Finlay and Mr O'Gorman, Kindernothilfe (KNH) – a leading Christian charity in Germany that funds St John of God's work in Malawi – has also called for Br Forkan to resign.

A KNH spokesperson said last night: 'We want to reiterate that our stance on the importance of independent and transparent investigations in child protection cases, both in general and in this particular case in has not changed. We still believe that an independent review of the roles of Donatus Forkan and other leaders in Br Aidan's presence in Malawi would be the right step.'

Pressure on Br Forkan increased last week after Children's Minister Norma Foley wrote to St John of God seeking assurances about its safeguarding standards.

Sinn Féin education spokesman Darren O'Rourke and Labour justice spokesman Alan Kelly have also called on Br Donatus Forkan to stand aside pending a criminal investigation.

Br Forkan dispatched Clohessy to Malawi in 1993 where he remained for two decades, working and living with children as the order secretly settled abuse claims from Irish victims.



COVER-UP: Clohessy and order head Br Forkan

All of the Irish claims relate to Clohessy's time as principal of the order's St Augustine's School for special needs children in Blackrock, south Dublin, during the 1970s and 1980s.

Separately, the order has also privately settled cases taken by those who allege they were abused by Clohessy in Malawi.

As many of 20 such cases have been settled, without any admissions of liability, over the past year. Since Clohessy was jailed in June, dozens of further claimants have come forward in Malawi. All of the civil cases from African claimants, have been taken against Br Forkan, as well as Clohessy.

The victims claim Br Forkan's actions in sending Clohessy to Malawi – and leaving him there for decades – put them in danger when they were children.

Some of the Malawi victims whose cases have been settled have spoken of their anger at being put at risk.

'What makes me angry is the fact that someone in Ireland knew that he was a risk to us,' Makaiko Banda Chimaliro told the MoS.

'They still decided to send him to Malawi to do the same work where he was exposed to more kids. That

'Issues arise how order managed complaints'

makes me disappointed and angry at the authorities for doing that.'

Br Forkan remains on the board of the St John of God Hospitaller Services Group – the parent company that controls the order's operations in Ireland, the UK and Malawi. He exerts considerable control over the order's main Irish charity, St John of God Community Services, which receives more than €200m annually from the State.

These funds are used to care for thousands of vulnerable children and adults with an intellectual disability. A spokesperson for St John of God Community Services said the organisation takes 'their responsibilities on safeguarding very seriously' and has 'robust measures in place to ensure the ongoing safety and protection of those in our care' The spokesperson did not comment on the dual Tusla and St John of God roles held by Mr Watchorn. However, the charity confirmed it has responded to Ms Foley's letter and 'outlined in detail the stringent measures in place in regard to the Children First Act 2015'. A Tusla spokesperson said: 'When Tusla suspects that a crime has been committed, and a child or children have been wilfully neglected or physically or sexually abused, Tusla notifies An Garda Síochána where they investigate the crime.'

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The Irish Mail ON SUNDAY

AUGUST 24, 2025

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MAXWELL TAPES

Ghislaine: My 'frenemy' Fergie had the hots for Epstein

PAGES 2, 14, 15, 16 & 17



PLUS

Your guide to beating heartburn without drugs

SEE MAGAZINE

Our decade-long investigation revealed a religious order's cover-up of a paedophile's crimes as he was left to prey on African street children, now...

MAIL ON SUNDAY REPORT ST JOHN OF GOD TO GARDAI

By **Michael O'Farrell**
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

GARDAÍ are considering a criminal complaint about St John of God bosses who allowed a predatory paedophile to prey on vulnerable children in Africa for decades.

The complaint was submitted to the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) by the Irish Mail on Sunday this week after political and public figures continued to demand a criminal probe.

The calls for Garda intervention follow a near-decade long investigation by this newspaper into how the St John of God religious order covered up the Irish crimes of serial paedophile, Br Aidan Clohessy, allowing him to abuse freely in Africa.

Br Clohessy was branded an ogre by a trial judge and jailed in June for abusing six boys in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s.

After this abuse occurred in Ireland, his order dispatched him to Malawi and made

Turn to Page 8 ››



LOUIS'S YOUR UNCLE: Beautiful bride Lyndsay laughs at her godfather's antics

Louis Walsh celebrates his niece's wedding – and a new car

Page 13

St John of God bosses await Garda assessment of MoS complaint that Order

‘I hope gardaí now conduct a thorough investigation’

From Page One

secret financial settlements with multiple victims here.

Now the GNPSB – led by Detective Chief Superintendent Colm Noonan – is assessing whether the complaint warrants a criminal investigation into the alleged reckless endangerment of children.

Putting children at risk of abuse has been a crime since 2006 when the Criminal Justice Act 2006 was enacted.

Under Section 176 (2) of the Act it is a criminal offence for anyone in a position of authority or control of a child abuser to put a child at risk. It is also a crime to fail to take reasonable steps to protect a child from such a risk while knowing that the child is in such a situation.

Upon conviction, the offence carries a prison term of up to 10 years. Crucially it’s not actually necessary to prove abuse took place for a reckless endangerment prosecution.

The law was one of the recommendations of the 2005 Ferns Inquiry into the response by civil and Church authorities to abuse allegations in Wexford.

It was campaigned for by One in Four founder, Colm O’Gorman, a victim of Fr Seán Fortune – a paedophile priest who had been moved around by superiors who knew of the risk he posed.

Last night, Mr O’Gorman welcomed the possibility of a Garda investigation.

‘It’s a good thing in my view that it’s now been reported by the Irish Mail on Sunday to the gardaí and I hope the gardaí carry out a really, really thorough investigation and that a file does go to the DPP,’ he said.

‘Ultimately that’s going to be a decision for the DPP but, on the face of it, there would seem to be a prima facie case that needs to be investigated and if the evidence is there then it should be prosecuted.

‘From a read of the legislation it’s very clear that there is at least a case to be brought and a case to be answered,’ Mr O’Gorman added.

> **‘He put rooms inside, they put beds there’**

‘There needs to be accountability for the fact that Br Clohessy was allowed to continue in positions of authority, that he was allowed to continue to have access to children who he continued to abuse for decades after the order was made aware of it,’ Mr O’Gorman said.

‘There needs to be accountability for that and that should include criminal accountability.’

Labour Justice spokesman Alan Kelly also called for speedy action.

‘Given that a complaint has now been made to gardaí, it is imperative that they investigate in a speedy manner, given how serious the issue is,’ he said.

Others who have called for a criminal inquiry include Sinn Féin education spokesperson Darren O’Rourke, former Bernardos CEO, Fergus Finlay and Kindernothilfe (KNH) – a prominent Christian charity in Germany that funds St John of God in Malawi. The complaint is also backed by all of the Irish victims for whom Clohessy was jailed for abusing – and other victims in Africa who have already received settlements.

Any Garda investigation will consider evidence that St John of God superiors knew Br Clohessy was a risk when they left him in Africa. This will include publicly-available records such as a 2015 church audit into the order.

The audit by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) confirms St John of God superiors received many historical Irish abuse complaints about Br Clohessy as he was left in Malawi.

Other readily-available evidence highlights the free access Br Clohessy had to children in Africa, despite these complaints at home.

This includes a 2010 TG4 documentary on Br Clohessy’s work with children in Malawi. The documentary aired on national TV even as Br Clohessy’s superiors in Ireland continued to receive historical complaints about him.

The role of those who knew – or ought to have known – that children in Africa would be at risk from Br Clohessy will also be examined in any investigation.

This will include – but is not limited to – the current head of the St John of God order, Br Donatus Forkan.

It was Br Forkan who first dispatched Br Clohessy to Malawi and left him there as secret settlements were made to victims back in Ireland.

No one in Malawi was told of these settlements or Br Clohessy’s child-abusing past as he was left free to prey on street children.

The St John of God order then conspired to keep Br Clohessy’s child abuse under wraps after superiors finally withdrew him from Africa in 2012.

This occurred as the Vatican launched a Canonical Inquiry into Br Clohessy and gardaí began investigating Irish complaints.

When the MoS first travelled to track down victims in Malawi in 2017, neither the Vatican nor the St John of God order had ever acted



VISIT: Donatus Forkan, left, with Br Aidan Clohessy in Malawi in 2010


‘OGRE’ BROTHER ABUSED STREET KIDS IN AFRICA

St John of God, accused of cover up, pays out millions to convicted abuser cleric’s victims here and in Malawi

COVER-UP: MoS report into Brother Aidan Clohessy’s Malawi abuse

TIMELINE OF ORDER’S SHAMEFUL COVER-UP

OCTOBER 22, 1993

Paedophile Br Aidan Clohessy is dispatched to Malawi as his order covers up his crimes in Ireland.

OCTOBER 2005

The Ferns report recommends the reckless endangerment of children be made a crime.

JULY 16, 2006

The Criminal Justice Act 2006 is signed into law by President Mary McAleese, making the reckless endangerment of children a crime.

OCTOBER 14, 2006

Br Donatus Forkan, who sent Clohessy to Malawi, becomes Prior General in Rome, making him the global head of his order. That same year, Clohessy adapts a garage at his Malawi compound to house street children.

2008

A new child abuse allegation against Clohessy is received by his order, the 10th such complaint since he was dispatched to Malawi. He continues to have unsupervised access to children.

2009

Another child sex abuse complaint, relating to Ireland, is received by the order. Clohessy remains living and working with children in Africa.

2010

As a new abuse complaint is received, Clohessy and Br Forkan celebrate their Golden Jubilee together. Br Forkan goes on one of his frequent trips to Malawi, staying in Clohessy’s home.

2011

Yet another child abuse complaint is made against Clohessy in Ireland, the 13th since he was sent to Africa. After a risk assessment, his order concludes he is not a risk since he is not in a position of authority over children. He remains living and working with children in Africa.

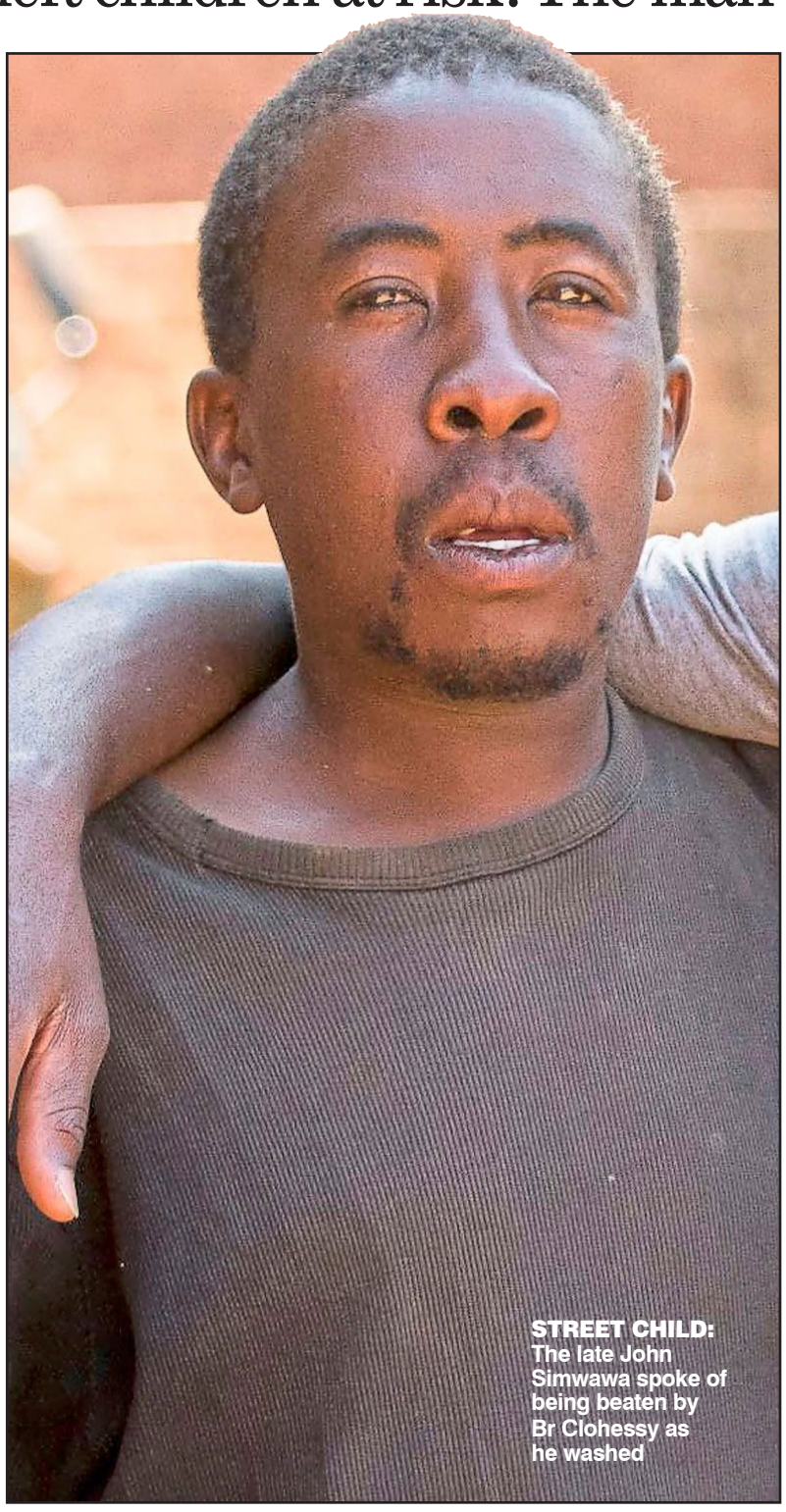
2012

As further complaints emerge, Clohessy is withdrawn from public ministry and returns to Ireland.

2013

Clohessy briefly returns to Malawi for a conference with Br Forkan and then group chief executive John Pepper.
The Vatican commences a Canonical Investigation, after which Clohessy remains in Ireland.

left children at risk. The man who campaigned for a change in the law says:



STREET CHILD: The late John Simwawa spoke of being beaten by Br Clohessy as he washed

Clohessy's access to children was evident

By **Michael O'Farrell**

THE Irish Mail on Sunday first travelled to Malawi in October 2017 to investigate whether Br Clohessy had contact with children.

We did so after we confirmed that his superiors in Ireland had secretly settled child abuse cases with Irish victims before dispatching him to Africa.

It was immediately evident, in recorded interviews we conducted back then, that Br Clohessy had not only had unrestricted and unsupervised access to children – but he had housed them at his compound.

According to those we spoke to, he housed many street children in a specially-built garage at his St John of God residence. He would also bring other children home from the streets to wash them during his lunch break.

Much of this contact with children occurred after 2006 when the reckless endangerment of children became a crime in Ireland.

And it occurred as Br Clohessy's superiors back home continued to cover up the fact that they knew he represented a child abuse risk.

Meanwhile, no one at the services run by St John of God in Malawi was ever informed of the settlements Br Clohessy's superiors were making to victims back home.

The first person we found during that first trip to Malawi was John Simwawa, who has since died. John was 22 when we met him. He told us that from the age of about ten he began being collected by Br Clohessy at Mzuzu's Coffee Den – a central location where street children often hung out.

That places John in contact with Br Clohessy from 2005 onwards. He told us: 'Br Aidan used to come and collect about 15 of us and bring us to his house. He had a pickup with a canopy. He forced us to take a bath. He would pick us up in his pickup truck, make sure we took bath, give us food and then he would take us back to the street. But there were other boys who were sleeping there.

'There were four boys who were staying with Br Aidan. I cannot remember their ages but they were younger than me.'

John spoke of being beaten by Br Clohessy as he washed.

He said: 'He would make sure we thoroughly cleaned ourselves and he would stand there and watch all the boys.

'He would beat us to make us wash. He would watch us and he had a stick. We were frightened. He would hit us on the buttocks.'

During our first trip to Malawi,



OUR STORY: 2018 investigation

several other former street children, spoke on condition of anonymity, about their time with Br Clohessy.

One said he first met Br Clohessy in 2002 and 'grew up with him for maybe 12 years'.

He added: 'He took us from the street when I was 12. He took us to his house where he was staying near the bishop.'

(The St John of God compound where Br Clohessy lived is beside Mzuzu cathedral and bishop's residence.)

Another man told of being taken from the streets by Br Clohessy when he was aged nine – something that happened repeatedly until 2008.

'Especially during the lunch hour he was taking us to his house and doing the same thing. He was giving us new clothes. He was doing this maybe like three times a week.'

The former street child said Br Clohessy would give him clothes to try on after he had showered.

This continued until 2008 when he went to live with another white man who promised to take care of him.

Another former street child said he met Br Clohessy in 2007 when he was 13, adding: 'I first met Br Aidan when I was in primary school. I needed support with my school. That's when he started helping me. I was in primary school.'

'He found me in the street… At that time he was staying at the Formation house. He took me there, then I had a shower and he gave me some food and he gave me a place so I can stay.'

This individual said that at this time there were ten to 15 other children living in Br Clohessy's compound.

Another man told the MoS he started being brought to Br Clohessy's house at the age of seven, with his two brothers, and stopped in 2007.

He spoke of being washed by Br Clohessy 'every day, two times a day', saying: 'He was using sobo [soap] to wash us.'

He confirmed that Br Clohessy would wash the genitals of those present.

By the time we made our second trip to Malawi, in September last year, Br Clohessy's order had begun settling civil cases taken by his African victims in the Irish courts.

Those taking these cases have gone through a vetting process and been interviewed by experts and psychiatrists. They say they were brutally abused and raped as children having been taken off the streets by Br Clohesssy.

St John of God and its provincial, Br Donatus Forkan, have never addressed or acknowledged the cover up that allowed Br Clohessy to prey freely on children in Malawi as they covered up his crimes back home.

to establish the extent of any abuse Br Clohessy carried out there.

Our investigation uncovered numerous men who had been collected from the streets by Br Clohessy when they were children.

Many were horrifically abused – and although it admits no liability – the St John of God order has recently begun settling civil cases taken on behalf of these victims in Ireland. As many as 60 such cases from Africa have so far emerged – with 20 already settled.

Others in Malawi also told the MoS of the unfettered access to children that Br Clohessy enjoyed.

Br Clohessy's personal cook, Maxwell Chirwa, for example, confirmed that a garage at Brother Aidan's home had been converted and used to house boys.

'There was a place where Brother Aidan was keeping them. Built at the back where the garage was. He put some rooms inside. They put the beds there,' he told the MoS in 2017.

Mr Chirwa said this converted garage had been built in 2006.

'It was in 2006. The children were sleeping there inside, yes.'

He added that children remained living there for 'many years – some of them until they finished school.'

Mr Chirwa also said Br Forkan knew of Br Clohessy's living arrangements with children because he had stayed himself in the compound during visits.

'Yes… When they were building the garage he [Donatus] knew.'

Harrison Chilale – the then Clinical Director for St John of God in Malawi who worked under Brother Clohessy from the beginning – also confirmed these arrangements.

'They would stay at the Brother's house. I think Brother Aidan had some space where they would eat, wash and clean themselves up,' he said. 'The inside activities and behaviours I don't know. But I knew he kept children – I think up to 10 sometimes in one roof. There were a group of children he was keeping there.'

No one in Malawi was concerned about these arrangements because they remained unaware that Br Clohessy's order had received and settled repeated abuse complaints.

That remained the case even after Br Clohessy suddenly left Malawi overnight in 2012 without warning or explanation, having spent two decades there.

In Ireland, the St John of God order's charitable services are managed via a corporate structure headed by a parent company called the St John of God Hospitaller Services Group.

As head of the order, Br Forkan remains a director of this company.

This weekend, a spokesperson for the group said it 'recognises the importance of and is committed to protecting all vulnerable people against any form of abuse.'

'Rigorous policies and procedures'

'We operate a zero tolerance approach to all types of abuse for children and adults in receipt of services and supports. We have rigorous policies and procedures to ensure the safeguarding of everyone we encounter, and to ensure that they are supported and protected. We are committed to timely reporting of allegations. We support anyone with concerns about the safety of a child or adult to take immediate action by contacting the appropriate authorities or the designated safeguarding personnel in our services.'

However, the St John of God order itself – and leaders such as Br Forkan – have never publicly acknowledged or addressed the situation in Malawi.

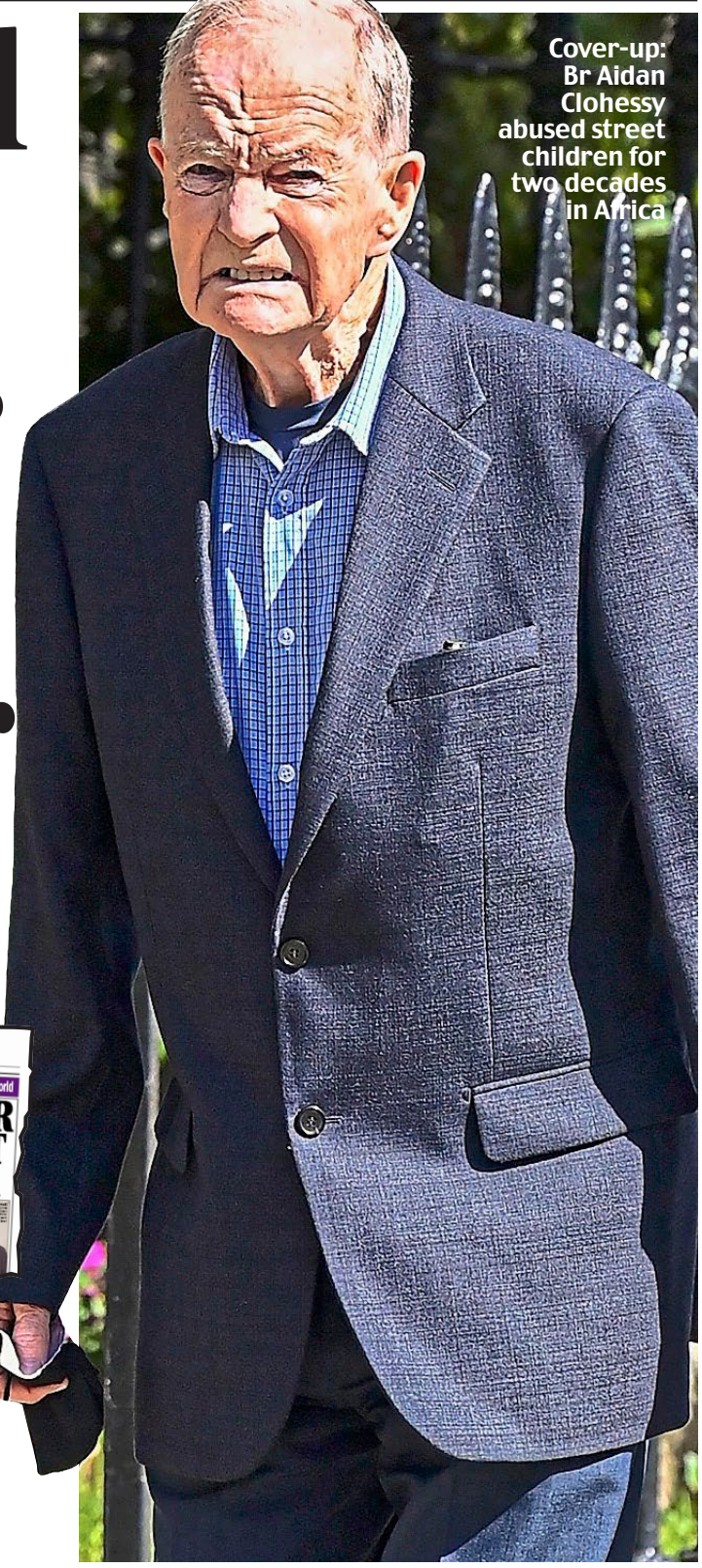
That remained the case this week as a spokesperson for the order declined to comment. Instead the order said it 'encourages anyone who has experienced hurt to seek support and talk with the authorities.' An Garda Síochána's free confidential 24/7 Child Sexual Abuse Reporting number is 1800 555 222 or email GNPSB_SCMU@garda.ie

michaelofarrell@protonmail.com

■ *Independent advice and help can be accessed at Towards Healing – Freephone – 1800 303 416 / 0800 096 3315 (Northern Ireland) / 085 802 2859 (hearing Impaired) / email info@towardshealing.ie*

St John of God will appoint lay people to leadership after MoS revelations about serial abuser

Order leaders step down after MoS decade-long investigation


Cover-up: Br Aidan Clohessy abused street children for two decades in Africa

By **Michael O'Farrell**
Investigations Editor

THE head of the St John of God order Brother Donatus Forkan – and all other clerics occupying leadership roles in the order's services – are stepping down.

The move will leave the order's services entirely in the hands of lay leaders for the first time ever.

The development follows a near decade-long investigation into an international child-abuse cover-up by our sister newspaper, the Irish Mail on Sunday.

It also comes as gardaí consider a criminal complaint about the reckless endangerment of vulnerable children. The complaint relates to leaders at the order, such as Provincial Br Forkan, allowing a paedophile to prey on vulnerable children in Africa for decades.

The complaint was submitted to the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) by the Irish Mail on Sunday two weeks ago after political and public figures continued to demand a criminal probe.

The calls for Garda intervention followed an ongoing MoS investigation into how the St John of God order covered up the Irish crimes of a serial paedophile. The cover-up allowed Br Aidan Clohessy to abuse freely for two decades in Africa.

Clohessy was branded an 'ogre' by a trial judge and jailed in June for abusing six boys in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s.

After the abuse occurred in Ireland, his superiors dispatched him to Malawi and oversaw secret financial settlements with multiple victims here.

Now the GNPSB, led by Detective Chief Superintendent Colm Noonan, is assessing whether the complaint warrants a criminal investigation into alleged reckless endangerment of children.



Child abuse cover-up: Some of the MoS front pages on scandal

Putting children at risk of abuse has been a crime since 2006 when the Criminal Justice Act 2006 was enacted. Under Section 176 (2) of the Act, it is a criminal offence for anyone in a position of authority or control of a child abuser to put a child at risk. It's also a crime to fail to take reasonable steps to protect a child from risk while knowing the child is in such a situation. The offence carries a prison term of up to ten years.

The law was one of the recommendations of the 2005 Ferns Inquiry. It was campaigned for by One In Four founder Colm O'Gorman, a victim of Fr Seán Fortune, a paedophile priest who was moved around by superiors.

Mr O'Gorman was among numerous public figures who demanded that Br Forkan stand down from any roles of responsibility involving children pending an independent investigation. Others demanding Br Forkan step aside included Sinn Féin Education spokesman Darren O'Rourke, Labour Justice spokesman Alan Kelly and former HSE board member Fergus Finlay. Insiders too spoke out including St John of God consultant psychiatrist Paul Moran. Kindernothilfe – a German Christian charity that funds St John of God in Malawi – also called for Br Forkan to step down.

In recent weeks, political pressure was also brought to bear, with Children's Minister Norma Foley writing to St John of God to seek assurances about its safeguarding standards.

As Provincial of the order's Western European Provence, Br Forkan is a director of the Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group (HSG), parent entity of the order's charitable services in Ireland, the UK and Malawi.

'Passing on their remaining positions'

In Ireland, these services are funded by taxpayers, via the HSE, to the tune of more than €200million a year. In the UK, the order's operations receive around £30million (€34.5m) annually from public sources. Board members of HSG are also trustees to seven special-needs schools run by the order in Dublin, Louth, Kerry and Kildare.

Now though, Br Forkan and other order members are stepping down. In a statement yesterday, the order confirmed: 'The Brothers of the West European Province are now in the process of passing on their remaining positions. It's expected this transition will be completed by the end of the year. Those positions include the boards of HSG and its subsidiaries, school boards of management, and the board of the canonical body Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries.

'Whilst the Brothers will no longer be involved in leadership they will be available to contribute in any way needed. Canonically and legally the work undertaken means the structures are in place for the continuation of the Order's Mission by lay people. With the completion of the process and the reorganisation work over the last 15 years, and with robust structures now in place to ensure the continuation of the mission of Saint John of God in Ireland, the Brothers of the West European Province are now in the process of passing on their remaining positions.'

The abuse cover-up scandal, Clohessy's jailing or calls for Br Forkan to step down were not mentioned. Any Garda investigation will consider evidence superiors knew Clohessy was a risk when they left him in Africa.

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City council to clamp down on e-scooters on footpaths

DUBLIN City Council will consider urgent measures today to crack down on illegal use of high-powered e-scooters on footpaths.

At Monday night's meeting of Dublin City Council, Lord Mayor Ray McAdam accepted Fine Gael's emergency motion and fast-tracked it to the mobility committee for detailed discussion this week.

It follows a series of scooter accidents including a hit-and-run involving a Surron-type e-moped in Tyrrelstown, which left a four-year-old girl with a skull fracture and swelling on the brain. The driver, aged 20, did not stop at the scene but was allegedly arrested shortly after.

A man in his 30s died following a collision between his electric scooter and a car on the Old Navan Road on August 3, and an e-scooter rider in his 30s was seriously injured after being struck by a car in Donaghmede, also on August 3.

The committee will meet today at 3pm in City Hall and members of the public can watch the debate.

It will then go to a full council meeting in October, when action is expected.

Councillor Colm O'Rourke said: 'This is a positive step forward. We cannot lose sight of the fact that every day, high-powered e-scooters and Surron-type models are racing down footpaths, putting children, pensioners and all pedestrians at risk.' Surron makes electric motorbikes and scooters.

Mr O'Rourke said he will be 'pushing for immediate measures to protect pedestrians before more lives are lost or seriously harmed'.

The Fine Gael motion also calls for 'targeted enforcement blitzes in Dublin in partnership with An Garda Síochána'.

Irish Daily Mail Reporter

Abuse cover-up still inquiry, order's big

Resignations do little to relieve pressure on scandal-hit brothers



By **Michael O'Farrell**
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR



DENIALS: Clohessy told funders he had he had never been accused of abuse

INTERNATIONAL funders of St John of God's work in Africa have welcomed the resignation of the order's Irish leadership – but demanded an independent investigation into a child abuse cover-up exposed by the Irish Mail on Sunday.

German charity Kindernothilfe (KNH) made the demand this week as Br Donatus Forkan – the current Provincial of the St John of God order – stood down from all of his public leadership roles.

KNH is one of Europe's most prominent NGOs with an annual budget of €73million provided by more than 300,000 citizen donors, the EU, and Germany's government.

The resignation of Br Forkan – and all other clerics occupying leadership positions in St John of God services in Ireland, the UK, the Netherlands and Malawi – was announced on Tuesday.

The move came two working days after the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Norma Foley, sought safeguarding assurances from the St John of God group in response to our revelations.

'Journalism plays a vital role'

This weekend, KNH welcomed the resignation of Br Forkan – the man who sent Clohessy to Africa.

The charity also called for Br Forkan – and anyone else who may have been involved in the abuse cover-up – to be independently investigated.

'We see the changes…as a positive development for the organisation and its future work,' KNH's child protection officer Jörg Lichtenberg told the MoS.

'We also continue to stand by our earlier position that a further independent investigation is a logical next step after the conviction and we hope that this will come to pass.'

The departure of the clerics leaves St John of God's charitable services and schools entirely in the hands of lay leaders for the first time in 147 years. This week's resignations come in the wake of a near decade-long MoS investigation that contributed to the jailing of serial St John of God paedophile Br Aidan Clohessy in June.

Clohessy was branded an 'ogre' and convicted of 19 counts of historical abuse against six boys at St Augustine's – one of the order's seven schools for intellectually disabled children in Ireland.

Our investigation also exposed a decades-long cover up that saw Clohessy dispatched to Malawi despite the risk this posed to children there.

KNH is backing a criminal complaint relating to the reckless endangerment of children made by the MoS against superiors at St John of God.

The complaint is currently being assessed by the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB), which is led by Detective Chief Superintendent Colm Noonan.

Commenting on our ongoing investigation, Mr Lichtenberg, who is also head of Learning & Consulting for Children's Rights at the German charity, paid tribute to the work the MoS has done.

'We are convinced that investigative journalism plays a vital role in child protection by exposing abuses and systemic failures, and by holding individuals and institutions to account. In light of this, we value our collaboration with you and your efforts in this case,' he said.

One In Four founder Colm O'Gorman said: 'It would be wrong for people to think that this is a welcome first step, because of course none of this should ever have happened, and the fact that these people remained in positions of significant and very senior responsibility across an organisation of such scale, with responsibility for so many vulnerable children and vulnerable adults, is a disgrace.

'The resignations are an important moment, but actually the bigger issue is the governance and other failures that have allowed all of this to happen in the first place.

'It took the pressure exerted by the Irish Mail on Sunday through its investigations, to force what is an obvious and proper measure, but it's very late.

'I would absolutely support the call of the German foundation that there should be a full review investigation of this, both in governance terms for St John of God, its organisations and its services, but also at an operational level

Paedophile's lie to gain €1.3m funds

BR Aidan Clohessy lied to German charity, Kindernothilfe (KNH) to secure more than €1m in funds. Before the MoS exposed Clohessy as a child abuser in 2018, he had signed contracts with KNH worth over €1.3m to support St John of God child-focused programmes in Malawi. At this time Clohessy's superiors had received multiple child abuse complaints against him and had made secret settlements. Yet Clohessy incorrectly stated he had never been accused of any physical or sexual abuse against children. He signed a declaration stating: 'I have not been accused or convicted of any offence involving the physical or sexual abuse of children or young people. I understand that if a complaint is levelled against me while engaged in any activity involving children, the police or other legal authority will automatically be asked to investigate and recommend suitable disciplinary action. I agree that in case of clear evidence that I was involved in sexually abusing a child, whether on duty or otherwise, I will no longer be acceptable to work in a child care ministry and resign voluntarily and immediately.'

needs independent German donors insist

Mounting evidence that St John of God order left children at risk of abuse

By **Michael O'Farrell**


'GARDAI MUST INVESTIGATE ST JOHN OF GOD CHIEF'
Finlay and German funders call for probe into abuse cover-up


30 MORE CLAIMS AGAINST 'OGRE' BROTHER AIDAN

OUR STORY: The Mail on Sunday investigation into Br Aidan Clohessy spanned continents and decades

PUTTING children at risk of abuse has been a crime for more than 20 years, since the Criminal Justice Act 2006 was enacted.

Under Section 176 (2) of the Act it is a criminal offence for anyone in a position of authority or control of a child abuser to put a child at risk.

It is also a crime to fail to take reasonable steps to protect a child from such a risk while knowing that the child is in such a situation.

The offence carries a prison term of up to 10 years.

Crucially, it's not actually necessary to prove that abuse took place for a reckless endangerment prosecution – just that children were left in danger.

The law was one of the recommendations of the 2005 Ferns Inquiry into the response by civil and Church authorities to abuse allegations in Wexford.

It was campaigned for by One In Four founder, Colm O'Gorman, a victim of Fr Seán Fortune – a paedophile priest who was moved around by superiors who knew of the risk he posed.

Mr O'Gorman was one of several public figures who had demanded that Br Donatus Forkan stand down from any positions of responsibility involving children pending an independent investigation.

Any Garda investigation into the order will consider evidence that superiors knew Clohessy was a risk when they left him in Africa.

This will include publicly available records such as a 2015 Church audit into the order.

The audit by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland confirms that St John of God superiors received many historical Irish abuse complaints about Clohessy as he was left in Malawi.

Other readily available evidence highlights the free access Clohessy had to children in Africa, despite these complaints at home.

This includes a 2010 TG4 documentary on Clohessy's work with children in Malawi.

The documentary aired on national TV even as Clohessy's superiors in Ireland continued to receive historical complaints about him.

The role of those who knew – or ought to have known – that children in Africa would be at risk from Clohessy will also be examined in any investigation.

This will include – but is not limited to – Br Forkan.

It was Br Forkan who first dispatched Clohessy to Malawi and left him there as secret settlements were made to victims back in Ireland.

No one in Malawi was told of these settlements, nor of Clohessy's child-abusing past as he was left free to prey on street children.

The St John of God order then kept Clohessy's child abuse under wraps after superiors finally withdrew him from Africa in 2012.

This occurred as the Vatican launched a Canonical Inquiry into Clohessy and gardaí began investigating Irish complaints.

When the MoS first travelled to Malawi to track down victims in 2017, neither the Vatican nor the St John of God order had ever acted to establish the extent of any abuse Clohessy had committed there.

As a result of the MoS coverage, as many as 60 African victims who were abused by Clohessy have now come forward – as well as additional victims in Ireland.

In the past year, the St John of God order has spent more than €3m settling 20 of these African cases, as well as several cases in Ireland.

about the overall approach to safeguarding – and not just in a historical context, but in an ongoing context.'

Reacting to the leadership changes at St John of God, former HSE board member Fergus Finlay called for a review of how public money is governed at the charity.

'What I would love to see now is a complete reset and a complete redesign of governance of the services run by St John of God that are fully funded by and run on behalf of the State, in order to ensure that the interests of people with a disability, and only those interests, are served by the organisation,' he said.

Mr Finlay, who is also a former chief of children's charity Barnardos, said any review should include a 'redesign of the legal framework and arrangements between' St John of God and the State.

'I would hope that they would be willing to do that. If they're not, I think it's something the HSE should be insisting on when we are talking about something like €250m a year,' he said.

'The State needs to be able to guarantee itself – in ways that it often doesn't bother – that money is being spent only in the interests of people with a disability,' he added.


'OGRE' BROTHER ABUSED AFRICAN STREET KIDS AS ORDER COVERED UP IRISH CRIMES
St John of God has since paid out millions to convicted cleric's victims
EXCLUSIVE

EXCLUSIVE: One of our stories in the decades-long MoS investigation

Mr Finlay's call comes as the Government launched its national human rights strategy for disabled people this week.

Asked by the MoS if this would include a governance review of groups such as St John of God, a spokesman for the Department of Children, Disability and Equality said the department was 'committed to developing a new vision…to ensure that services are progressively more person-led, sustainable and cost-effective.

The spokesman added that the department wanted to ensure 'high-quality financial governance, data and oversight arrangements'.

The departure of Br Donatus and three other St John of God brothers was formalised on Wednesday when their resignations from the St John of God Hospitaller Services Group (HSG) were registered with the Companies Registration Office (CRO).

The HSG group governs all of the order's charitable operations – including St John of God Community Services Ltd, which receives more than €200m annually from the Irish taxpayer.

According to its latest filed accounts, HSG considers the Holy See and the St John of God order in Rome as its controlling body.

But this week the Vatican continued its policy of refusing to comment on the Clohessy cover-up scandal.

In recent weeks, the clerical leadership of the St John of God order in Ireland had come under mounting pressure to step aside.

In addition to KNH, others demanding resignations included Sinn Féin Education spokesman Darren O'Rourke, Labour Justice spokesman Alan Kelly, and St John of God consultant psychiatrist Paul Moran.

That pressure intensified last week as Minister Norma Foley wrote directly to the HSG group.

The correspondence followed a previous letter, sent a week earlier, to St John of God Community Services.

'I am seeking confirmation from St John of God Hospitaller Group that all the necessary child protection measures under the Children First Act 2015 are being complied with and implemented, and that all individuals, at all levels of the organisation, are in compliance,' the minister's letter reads.

'I am also seeking assurances that all the necessary child protection measures are in place in St John of God Hospitaller Services Group, and that all individuals at all levels of the organisation are in compliance.'

The announcement of the departure of St John of God's clerical leaders came on Tuesday this week, just two working days after Ms Foley's letter was sent to HSG.

In this week's announcement, St John of God confirmed that 'the Brothers of the West European Province are now in the process of passing on their remaining positions.

'Those positions include the boards of HSG and its subsidiaries, school boards of management, and also the board of the canonical body Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries,' the order's statement said.

> **'We're talking about €250m a year'**

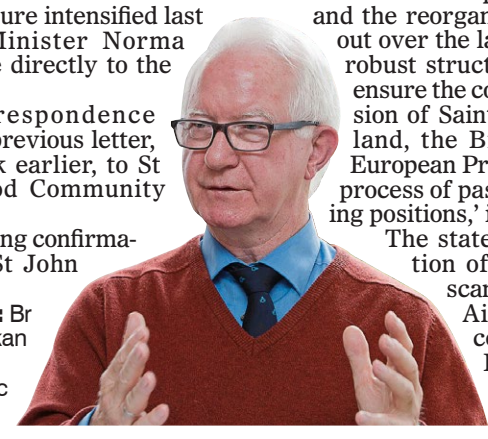
'Whilst the Brothers will no longer be involved in leadership they will be available to contribute in any way needed where possible,' it added.

St John of God presented the leadership changes as the conclusion of a long-running process in which the order was preparing to hand over to lay leaders.

'Canonically and legally the work that has been undertaken means that the structures are in place for the continuation of the Order's Mission by lay people,' the statement reads.

'With the completion of the process and the reorganisation work carried out over the last 15 years, and with robust structures now in place to ensure the continuation of the mission of Saint John of God in Ireland, the Brothers of the West European Province are now in the process of passing on their remaining positions,' it continues.

The statement made no mention of the abuse cover-up scandal, the jailing of Br Aidan Clohessy or the continuing calls for Br Forkan to step down.



RESIGNED: Br Donatus Forkan stood down from all public leader roles

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NEW HOME: Makaiko Banda Chimaliro's house that he bought after receiving a settlement

Just a year ago, Makaiko Banda Chimaliro's family were living in a mud hut. Today, he owns his own home and car. But this good fortune came at a high price – as the money came from a settlement by the St John of God order that let a serial predator hide his crimes

After years of abuse at the hands of `an ogre´ masquerading as a man of God, how Clohessy's resilient victims are striving to rebuild their lives



By **MICHAEL O'FARRELL**
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

MAKAIKO Banda Chimaliro's life was very different a year ago.

Just 12 months ago, he and his family lived in a shed-like structure made of rough, mud brick walls with no glass in the windows.

To keep the wind and rain out, he had bricked up the window frames, leaving a small gap at the top to allow some light in.

Inside, in the permanent semi-darkness, there was no furniture at all. Not even a single chair. Just bare mud brick walls and an earthen floor.

'You can take a seat,' he told me politely, gesturing at a straw mat on the floor. The same mat doubled up as a bed for his children at night.

With no electricity or running water, the kitchen was a small collection of tin pots and a plastic bucket neatly piled up on the floor in the corner beside a

'We were forced to do unimaginable things'

near empty sack of maize. 'When God blesses me, I want to change my life, to have a good bedroom. Not like this,' Makaiko told me at the time.

'I don't have radio. No TV. No electricity. It's very cold because the window is open. Things are not good.'

But now – thanks in part to the a decade-long Irish Mail on Sunday investigation that has led to legal settlements for Makaiko and others – that 'change' has finally come about.

When I first met them in September 2024, Makaiko and his family were hunkered down in the orange soil outside their home sharing a boiled sweet potato between them.

Their only income came from selling charcoal on the streets, a job that barely gleaned enough to pay the rent on their shack.

Today, they don't pay rent anymore. Instead, they are the proud new owners of their first real home on a plot land that is also theirs.

A concrete-based structure with glass windows, sparkling tiled floors, electricity and a satellite dish pointing to the heavens, the new home is a world away from their previous life.

Inside, a new corner couch faces a large TV screen on the wall.

On a desk below sits a PC computer with large speakers.

Outside, Makaiko's first ever vehicle – a Mitsubishi Canter pick-up truck – is gleaming in the sun.

THERE is a dark past behind Makaiko's recent good fortune. He is one of dozens of former street children in Mzuzu – the capital of Malawi's Northern Region – abused by the serial predator, Br Aidan Clohessy.

Makaiko's new home has been paid for by a legal settlement from the St John of God order in Ireland.

Clohessy is now in jail in Ireland after he was convicted this summer of the historical abuse of six former pupils at St Augustine's, a St John of God school for the intellectually disabled in Blackrock, south Dublin.

The trial judge described Clohessy as an 'an ogre' who 'secretly carried out atrocities' against some of the most vulnerable in society.

The prosecution stemmed from an MoS investigation that tracked down Irish victims and brought their cases to the authorities here.



REVEALED: The MoS article about further claims made against Clohessy

As far back as 2017, our investigation had also traced and spoken to victims in Malawi.

Back then, we ensured the victims we found in Malawi had legal representation here enabling them to take civil cases. Dublin law firm Coleman Legal took on these cases and quickly found many more victims in Malawi.

But to ensure due process in the Irish criminal case, this information was kept from the jury in Clohessy's prosecution this summer.

This meant that the St John of God cover-up that saw Clohessy dispatched to Malawi in 1993 was kept from the court. So too were secret Redress Scheme settlements made to Irish victims, even as Clohessy was allowed to remain working with children in Malawi.

Civil settlements the St John of God order made with victims in Malawi were kept from the court in advance of this summer's trial.

This allowed lawyers for Clohessy to argue in mitigation that his prison sentence should be reduced because of the 'good' work he did in Malawi.

Outlining this work in Malawi, Clohessy's lawyer told the court his client had 'devoted a lot of his life to serving others'.

'He is a person who has, despite his failings, made some contribution to society,' the court was told.

The person who dispatched Clohessy to Malawi and left him there for two decades as secret settlements were made back home was the then Provincial, Br Donatus Forkan, who rose to become the global leader of the St John of God order.

He was based in the Vatican as his fellow cleric was let loose on the children of Malawi for decades.

Now back in Ireland, Br Forkan oversaw the order's response to as many as 50 civil abuse cases taken on behalf of African victims of Clohessy.

The unprecedented legal actions have seen Br Forkan and his order accused of recklessly endangering children in Malawi by knowingly placing them at risk of abuse.

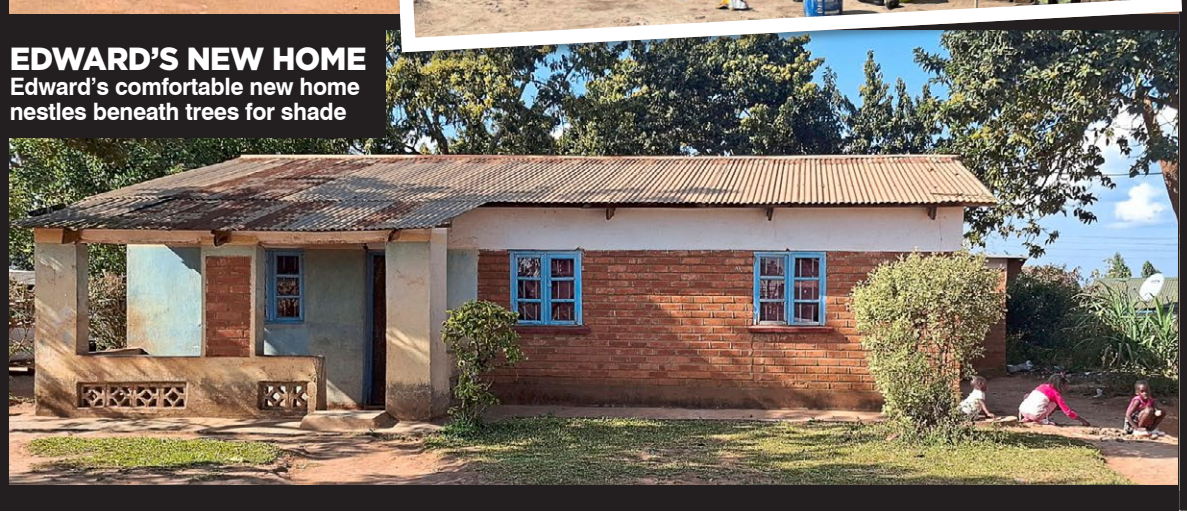
This is something the St John of



PROUD: Makaiko with his new pick-up truck

EDWARD PHIRI'S SHACK
Edward Phiri's old 'house' was a mud-brick shack that didn't even have doors. Right, Chikondo Kumwenda has a new motorbike





EDWARD'S NEW HOME
Edward's comfortable new home nestles beneath trees for shade

God order has never addressed. Neither has the Vatican, which pulled Clohessy from Malawi amid a Canonical inquiry into his abuse – without telling anyone there why. Although they have made legal payouts, the order has not accepted liability in any of the settlements made so far. They have also not made any apology.

Recklessly endangering a child is a crime in Ireland and the MoS has filed a criminal complaint with gardaí about Br Forkan.

In the wake of that complaint, Br Forkan and all the remaining brothers in St John of God's Irish and UK operations have recently resigned from their public, charitable roles.

MAKAIKO'S settlement was agreed a year ago via a zoom call with St John of God's lawyers from Dublin. At the time, Clohessy was awaiting trial in Dublin. After those zoom calls, Makaiko and 20 other victims in Mzuzu were told to open bank accounts, something they'd never had before.

So far, the order has spent more than €3million settling these first African cases, as well as further cases in Ireland.

The money that has since landed in those accounts from St John of God in Dublin has been truly life changing.

In recent days, Times Television – Malawi's leading TV channel – charted this transformation in a special half hour documentary.

In the programme, Makaiko spoke of his early life as a street child.

'It's easy to die in the streets, even being killed. There were moments that we were forced to do unimaginable things,' he said.

He recalled being brought by Clohessy to live in the St John of God compound.

'He could undress you, make you sleep on a table facing down and whip you severely, maybe 100 or 50, 70 whips. We were beaten on buttocks mercilessly. He could then release you to bath and give you food. We thought that life was normal.' Makaiko also told how he used his compensation to change his family's life for the better.

'When I received the compensation, I bought a plot of land and built a house, I bought a vehicle which I use for business. I used to struggle to find food and my wife was leading a miserable life. So, life was very had, renting a house, to eat was very hard… not anymore.

'Now my life has changed. I have food and my wife is also a running a business. My plan is to save any money that I make for my children to be well off than what I went through. So I opened two accounts, one for business and the other or the daily use of our family.'

The programme also featured Edward Phiri and Chikondi Kumwenda, who told how Clohessy abused them as children after winning their trust.

'We took him [Clohessy] as our father and visited him regularly,' Chikondi told the programme.

'We could go while we had already taken a bath at home, but he would tell us to bath again at his place. It bothered me but we could not do anything. Sometime he could tell me I need to grow up, I did not know what he meant. Sometimes he could literally bath us, while bathing me, that is when he would tell me, I needed to grow up.' With his settlement, Chikondi has bought a new motorbike to get around and he is building for the future.

'Using the money I have bought a plot in town where I am building. I have a bought a three-acre land in the outskirts of this town. I have also procured a land in Mzimba in TA Maulabo, which I will develop because it is on a trading centre.'

Edward's life has also transformed. A year ago, the father of four was living in a leaky, garage-sized shack split into two tiny rooms.

He survived by gardening for a pastor while his wife collected herbs and boiled them up on an open fire to make potions to sell in the local market.

'It's a small house. I have no choice,' he told the MoS when we visited him last year. 'We never have enough food.'

At the time, Edward had just received news of his settlement.

Despite the Catholic Church's role in the abuse he suffered, Edward insisted he still had his faith.

'You cannot be happy without God, so the first thing is I will do is pay a tithe to the Church before I use my money for anything,' he said.

'I want to buy a house and after that I want to have a car. After that, I shall have a business. Myself, I want to be a farmer. While I am doing my farming, my wife she will have a shop in town. She'll be going outside buying the goods, and in that shop my wife can be selling that goods. Myself, I will be farming.'

'We should always report injustices'

Now Edward has done just that.

His new home, with its pretty blue sash windows, is nestled beneath lush trees in a good part of town.

Outside, a new Hyundai car is parked in the shade.

Meanwhile, downtown in the Matiafa market, Edward's wife is the proud owner of a new shop.

Edward remains conscious, though, that his change of fortune stems from his suffering at the hands of an abuser as a child.

The abuse started when he was just 11 after Clohessy invited him back to the St John of God compound to bathe.

Edward has previously spoken to the MoS about how the ensuing abuse led him to consider taking his own life.

'During my time, I used to even think to hang myself. I even put strings up in the house to kill myself but some neighbour passing by took me from those strings.'

Now Edward is urging other victims to come forward.

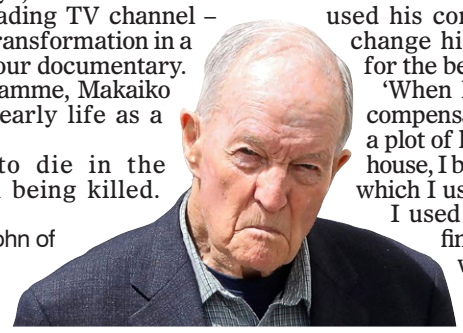
'We were assisted, and as I speak my life has changed completely,' he told Times Television.

'My message to the youth is that we should always report whenever we are facing injustices. There are several ways. Whether you are in the community, at school please report when you face abuses.'

The message is a vital one in a country where child abuse is seldom spoken of and rarely recognised.

'I know that there are several others in the NGO sector we fail to report despite being infringed but I encourage you to open up,' Edward urged other abuse victims.

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JAILED: St John of God brother Aidan Clohessy