

## MACSAS CONFERENCE 2009 – EDINBURGH Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2009

**Summary of Key Note Presentations:** Martin Ridge, retired police officer & Author.

Martin Ridge was a police officer in Donegal, Ireland and investigated 3 cases of child abuse; two of which were within the management of the Catholic church: a priest and a teacher, in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Both of these cases had been brought to the attention of the authorities within the church decades before they came to the attention of the police.

In 2008 he published a book – **Breaking the Silence** which told of that investigation.

### **Background to Abuse**

In Ireland in the 1990s the police, politicians and the church were all under investigation. My wife was from Donegal and although I worked in the midlands of Ireland for many years, as a family we spent holidays in Donegal and got to know the community. Our daughter was baptised by Fr Eugene Green in the 1970s and he was considered a friend of the family.

My wife and I moved back to Donegal for the last years of my police career before I retired. I thought it would be calmer and quieter and a nice way to finish my working life. Where we lived was a small, remote and very close community where everyone knew everyone. My wife and I were intimately involved within the community including the church.

The people in this community presented themselves as good people and I saw them as such. However in 1997 the Police force in Donegal was under investigation for corruption. Some things did not add up but I, like everyone else could not see it.

### **The Case**

This case began with a knock at the door of Fr Eugene Green by a young man seeking money. The priest reported to the police that he was being blackmailed. Within days the young men had been arrested and what they told shattered my world.

The young men alleged that Fr Green had sexually abused them when they were children. Before the investigation concluded there were eight cases involving four priests as well as paedophile rings in England. The nature of the abuse was horrendous, the level of depravity shocking.

I had to forget that I had any connection to the community and the church. I had to learn to step outside of it all to be able to see it clearly. It is so easy to get sidetracked, to get taken in, anaesthetised to it all.

What came out during the investigation was that the abuse had been going on for years, from the 1960s to the 1990s. Green was a repeat offender, who had been moved time and again with the support of the Bishops. There was a consistent pattern.

The response and collusion of the church was staggering. Bishops were transferred with no accountability as to what happened under their watch. The church consistently attempted at all times to protect themselves. It made me ashamed to be a Catholic. A written apology was read out at masses after Fr Green was convicted.

Ireland had first had their eyes opened in 1994 when the Brendan Smyth case broke. The church had always known about him and they knew about these other paedophile priests. The investigation revealed crime, power and corruption, betrayal and deceitfulness at the heart of the church. Truth and justice were never mentioned by the church authorities.

A mother he got to know had 4 sons abused. No meetings were set up to discuss the cases, so either the church had knowledge or buried knowledge or showed no lack of care; apart from the usual statement that somehow they (the Church) was hurt, but who hurt them? The children that were abused or the way they buried the cases by not having more openness.

Victims asked to meet me in the night on lonely bog roads, skulking around in the dark as if they had done something wrong. They had done nothing wrong. It made me so angry.

Trying to get evidence from the Bishops was thwarted at all turns. These experts in everything suddenly knew nothing. Finding evidence was like trying to find footsteps in a stream. They seemed so careless of the victims, of the hurt caused to them, of the harm done.

### **After & the Book**

After the investigation was finished and Green was convicted to 12 years in prison I thought things would change, that the church would have to look into this, that there would be an inquiry. But nothing happened. Everything went silent, no inquiry took place; nothing was offered to or done for the survivors by the church. The existence of files was denied and access to them blocked, which was typical of the church secrecy around abuse matters. There was no sense of justice for the victims.

I thought everyone would be outraged and ask how this could have happened. But there was no outcry and where was the change? Nothing happened. In the end I HAD TO WRITE the book, I had to tell people what had happened and how the church had colluded in it all. When I did I met with criticism and threats from those who had previously been my friends and from the church. They said that I did it for the money. How could they possibly think that, I didn't care if I made nothing, I felt compelled to tell what I knew, to tell the truth.

The dominant discourse coming from the church is that we didn't know the harm caused in those days, if we have training we will know better. This is all rubbish. Priests didn't care less what had happened, they were completely unmoved by the suffering of the victims. I call them Pastoral Actors: they say and appear to do the right things but in their hearts they are unchanged.

Mary Raftery brought out her book, **Suffer Little Children** and it brought child abuse out into the open.

The Church's view of child abuse is that it is better to sacrifice one life than to endanger the institution. It was all about control. The church tried to control what was known, what was said, what was revealed.

The investigation revealed that Confession was used as a form of grooming. Bishops became complicit with the priests in the repeated abuse of children.

Whilst in prison Green was visited by Bishops, priests and members of the community. When he was released after serving 8 years there was a collection for him in the parish and in total Euro 45,000 was raised. Green is now in hiding. However no-one, no Bishops or priests visited the

victims support groups; in order to pursue some form of justice and obtain acknowledgement of the truth the victims had to sue the church.

What is being said to victims by the church? It's that they don't care. It is always the victims/survivors who have to expose what happened to children abused on what were supposed to be places of safety.

## **Ireland**

Nothing would have changed had it not been for the victims/survivors coming forward and revealing the truth. Colm O'Gorman, the founder of One in Four is beyond belief. His courage and tenacity has brought all out into the open.

The Church has repeatedly said that it is sorry yet it fights tooth and nail every case that is brought.

My conclusion is that the whole church system is unsafe for children and vulnerable people. There is a dynamic of abuse at the heart of the church and for priests it is part of the seminary system where emotional and psychological abuse is widespread.

Society must listen to survivors; they are the experts.

The reception to the book from survivors was one of deep appreciation for understanding them and telling the truth about their experiences and how the church responds. That has made it all worthwhile.

The book *Breaking the Silence* is a brilliantly written account of the police investigation that brought two serial and unrepentant Abusers to justice. A group of women from Scotland, with Irish connections, who were either abused themselves or had children who were abused set up a new website for victims/survivors as a result of the book *Breaking the Silence* ([www.innocentvoicesuk.wordpress.com](http://www.innocentvoicesuk.wordpress.com))