



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Roman Catholic bishop admits he broke the law



Bishop Joseph Duffy

Irish Bishop, Joseph Duffy of Clogher, has admitted he did not report a priest's child abuse to the authorities, in contravention of the law. Bishop Duffy is currently helping to set up an audit of past abuse complaints against the clergy within the Roman Catholic parishes in Ireland, north and south.

His admission, in a statement, came in response to fresh criticism of his handling of the case of John McCabe, jailed in 1995 for 13 indecent assaults on a young boy. It was offered by way of excuse that "the victim's family bound Bishop Duffy to confidentiality. Bishop Duffy honoured this not realising he was in breach of civil law. This was explained in court to the judge who accepted the Bishop acted in good faith." McCabe was a priest and a teacher at St Michael's College in Enniskillen at the time of the assaults.

Bishop Duffy, who is chairman of St Michael's Board of Governors, was told about the abuse by the victim's family in 1989. He did not report the matter to social services or police.

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McCabe left St Michael's in 1988 and subsequently quit the priesthood, but later secured a teaching job at Hazelwood Integrated College, Belfast, with a reference from a former St Michael's colleague. The victim's family discovered he was working at Hazelwood and contacted the school. McCabe lost his job and a police investigation resulted in his receiving a 20 month jail sentence.

Hazelwood's Board of Governors' chairman at the time, John Gray, has renewed his criticism of Bishop Duffy's handling of the case. He has spoken out again after seeing the bishop in a church press conference announcing the audit of past clergy abuse cases. Mr Gray said: "I find it extraordinary that Bishop Duffy was in the front line at the conference which suggested that a new era was dawning." "Unfortunately, the bishop still has questions to answer."