



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Nun guilty of cruelty



A nun who was convicted of cruelty charges against children is to go on a three-month holiday to the US for a period of “rest and recovery”. “Sister” Marie Docherty was found guilty of four charges of cruel behaviour towards girls in her care at two children's homes during the 1960s and 1970s.

But she escaped jail after Sheriff Colin Harris decided at Aberdeen Sheriff Court that because of the nun's age and heart condition a custodial sentence was not appropriate. It has been confirmed by the Roman Catholic Church that Docherty, also known as ‘Sister Alphonso’, will continue to work for her order, the Sisters of Nazareth. However, a spokesman said it was ‘very doubtful’ that she would continue in her current role of looking after elderly people. He added that she was a ‘multi-talented nun’ and alternative work would be found for her. News of the nun's foreign break came as it emerged that the battle for compensation by her victims, who resided at Nazareth House homes, could take more than two years. Solicitor Cameron Fyfe has been acting on behalf of the women hoping to win a civil suit against Docherty's order. In total, Mr Fyfe represents 420 people who have alleged that they were treated cruelly while being brought up at six children's homes in Scotland run by two orders of Catholic nuns. He said: ‘My clients’ accusations are against 20 to 30 nuns in total. And they are similar to allegations which have been brought in both Ireland and Australia.’

Docherty originally faced 23 charges but was found guilty of four charges of cruelty against children at Nazareth House homes in Lasswade and Aberdeen. One of the nun's accusers, Mrs. Helen Cuister said that she was not motivated by greed. ‘If this was about money I could have gone to the bishop and I'd have been given cash to keep my mouth shut.’ A former helper at a Nazareth House children's home in Lasswade has been jailed for six years after he admitted sexually abusing two boys. Peter Blaney, 53, from Kilsyth, Lanarkshire, was sentenced on 1 September, but a ban was placed on reporting until the end of the Sister Marie Docherty trial. Blaney admitted at the High Court in Edinburgh that he regularly abused two brothers at the Lasswade home between August 1969 and February 1972. He was jailed for six years.

