

Priest who's become Cliff Richard's rock: As he faces biggest crisis of his life, there's one man he can rely on - Father John, who quit Church to be 'Man Friday' at his four homes

- **Cliff Richard is battling allegations that he sexually assaulted a young boy at a Christian rally in Sheffield in 1985**
- **The person who will be the singer's most staunch defender is ex-priest John McElynn - his close friend and manager of his four luxury properties**
- **They met at a tennis event in 2000, and within a year John had given up the priesthood**

By [Alison Boshoff for Daily Mail](#)

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On a balmy June evening in New York earlier this summer, Sir Cliff Richard was invited to perform at a celebratory event at the British Residence hosted by the British Consul General.

Cliff was in great spirits — singing Living Doll, Move It and Congratulations — and giving a short speech about his life and career.

And among the guests, who were tickled by the tennis-themed canapes at the pre-Wimbledon do, was a tall, burly man in a navy blazer.

John McElynn delighted guests with his bonhomie and pictures show him apparently having a very pleasant time.



Former priest John McElynn (right) - along with Cliff's sisters Donna and Jaqui - will be Cliff Richard's rock as he battles allegations that he sexually assaulted a young boy at a Christian rally in Sheffield in 1985

One fellow guest tells me, though, that Mr McElynn kept a close eye on Cliff at all times, making sure that he was happy and at ease. For John, 60, is always Sir Cliff's 'plus one' to such events — a loyal and supportive presence upon whom the star clearly depends.

The former priest has become Cliff's constant companion as he travels between his homes across the globe. Now he — along with Cliff's sisters Donna and Jaqui — will be the singer's rock as he battles allegations that he sexually assaulted a young boy at a Christian rally in Sheffield in 1985.

Sir Cliff, 73, has already said that the allegations are 'completely false'. Nevertheless, following a police raid on his apartment in Sunningdale, Berkshire, on Thursday he will face questioning over the alleged incident.

For a man who has been in showbusiness for 55 years without a whisper of scandal, it is likely to be a bruising experience. He is apparently already furious that the police seem to have notified the BBC of the raid so they could film it.

Sir Cliff, famously clean-living and Christian, takes pride in his reputation as the nicest man in pop. His record-breaking career — he has sold 250 million records and built a £50 million fortune — is built on that image.





Understandably, friends and former colleagues are lining up to express their support for him.

His former manager, Bill Latham, called the allegations 'a fiction', while his former promotions man, Malcolm Hill, said: 'I did UK promotion with him for 20 years, and there was not a hint of anything remotely dodgy in all that time.'

'Yet he is guilty by media exposure already — whatever happened to innocent until proved guilty?'

The person who will be his most staunch defender, though, and the man who spends the most time with the singer, is John McElynn, who was once known as Father John.

They met at a tennis event in 2000, and within a year John had given up the priesthood and assumed a job as Cliff's property manager. He has since assumed a 'Man Friday' role in the singer's life.

John is in the habit, for instance, of travelling a day ahead of Sir Cliff to make sure that his houses are in perfect condition when he walks through the door. The entertainer is undoubtedly fastidious.

When I interviewed Cliff in Switzerland years ago, I observed him watering a wilting hotel plant with bottled water. Cliff likes things just so, and John makes sure that they are.

McElynn was born in New York in 1953 to a working-class Catholic family. They lived in Queens and his father was a photo engraver at the New York Times, which made the family prosperous by the standards of the neighbourhood.

Described as bright but shy, young John was sent to St John's Prep, a New York private school. In 1981, aged 22, he joined a seminary run by the Congregation of the Mission, an order dedicated to bringing the word of God to the poor.

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Sir Cliff Richard performs at the 1985 Christian rally in Sheffield where police sources say he is alleged to have molested a young boy. The singer will return to the UK within days

Charming Father John ended up working in the Long Island town of Southampton — one of the Hamptons resorts frequented by moneyed New Yorkers — ostensibly to spread the gospel among the poor Hispanics who worked there.

It is said, though, that he became the priest of choice for the weddings and funerals of wealthy New York Catholics.

It was pure chance which brought him into Cliff's orbit. In his autobiography *My Life, My Way*, Cliff says that in 2000 he was travelling to New York alone because he was planning to take the year off. He was feeling burned out, and joked about having a mid-life crisis.

Bill Latham, who had been Cliff's best friend and manager for 30 years, and housemate for a long period, had moved out in 1996 to live with a new girlfriend whom Cliff didn't much care for.

When Cliff met McElynn, he effectively filled that role of companion and best friend.

They were introduced through mutual friends. When Cliff told a friend, choreographer Pamela Devis, that he was planning to spend much of that year travelling in America, she suggested he might get on with McElynn, a friend of hers living in New York.

Cliff rang the priest and they arranged to meet (though the singer booked himself into the plush Fitzpatrick Manhattan hotel as an 'escape route' in case he didn't like McElynn or want to stay with the family).

He wrote in his biography: 'I breathed a little more easily when I met John and his family. We played tennis together — John, his sister Janet and her husband Jack; they were very friendly and, as Americans do, immediately invited me to the family home for dinner.

'I needn't have worried. The evening turned out really well and we've all become very firm friends. I cancelled the hotel.' What particularly appealed to Cliff was the fact that, because he had never 'broken' America as a pop star, McElynn's family didn't have the first idea who he was.

'It has been so rare for me to find friends I know like me for myself,' he observed. 'I am not always the best judge of character.'

The following year the family flew to London to see him on stage at the Albert Hall. Cliff is now considered so much a part of the McElynn clan that they sometimes spend Christmas and Thanksgiving together.

Cliff and McElynn have now been friends for 14 years. 'John and I have over time struck up a close friendship,' Cliff wrote in his memoirs. 'He was about 46 when we met and at that time he was a Roman Catholic priest, so we immediately had a lot to talk about.

'He belonged to a religious order that worked with the poor and had been a missionary in Panama, but was currently working among Hispanic immigrants on Long Island.

'I hadn't realised that priests in a religious order don't have much choice about where they work. That is decided by the Order, which sends them to different parts of the world to take on projects of one sort or another.'

Having taken his vows at 22 and worked for more than 20 years sometimes in difficult communities, John had felt he was beginning to burn out.

Soon after they met, McElynn chose to take a sabbatical. He came to Britain and met up with Cliff at Glastonbury and elsewhere.

'He hadn't any thought at the beginning about giving up the priesthood,' explained Cliff, 'but when it became clear he was thinking of the possibility I suggested he might help me with some charitable projects, and he said he would.'

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Cliff's great friend, TV presenter Gloria Hunniford (pictured with him), observed that John McElynn has allowed Cliff to 'spread his wings'. Another friend says that John has 'opened Cliff's eyes to the many joys his millions can bring him'

John also took on responsibility for looking after Cliff's four properties, in Sunningdale, Portugal, Barbados and New York. 'It takes a great weight off my mind,' said Cliff.

'He is very good at it — in fact, I'm amazed at how good, because you wouldn't necessarily think a priest would be good at dealing with workmen or architects or even a vineyard [Cliff has one at his estate in Portugal], but he's very practical.'

More than an employee, John became a friend. 'He has also become a companion, which is great because I don't particularly like living alone, even now,' wrote Cliff.

'And crucially he knows how to work computers and send and pick up emails and handle all those technological things that seem to be so vital today, and that I know so little about.

'Nearly all my communications with the office now go through him. And after 20 years of simple living, I don't think he's having too much difficulty adjusting to the odd glass of fine wine!'

Those who know Cliff say that he has changed since he met McElynn. He used to be a man of extremely

humble and simple tastes — now he has the confidence to enjoy his wealth and the freedom it offers.

He has become more at ease and expansive, offering the Blairs a holiday at his mansion in Barbados, and hobnobbing in New York with philanthropist and former Conservative Party deputy chairman Lord Ashcroft.

Today, it seems, McElynn has quit the priesthood. There is no reference to him in the national U.S. directory of Catholic clerics, and the spokeswoman for the Congregation of the Mission said: 'He is no longer a priest in our community, he's out of contact with us.'

McElynn's mother, Betty, elliptically told a newspaper in 2006: 'He left for the same reasons so many of them leave. I know about his new life and Sir Cliff, of course. I hope they are happy.'

Cliff has declined to say whether their close relationship is a friendship or a romance. He has always talked of McElynn as his travel companion.

He told a TV show this year that gossip about him being gay had hurt his family when he was young, but added: 'Who cares? It doesn't really matter to me any more. I have got gay friends. Most people have gay friends.'

'If I was gay would it make any difference? Would you not come to my concerts because I was gay? I hope not.'

Regardless of such issues, Cliff's life has changed enormously since meeting McElynn. In Barbados, where Cliff has a house on the Sugar Hill plantation, they mix with a glitzy crowd.

Tennis champion Virginia Wade comes over to play on his court, and they often see Cilla Black, who has a home on the beach and has known Cliff for so long that she once admitted she had a crush on him when she was a schoolgirl.

Writer Steve Turner, author of the star's authorised biography, said: 'Cliff has started to spend money rather than save it. He's been doing a lot more travelling and seems to have a new lease of life.'

'It's clear that he is much happier in himself since meeting the priest. He's gone from someone who rarely invited friends to dine at his home to doing a lot more lavish entertaining.'

'His decision to sell himself as a brand name, branching out into perfume and wine, also appears to be largely due to McElynn's influence.'

Cliff's great friend, TV presenter Gloria Hunniford, observed that John McElynn has allowed Cliff to 'spread his wings'. Another friend says that John has 'opened Cliff's eyes to the many joys his millions can bring him'.

Now, as Cliff faces perhaps the greatest crisis of his professional life, his friend the former missionary will be needed at his side more than ever.