THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS BY THE CLERGY:
THE EFFECTS OF THIS CRISIS ON
NON-OFFENDING CATHOLIC PRIESTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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Abstract

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The sexual abuse of minors by the clergy: the effects of this crisis on non-offending Catholic priests in England and Wales

Key words: Non-offending priests, sexual abuse, Catholic Church, psychological welfare.

This thesis explores the impact on non-offending priests of a two-dimensional crisis for the Roman Catholic Church: the scandal of child sexual abuse by some in its clergy compounded by the unsatisfactory response to the crisis by the Church hierarchy. Child sexual abuse, although particularly difficult for the Church because of its taboo nature, has erupted as a scandal across British society and in many other countries. Extensive attention by the media, governments, the Catholic and other churches and various organizations has focused on safeguarding children and punishing the guilty, including institutions which, like the Catholic Church, sought to cover it up. The personal and professional problems of non-offending Catholic priests do not seem to have been recognised and addressed. Hence the question - “What is the impact on non-offending Catholic Priests in England and Wales of the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy”.

To collect data on the problems facing innocent priests, I opted for a qualitative research methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), using a Hermeneutic approach to interpret in-depth the results of interviews with six priests selected on a representative basis from among priests in England and Wales. IPA helps the researcher to develop an “insider perspective”, one I already possessed as a long-serving Catholic priest. My priestly position and my additional knowledge of both counselling and safeguarding enabled me as a researcher to overcome the difficult taboo nature of the subject to elicit from the participants a deeper understanding of the problems common to all of them as individuals.

The findings from my six intensive interviews reveal eight broad areas of concern, superordinate themes which continue to seriously affect how they view other priests, their confidence in themselves as priests, their perception of their role in ministering to children and their faith in the establishment they serve. They also reveal that the Catholic Church, despite being the fount of their religious and moral lives and their employer, is not addressing these concerns in a co-ordinated way, or at all. One of the superordinate themes, betrayal, bridges both dimensions of the crisis as priests struggle to deal with brother priests who have betrayed them and with the Church which is both a victim and a perpetrator of betrayal.

The experiences my interviewees shared with me offer a previously ignored insight into the experience of being, as far as I can ascertain, non-offending priests in a society which seems to regard all Roman Catholic priests with increasing suspicion because of the child abuse scandal. The data unearthed in this thesis is not presented as the views of all priests in England and Wales or in the rest of the international Church. But the commonality of the global child sex abuse scandal and the scandalous early response to it by the Church in all countries, and the commonality
of the views by my representative sample of priests in England and Wales present a challenge to the Catholic Church, and indeed other institutions, to investigate further and respond to the adverse effects of the crisis on innocent priests.
Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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Environment, Education and Development.
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My gratitude goes to the Bishop and Diocese of Salford for supporting me throughout my research. This support was instrumental in enabling me to begin the research and then to continue it through to completion.

I am pleased as well to acknowledge the clerical assistance provided to me by Pam Jones and Catherine Grundy.
The Author

Barry O'Sullivan was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1987 following his graduation from Ushaw College, then a senior seminary in Durham, U.K. He obtained a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology from Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, U.S.A., in 2001 and a Postgraduate Certificate in Behavioural Forensic Psychology from the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, U.K., in 2010. He is a Member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Fr O'Sullivan served as an assistant parish priest in Manchester from 1987 to 1991, during which time he was a chaplain to a 1,000-student high school and provided counselling to students and staff. He was a chaplain to three hospitals and a hospice from 1991 to 1995 and then served as a full-time prison chaplain from 1995 to 1999. This latter work including serving as a group facilitator in the Sex Offender Treatment Programme in the prison which housed the largest number of sex offenders in Europe. Among other prison duties, he was involved in ongoing training with the Lucy Faithful Foundation, an organisation specialising in issues related to child abuse.

In 2001, Fr O’Sullivan was appointed by the Bishop of Salford as the diocese’s Child Protection Co-ordinator which involved, among other duties, the implementation of the Church’s best practices for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, and investigations into allegations of child abuse by any representatives of the diocese’s 200 parishes. He was also a member of the Bishop’s Office for Pastoral Support of Clergy.
He has been an *ex-officio* Member of the Vatican’s Anglophone Conference for Child Protection since 2007 and, since 2010, a Member of the Academy of the U.K. government’s Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

As well as participating in numerous safeguarding seminars, Fr O’Sullivan was a Member of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales Working Party on the care and rehabilitation of sex offenders, and from 2004 to 2006 was a Member of the Catholic Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Working Party. This body developed national policies for the Catholic Church in England and Wales for “The Support of Those who have Suffered Abuse and Those Accused of Abuse”. In 2010 and 2011, he was a Member of the National Working Party to Develop a Safeguarding Programme for Clergy in England and Wales.
Chapter 1

Introduction to the scandal and its effects

1.1. Introduction

The focus of this thesis is the effect of the child abuse crisis on Roman Catholic priests in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales who have not been accused of inappropriate sexual behaviour towards children and who, in that sense, can be described as “non-offending”. I refer to the Roman Catholic Church throughout this thesis as the Church to make it clear when I am referring exclusively to it.

The concept of abuse is central to this thesis. Before going further to discuss its effects on non-offending Catholic priests, it is important to be clear about what is meant by “abuse”.

Abuse is a violation of an individual’s human and civil rights by any other person or persons….

Abuse may consist of a single act or repeated acts. It may be physical, verbal or psychological, it may be an act of neglect or an omission to act, or it may occur when a vulnerable person is persuaded to enter into a financial or sexual transaction to which he or she has not consented, or cannot consent.
Abuse can occur in any relationship and may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of, the person subjected to it. (“No Secrets”, 2000, U.K. Home Office and Health Department)

Abuse is categorised as follows in the Statutory Guidelines for Schools and Colleges (2014, p. 8): physical, emotional, sexual, neglect/acts of omission, financial/material, discriminatory.

While there have been allegations of other forms of abuse by clergy, this thesis deals exclusively with the sexual abuse of minors. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child/minor as a person under 18 years of age; the United Kingdom has ratified this convention (NSPCC, 2015). Sexual abuse has been the most common and most widely publicised form of abuse allegations against priests. Sexual abuse is defined as:

Forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. For vulnerable adults, it is activities or acts to which the adult has not consented, or could not consent or was pressurised into consenting. The activities may include physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery, oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. It may also include non-contact activities such as involving children in looking at or in the production of pornographic material or watching sexual activities or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. The most common indicator of
sexual abuse is the child’s disclosure. (National Catholic Safeguarding
Commission (NCSC), National Safeguarding Standards Module 2:1:8)

1.2. The nature and extent of the crisis

In the early 1990s, the scandal of the sexual abuse of children by some members of
the clergy emerged as what Mark Dowd, BBC Radio 4 religious affairs
correspondent, was to describe in a 2010 interview with me as “the greatest threat to
the Catholic Church since the Reformation”. This scandal was compounded by the
unsatisfactory initial response by those responsible for addressing the crisis: the
Catholic hierarchy, bishops and major superiors of religious orders. The issue was
especially sensitive given that the subject of sexual abuse of minors is such a taboo
within the Catholic Church.

In the nine-year period from 2003 to 2012, 598 allegations of abuse were reported to
statutory authorities by the Church’s dioceses and religious institutes in England and
Wales. Of these, 465 (77 per cent) were allegations of sexual abuse. Of the total
number of allegations, 487 arose from diocesan contexts and 111 from religious
contexts (CSAS, 2014).

For clarification, diocesan priests belong to a graphical area, e.g. Salford Diocese,
and a religious priest belongs to a religious order, e.g. the Benedictines or the
Franciscans, and belongs to a province, e.g. England and Wales.
In March 2014, an independent review was commissioned by the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC). The following statistics are taken from the independent review, which was led by Dr Stephen Bullivant. The review researched the allegation statistics for the Catholic Church in England and Wales between 2003 and 2012. The following are some of the relevant statistics and breakdowns of these allegations (CSAS, 2014).

**Figure 1.1. Annual number of allegations**

The above chart succinctly summarizes the number of allegations against Roman Catholic priests whether belonging to a diocese or a religious order, and pertain to those working exclusively in England and Wales. This diagram, perhaps for the first
time, enables us to see at a glance the exact number of allegations made against priests in England and Wales between 2003 and 2012.

Figure 1.2. Abuse allegations by type

The above pie chart again gives us data at a glance as to the category of abuse of minors by the clergy. Whilst sexual abuse (77 per cent) is by far the most common form of alleged abuse, it is important to note that physical abuse (13 per cent), emotional abuse (five per cent) and child abusive images (five per cent) should be noted lest they be forgotten and reduced to the shadows of sexual molestation of children by the clergy.
Figure 1.3. Allegations by ecclesial context

Fifty-two laicisations (permanent removal from priestly office) were completed between 2001 and 2013 in England and Wales as a direct result of abuse (CSAS National Report, July 2014).

Haywood and Green (2000) sought to explore the similarities with and differences between clerics who sexually abuse and other sex offenders. They reported that clerics were generally older and better educated, and that 77 per cent of accused clerics had been accused by male victims compared with 46 per cent for other groups within society.

The sense of shock and betrayal which can be heard from bishops and priests who have been affected by the sexual abuse crisis is compounded by the fact that these
offences were perpetrated by people whose vocation was directed to the pastoral
care and service of others, particularly the most vulnerable in society.

1.3. An insider researcher

The aim of my thesis is to present the results of my research as accurately as
possible. However my background, both personal and professional, relates to the
subject at many points. It is important and necessary to describe and explore these
points of contact. My background gave me special access to and an insight into the
views of non-offending priests. I explore this subject further in Chapter 3 –
Methodology.

I was ordained a Roman Catholic priest on 18 July 1987. I have been a priest, based
in the Diocese of Salford, for 27 years. For 10 years, I was the Diocesan Child
Protection (now Safeguarding) Co-ordinator. It is the responsibility of the Diocesan
Safeguarding Co-ordinator to oversee and implement the agreed Safeguarding
Policies and Procedures of the Church in England and Wales, working, as always,
within the legal requirements, national and canonical, as they have been developed
in recent years. The Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator is responsible to respond
to any concerns with regards to clergy and other personnel, both employed and
voluntary.

From 1995 to 1999, I was the Chaplain at HMP Wymott, where I was also a tutor
for the Prison Service’s Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP). From 1999 to
2001, I studied in Boston, U.S.A., and obtained a Master’s degree in Counselling Psychology. I then returned to the Diocese of Salford to be its Safeguarding Coordinator until 2012. During that time, I obtained a Postgraduate Certificate in Behavioural Forensic Psychology from the University of Central Lancashire in 2010 and became a Member of the Child Exploitation Online Protection (CEOP) Academy. From 2007 to 2012, I was an Ex-Officio Member of the Anglophone Conference for Safeguarding at Vatican City. I am a Member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

As a practising therapist and as a Roman Catholic priest, I have been in an unusual position of counselling both clergy perpetrators and victims of clergy perpetrators of child sexual abuse. I was both concerned and disappointed that the victims all too often reported a woefully inadequate response from Church authorities to their accusations, a response which often included accusations of lying and seeking compensation. Ironically, the clergy perpetrators who were my clients more often than not reported a sense of being abandoned by their religious superior.

1.4. The methodology of this study

My research explores difficult questions around the clergy child sex abuse crisis and its effect on day-to-day ministry with children for non-offending priests. It then explores the psychological, emotional and spiritual effects of the scandal on non-offending priests.
The nearly 6,000 Roman Catholic priests in England and Wales would have been too large a group to allow me to reach firm conclusions from quantitative research. I therefore chose qualitative research on a randomly selected sample of six interviewees.

I discuss in Chapter 3 – Methodology the basis for my decision-making and the process.

1.5. Content of this thesis

This thesis is built around extensive interviews with six non-offending priests, supplemented by original research and an analysis of the available literature on the subject.

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 – Introduction to the scandal and its effects
Chapter 2 – Literature review themes
Chapter 3 – Methodology
Chapter 4 – Findings
Chapter 5 – Discussion
Chapter 6 – Conclusions
This thesis is an exploration of the effects on non-offending Catholic priests in England and Wales and on their ministries which have resulted from the clergy sex abuse crisis and the Church’s handling of it. The findings from interviews with six non-offending priests are contained in Chapter 4.

As a priest conducting this research, I am acutely aware of the significance of my position as an insider. The implications of this are explored in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 2

Literature review themes

2.1. Nature of the review

In the course of my work as a Roman Catholic priest and especially as one of the Church’s specialists in the field of safeguarding children, I was familiar with the first part of the literature that led to this thesis: a vast amount of published material on the scandal of the sexual abuse of children both by Catholic priests and in society at large. This material included: official Church and governmental reports and policy statements; pronouncements by senior Church leaders; books, articles and theses; and media reports from around the Catholic world. This literature, as one of its authors (Keenan, 2011) among others points out, subdivided the subject of abuse by clerics into two dimensions: the fact that the abuse occurred at all, and the way the problem was managed once it came to light.

However, this large volume of published material focused mainly on the plight of the primary victims of abuse, the children, and on the effects on the Church as a religious institution. This is of course legitimate considering the unthinkable betrayal of children by some of its clerics and, much of the literature argued, the almost equally unthinkable betrayal of the children, the Church and its values by its senior leadership which was widely criticized for mishandling the allegations and the perpetrators.
There was some acknowledgement of the effects of this scandal on one group of secondary victims: parishioners whose faith in the Church could have been shaken. For example; Mary, a parishioner from a Catholic parish in the north of England said:

My emotional and physical world was turned upside down. I loved the Church and had brought my own family up to respect her and look to her for guidance and support. As a teacher I thought the children to seek out priests when times were hard. All I could feel at this time was a deep sense of betrayal – tears for the children who were abused and most of all tears for my Church. (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 281)

And another parishioner, Phil, adds:

I found myself asking “how could this happen in God’s true Church?” If my Christianity wasn’t damaged, my satisfaction with the Catholic Church certainly was. I had taken a radical step in converting to Catholicism and it was difficult not to feel thoroughly let down. (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 285)

However, there was very little written about another group of secondary victims: innocent priests. There were some published views of individual innocent priests such as Doyle (2009). But there was no extensive published data on or interpretations of the psychological and ontological effects of the Church’s child sex abuse scandal on priests who played no part in it other than to attempt to continue
their vocation while it swirled around them. This further convinced me of the importance of research into this aspect of the crisis and of the necessity to fill that research gap, as I have done for this thesis, by identifying and analysing the effects on six innocent priests through in-depth interviews with them.

2.2. Accessing the literature

My position as a Roman Catholic priest meant I had access both to Church data and Church personnel. Also, because of my previous role as a Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator I had access to safeguarding matters on a national basis. I also was an ex-officio member of the Anglophone Conference based at the Vatican, which gave me invaluable access to the unfolding story of the child abuse scandal on an international level. Again due to my insider status as a Catholic priest, I was aware of the many books, articles and journals, often written by Catholics, which proved an invaluable resource, including religious-based journals such as The Furrow and Pastoral Psychology and the Catholic Church’s weekly newspaper The Tablet.

My position as a Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator for ten years gave me the opportunity to attend more than 30 conferences both nationally and internationally and Church and secular. These occasions provided a wonderful opportunity not just to be exposed to the latest literature, but also to network with other professionals in this field.
The electronic data for this study was retrieved using such search engines as Google and Google Scholar as well as databases such as PsycINFO, as well as from many other individual websites which can be found in the Bibliography.

Whilst conducting electronic research I used the following key words and phrases: child abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, psychological impact of sexual abuse, the Church’s response to the child abuse scandal, victims of clerical child sexual abuse, institutional child abuse. I only accessed literature written in English. However, since the vast majority of reported sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church and the ensuing research seemed to concentrate on the Irish Republic, the United States and Australia, there was more than enough data for my research. Because clerical child sex abuse has been an issue for the Catholic Church throughout its history, and because the current scandal has evolved over several decades, I did not limit my research to any particular time frame, although more emphasis was of course given to material published since the early 1990s.

Initially, it was instructive to examine the literature on child abuse in U.K. society generally before examining the situation in the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. A broader perspective was then obtained by reviewing the literature on the Church throughout the world as ultimately it is a global organization. As the researcher, I was overwhelmed with the amount of data available on the subject of the scandal of clergy sexual abuse of children. Thanks to the scrutiny of my principal supervisor, I had to continually discipline myself to a search for data immediately pertaining to the thesis title.
My other role as a therapist gave me access to a wide range of psychology publications which gave me further insights into the literature on the Church’s scandal and on the psychology of handling questions about such a difficult issue.

The second part of the literature underpinning this thesis is the published works on interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is a detailed qualitative methodology, and hermeneutics, which helped to guide the interpretation of the data. These methods were selected so that I could question innocent priests and analyse their responses to elicit a deeper understanding of each individual’s experience. The literature on IPA and hermeneutics is discussed fully in Chapter 3 – Methodology.

The first part of the literature can be subdivided into the following subject areas:

- structure of the Church
- trauma of child sex abuse
- institutional issues
- identity of priests as a group
- difficult conversations
- betrayal

2.3. **Church structure**

There are 5,868 Catholic priests belonging to various religious institutions in England and Wales (National Catholic Directory of England and Wales, 2013). The
Church in England and Wales is divided into 22 dioceses, geographical areas which each come under the authority of a diocesan bishop. A religious order, whilst subject to the authority of a diocesan bishop, also has its own levels of accountability. A parish priest is answerable and accountable to his diocesan bishop; in a similar way, a priest from a religious order is accountable to his religious superior (head of the order). This accountability does not negate a priest’s ultimate responsibility for the pastoral care of those located within his parish boundary.

The structures of the Roman Catholic Church are the point of reference for each of the interviewees for this thesis.

2.3.1. **The three-tier hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church**

There are at least 30 Roman Catholic denominations in the world. But there are only three levels of control: world head (Pope), diocesan head (bishop), local parish (priest). Currently, there are 2,946 Roman Catholic bishops around the world; each bishop is located in a cathedral that is the centre of administration, governance and control of the local churches (parishes) within its geographic territory.
2.3.2. The priest

Priests are also called reverend, pastor and father. There is at least one priest for each of the 219,583 parishes (local churches) in the Church worldwide. Each parish has its own geographic territory and boundary lines. The priest is usually in charge of a single parish and has a responsibility for the Catholics living in it. In the Latin Roman Catholic Church, only celibate men, as a rule, are ordained as priests. The Catholic Church and the ancient Christian churches see ordination as dedicating the person ordained to a permanent relationship of service. The official definition of a parish priest is:

The parish priest is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises the pastoral care of the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share, so that for this community he may carry out the office of teaching, sanctifying and ruling with the co-operation of other priests or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of Christ’s faithful, in accordance with
The priest answers only to his bishop and the Pope. A bishop from one diocese has no authority over a priest from a different diocese. In terms of power and authority, only two men can “fire” a priest: the Pope or the bishop who appointed him. This dynamic is extremely relevant to the world view, or gestalt, of all priests.

The concept of the brotherhood of the priesthood is significant for priests as the brotherhood far exceeds commonality and comradeship (see section 2.11. below).

When a priest is ordained, the Church teaches that an ontological change takes place affecting nature and essence of being. The notion of ontological change and R.D. Laing’s *Theory of Ontological Uncertainty* (1960) bridge the gap between theology and psychology. In Chapter 5 – Discussion, I will further explore Laing’s theory and its pertinence to the findings of this study.

What does the concept of ontological change try to express? The catechism states that ordination “confers an indelible spiritual character” which cannot be “repeated or conferred temporarily” (Canon 1583). Further, “the vocation and mission received on the day of his ordination mark him permanently” (Canon 1583). Ordination, like baptism and confirmation, is done once and for all. Holy Orders places one in a different position (*i.e.* order or group) in the community, not a better or more privileged one, but a position from which one is called to spend a life exclusively in the service of the People of God.
In accordance with the Code of Canon Law which governs the Church, all parishioners (including children) have a right to receive spiritual help from their priest (Canon 213). Canon 515 says the priest is tasked to prepare the faithful for the sacraments.

The pastoral tasks and duties of the parish priest are outlined in Canons 528 and 529 and include: “to have a special care for the Catholic education of the young, to know the faithful entrusted to him through visits to families”. This raises the question of whether priests who no longer choose to engage in ministry with children and young people are in breach of canon law. Many priests seem to have withdrawn from ministry and contact with children (based on my experience of conducting Clergy Safeguarding training, 2010). This is also found in the literature for other professions where professionals’ confidence to work with children has been impacted by claims and actual cases of abuse (Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2009).

The behaviour of the perpetrators of abuse, and especially the initial response of the bishops, led Chinnici (2010) to write:

As a social institution the Church claims moral authority; as a religious institution it claims truth and “holiness”. Such has been its self-presentation in America since the early years of the immigrant Church, a public posture only strengthened during the era of the Cold War. As the Baltimore Catechism phrased it, “Holy” – a central mark of the Church; it was a social body always teaching holy truths and making people holy. The public
institutional carriers of that holiness were the priests and bishops who had received the sacraments of “Holy Orders”, and who administered the holy Sacraments. (Chinnici, 2010, p. 157)

2.4. An old problem with a new dimension

Geary and Greer’s review (2011) of documentary evidence of the abuse of children throughout almost a thousand years of Church history amply supports the following conclusion from Doyle, Sipe and Wall (2005):

Victims have never been treated in a compassionate way, given the damage that has been done to them. Church leaders have known about this kind of behaviour throughout the Church’s history. Church leaders have abused their power to protect clergy offenders and stop the crimes being made public. The penalties imposed have generally been lenient, and the Church often only acted when it had to. (Doyle, Sipe and Wall, 2005, p. 63)

There had been individual cases which caused sensational scandals in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. At that time, the bishops and religious superiors handled many individual cases either by moving the perpetrator to another assignment or sending him for treatment to one of the Church’s own therapeutic facilities (Geary and Greer, 2011). Thus, the first response of the Church was to handle any allegations or concerns “in-house” without any reference to the statutory authorities.
The very existence of specialised treatment centres shows that the Church was aware of this issue. The sad reality is that the sexual abuse of children has existed in all eras of Catholic Church history. Geary and Greer (2011) point out that it is interesting to see how the dynamics of abuse have not changed: *i.e.* the victims tend to be vulnerable children like orphans or those entrusted to the care of the Church.

Some Church leaders followed the early lead of Marcellin Champagnat (1817), the young French priest in post-Napoleonic France who founded the Marist Brothers. This order was established with the primary intention of teaching and providing religious education to poor children. When Champagnat came across abuse of children by members of the order, he acted swiftly to confront and discard offenders against children (Geary and Greer, 2011, pp. 39-42).

In the early days of Champagnat’s community, he took in children as boarders in order to boost funds. When he heard that one of his monks had yielded to “temptation to impurity”, Champagnat confronted the man with these words: “What did that child do to you that you should rob him of his innocence? Away with you. You don’t deserve mercy.” (Furet, 1856, p. 409). In the context of his era in the early nineteenth century, he acted immediately and decisively.

For several years I attended the Anglophone Conference for Safeguarding at the Domus Sanctae Marthae, which is now the residence of Pope Francis. This was an international conference from the English-speaking Bishops’ Conferences (countries). Opposite the front door to the main entrance there is a statue of St Marcellin Champagnat (see Figure 2.2. below). As someone who has been working
in the field of safeguarding for more than 20 years, the statue of St Marcellin Champagnat epitomises for me what safeguarding should be about.

**Figure 2.2. Statue of St Marcellin Champagnat, Domus Sanctae Marthae, Vatican City**

Here we see a priest who is comfortable in the presence of children and who can touch them appropriately. They are comfortable and safe in his presence, and are drawn to look to a larger horizon and a future full of hope. This captures the essence of ministry with children and young adults. It is in sharp contrast to the cartoon reproduced below (see Figure 2.3.), which sadly seems closer to the experience of priests today.
This cartoon epitomised not how priests view themselves, but how many believe people perceive them. Perhaps the most important challenge for present-day priests is how to reach the standards of pastoral ministry with children set by St Marcellin Champagnat.

2.5. Child sex abuse in U.K. society

The literature on child sex abuse today indicates this problem is not confined to the Catholic Church. There has been a rise in public concern over sexual abuse generally within society and specifically across a range of institutions and professions. As I write this thesis there are several newspaper articles and news
items about sexual abuse of minors by both individuals and within institutions. The Rochdale Inquiry (2014), the Methodist Church (2015) inquiry and the Doncaster and Oxford inquiries (2015) are just few examples. The common theme between each of these enquiries is the systemic institutional aspect of the abuse of children.

The first recognition, in the wider context, of child sexual abuse in society and its damaging effects is found in an 1896 paper by Sigmund Freud entitled “Aetiology of Hysteria”. Freud treated a number of women for “hysteria” and found that as children they had all been sexually abused by adult men. Freud said victims of sexual abuse tend to conceal childhood experiences of abuse, and when these memories become conscious the most powerful feeling reported is shame. Freud believed sexual abuse of children was a widespread phenomenon of which few people were aware but which would soon become widely known. However, it should be noted that Freud later changed his ideas and came to argue that the abuse was imaginary and was connected to infantile sexual desire. His whole idea of psychosexual development was based on this hypothesis.

Freud’s initial analysis of the victims have now come to pass in many societies and especially in the United Kingdom where public concern has been generated because of the extent of the incidence of abuse across society at large. Since 1967, there have been at least 30 public or known private inquiries into abuse in children’s homes and similar institutions, such as the public inquiry by Sir Cecil Clothier in 1994 and the Marcus Erooga inquiry for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 2009.
The media have reported extensively on alleged abuses of children in the care of individuals and institutions, raising concern on the part not just of the general public but particularly of institutions which have looked into their own pasts. The most recent coverage, on 28 May 2015 in The Guardian and others, concerned a report for the Methodist Church in Britain entitled “Courage, Cost and Hope” (Methodist Church Past Cases Review, 2015) which found 102 allegations of sexual abuse by its ministers among nearly 2,000 cases of all forms of abuse by its clergy and lay people, some dating back to the 1950s. Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (2015) reported in February 2015 on 60 cases of sex abuse, many involving young children, by the late Jimmy Saville at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

Even more public attention has been generated by high-profile allegations against Saville and other radio and television personalities, both living and dead, of sexually abusing children. In October 2012, the Metropolitan Police launched Operation Yewtree to investigate criminal charges in the Saville case. Some of these allegations, such as those against Saville and the BBC, have included investigations into decades of alleged institutional cover-ups that are said to have concealed repeated abuses over many years (BBC News, 2014).

The issue of child abuse and its implications for professionals is a multidisciplinary matter. Education is one area in which, unlike with innocent priests, concern has been expressed for professionals innocent of any wrong-doing. Mellor and Sachs (2003) highlighted the impact of sexual abuse allegations against teachers. There was evidence that the already very low percentage of male childcare teachers
dropped by half between 1992 and 1997 due in large part to allegations of sexual
abuse against male teachers.

The National Union of Teachers (2009) reported concerns about rising levels of
abuse allegations, although allegations against its members were mostly about
physical restraint and discipline. The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union
of Women Teachers (2009) suggested that there are signs that a culture of abuse
allegations is spreading.

In U.K. legislation, the Children Act, 1989, was the first major legislation on
institutional abuse and provided measures to standardise practice in residential and
day-care facilities (Gallagher, 2000). It provided a basis for the adoption of the
“paramountcy principle” putting the protection of children first.

Legislation alone was clearly not sufficient so the government now seeks to link
legislation with the work done by non-government organisations, including faith
communities. Following the 2003 murders of two girls by a school caretaker, the
Bichard Inquiry (2004) led to the passage by Parliament of the Safeguarding
Vulnerable Groups Act, 2006, and the establishment of the Independent
Safeguarding Authority (ISA). The ISA was established to co-ordinate professional
and voluntary sectors to help prevent unsuitable people from working with children
or vulnerable adults (U.K. Government, 2014). It was merged with the Criminal
Records Bureau in 2012 to form the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).
Scotland is developing its own similar system, which will work closely with the
DBS (Scottish Government, 2015). These services are mandated to keep potential
abusers out of employment involving children and vulnerable adults; but their mandate does not extend to assisting innocent staff in employment areas where sexual abuse has nonetheless occurred. For example, the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) stated in 2007 that priority for children’s security is a key principle.

Among other faith communities, the Church of England revisited policies and procedures in this arena in “Protecting All God’s Children” (Church of England, 2004). The Church of England, like the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, also has published a policy to care for and supervise any member of the Church, ordained or lay, known to have offended against a child (Church of England, 2015). The Churches’ Child Protection Advisor Service (CCPAS), a Christian charity, is a resource for any Christian community seeking to either introduce or review safeguarding policies and procedures.

Among other recent major incidents in the United Kingdom, significant levels of child abuse have been recorded at a number of schools, hospitals and care homes, and organised sexual abuse by sexual trafficking rings was revealed in Plymouth, Rotherham, Oxford, Rochdale and Derby. An Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse was announced by the British Home Secretary, Rt Hon. Theresa May, in July 2014, to examine how the country’s institutions have handled their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse. This illustrates the extent to which sexual abuse is all too evident in the United Kingdom. The above incidents are not intended to minimise the reality of clergy child sex abuse, but rather to set it in both a local and global context.
2.6. The scandal and the Catholic Church in England and Wales

The prevalence of child sex abuse in society at large is not, however, seen as explaining its incidence in the Church. Brunner/Mazel (1995) propose that the crisis for the Church indicates what they describe as a cancer in the very systemic structure of the priesthood and the hierarchy. They further suggest that it is not possible that priests’ sexual misconduct is just the overflow of a societal problem. Cozzens (2000) cites a number of commentators who believe that the scandal points to something much more revealing than the behaviour of some in society spilling over into the priesthood.

The literature, including official documents, revealed the extent of child sex abuse by priests among the nearly 5,900 priests and permanent deacons in the 22 dioceses of England and Wales who serve an estimated Roman Catholic population of over 4 million. The charts below indicate there were 425 allegations reported in official figures.
Figure 2.4. Allegations by diocese

Total number of allegations by diocese, 2004-12

NB: Missing data for Leeds and Northampton in 2006; 2004 data refers to alleged numbers of abusers, not total numbers of allegations.
2.7 The global situation in the Catholic Church

2.7.1 The scale of the issue

The U.K. literature on child sex abuse by priests is matched by publications on the problem in other parts of the Church globally.

In Australia, Archbishop Coleridge (2010), then Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, wrote in a letter for Pentecost on the crisis and its effects:
The story of the sexual abuse of the young within the Catholic Church has been the greatest drama of my 36 years of priesthood. (Coleridge, 2010, p. 1).

A Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was appointed in November 2012 (Australian Royal Commission, 2014) to investigate how the Catholic Church and other institutions in Australia dealt with allegations and incidents of child sex abuse. It is still conducting hearings and the Catholic Church’s alleged covering up of allegations has been at the centre of its inquiries.

Ireland produced two extensive published reports in 2009 (the Ryan Report and the Murphy Report) on child sex abuse in the Roman Catholic Church, there were media reports of abuse by priests in England, Wales and Scotland and revelations of abuse emerged in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

In the United States, one of the other countries with much published material on the subject to which reference is made throughout this chapter, media revelations of clergy sexual abuse of minors began to surface as early as 1990. A dramatic change took place after the “Boston Crisis” of 2002 which was the first time the scale of abuse of children by clergy was widely reported in a public arena.

Allegations by victims, reporters and litigators forced the U.S. to confront an internal cancer (Alan, 2011) in part with a self-examination of its priests’ attitudes.
In June 2002, a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People was approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It created a National Review Board which was instructed to commission a study, with the co-operation of the dioceses and eparchies, of the nature and scope of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. The board engaged the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York to analyse allegations of sexual abuse in dioceses in the United States from 1950 to 2002. The result was a report titled “The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States”, commonly known as the John Jay Report (2010).

The report found 10,667 people had alleged sexual abuse. Of these, the dioceses identified 6,700 unique accusations against 4,392 clergy, which was about four per cent of the 109,694 ordained priests, deacons or members of religious orders active in the U.S.A. Of the 4,392 accused, 252 (5.7 per cent of those accused or less than 0.1 per cent of total clergy) were convicted. The number of alleged abuses increased in the 1960s and 1970s, then declined in the 1980s and by the next decade had fallen to 1950s levels.

2.7.2. The scale of media attention

Plante (1999) agrees that sexual abuse by members of the clergy is a significant problem which has existed throughout the world and throughout the history of the Church. However, the intense media attention directed at the problem is new and is escalating, with the result that the public are given the impression that many priests are sex offenders and that the problem is a recent one. The unfortunate alliteration of
“paedophile” and “priest” does nothing to help this inaccurate impression (Plante, 1999). At this point, it is perhaps useful to cite the definition of “paedophilia:”

A. Over a period of at least six months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age thirteen or younger).

B. The fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

C. The person is at least 16 years and at least five years older than the child or children in Criterion A.

(Diagnostic Criteria From DSM-IV 1994, p. 244-245)

Plante suggests that, according to best estimates based on research in the U.S.A. in 1996, approximately six per cent of Catholic priests have been sexually involved with minors. More than 80 per cent of these offenders targeted adolescent boys, and nearly 20 per cent committed offences against younger children. He cites other research which supports the view that abuse by religious personnel is not confined to the Roman Catholic Church and that incidents of such abuse are also perpetrated by Protestant, Jewish and other religious groups. Geary (2008) also reports accusations against Muslim leaders in a mosque in Glasgow. He suggests that the six-per-cent figure that applies to Catholic priests is likely to apply also to clergy from other religious traditions; however, it seems that the Catholic Church has received the most attention for such offences (Bates, 2003).
Seewald (2010), in noting that priests reportedly formed 0.03 per cent of people convicted of child abuse in the United States, asked Pope Benedict XVI a direct question: “Is the Catholic Church being watched differently and evaluated differently with regard to abuse?” To which the Pope replied in 2010:

If you look at the real statistics that does not authorize us to look away from the problem or to minimize it. But we must also note that in these matters we are not dealing with something specific to the Catholic priesthood or the Catholic Church. (Seewald, 2010, pp. 92)

2.8. Initial responses by the Church

The Vatican, which is an independent principality, in 1990 was amongst the first countries to ratify the 1989 United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. But it was to take another two decades, two inquiries in Britain (Nolan, 2001, and Cumberlege, 2007), two in Ireland (Ryan and Murphy in 2009) and one in the United States (John Jay, 2011) before the Church implemented the UN convention in its handling of its child sex abuse crisis.

Overwhelming evidence in the literature shows that bishops throughout the world sought to protect the Church’s image by denying or minimising complaints (Beal, 2004). Moreover, where there was acknowledgment, it expressed itself with the primary concern for the reputation of the abusing priest rather that his victims or for the prevention of further abuse (Beal, 2004). Many bishops were reportedly so
consumed by the need to protect the reputation of the Church that they were “paralysed by the cancer eating away at the heart of the Catholic Church” (Beal, 2004, p. 92). I will return to this issue later in this chapter.

The UN committee on the convention met in January 2014 in Geneva and the Vatican appeared before it (L’Osservatore Romano, 17 January 2014) to report on its implementation of the convention. The Vatican was described as taking a first step towards restoring its good name over clerical child sexual abuse (The Tablet, 20 January 2014, editorial). The editorial noted that its record was not impressive as no bishop had been dismissed for negligent handling of clergy responsible for the sexual abuse of children. This is in sharp contrast to the response of Pope Francis who reportedly said at his morning mass that some cases have cost the Church a lot of money. He exclaimed: “Good! One must do that ... the shame of the Church!” (L’Osservatore Romano, 17 January 2014.)

*The Tablet* editorial (20 January 2014) went on to ask why the Vatican had not told all bishops that failure to comply with the strict letter and spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which gives absolute priority to the child’s interest, would be grounds for dismissal? Bishop Charles Scicluna, who is also the Vatican’s former chief prosecutor of child sex abuse cases, reportedly informed the UN committee that Pope Benedict had laicised (withdrew their status as priests) 384 priest abusers between 2011 and 2012 and voluntarily and forcibly removed another 182. The editorial insisted this would be normal in any civilised secular society. Having ratified the convention, the Vatican was expected to be judged by those standards if not higher, given the Church’s stand on ethical and moral issues.
2.9. Institutional issues

The literature divides the institutional aspects of the crisis into those affecting the role and reputation of the Church and those affecting its structures. The Church’s relationship with the victims of abuse, its role in society, the relationship between canon and civil/criminal law and the role of bishops with their priests have all been affected.

2.9.1. Abused children

In his 2009 research into the sexual abuse of 12 people by Roman Catholic priests, Farrell used interpretative phenomenological analysis to investigate the experiences of those who had been abused. He states:

The Roman Catholic Church has a long tradition in grappling with religious, spiritual, political and philosophical dilemmas and conflicts. In its 2000-year history, the Church has faced many crises: it has encountered wars, villainous Popes, perjuries, reformation and scientific scrutiny; yet still it has just over one billion believers amounting to 16.67 per cent of the total world’s population (Catholic News Agency, 2007; Central Statistics Office, 2007). However in more recent times, one of the most contentious dilemmas the Church has had to face is that of sexual abuse being perpetrated by its priests and religious. (Farrell, 2009, pp. 48)
Geary (Geary and Greer, 2011), in a chapter entitled “Contributions of the Catholic Hierarchical System to Sexual Abuse of Children”, cites Colm O’Gorman (2009), a victim of clerical sexual abuse, who described his experience of the institutional Church thus:

When I turned to the Church that purported to be the Church of the living Christ, I was met not with love and truth, but with lies and obfuscation. The denial and deceit of the hierarchy of the institutional Catholic Church was a final and terrible revelation of the corruption of its values. (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 71)

Geary and Greer (2011) explore how to make sense of the behaviour and experience of Colm O’Gorman which is so completely at odds with what the Church stands for and the values it seeks to promote. It is suggested that the Church was, in fact, partly an enabler of clergy perpetrators.

The scandal has reached beyond individual pathologies of perpetrators to the way that the Church understands itself, how it relates to civil authorities, how it deals with moral lapses and criminal activities of the clergy and how the bishops and the Vatican relate to each other. (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 7)

In a 7 July 2014 address to victims of clerical sexual abuse, Pope Francis unequivocally stated his support for victims when he declared:
This is what causes me distress and pain at the fact that some priests and bishops, by sexually abusing minors, violated their innocence and their own priestly vocation. It is something more than despicable actions. It is like a sacrilegious cult, because these boys and girls had been entrusted to the priestly charism in order to be brought to God. And those people sacrificed them to the idol of their own concupiscence. Before God and his people, I express my sorrow for the sins and grave crimes of clerical sexual abuse committed against you. And I humbly ask forgiveness. (Address given at Domus Sanctae Marthae, The Pope’s Residence, 7 July 2014)

This lengthy papal statement is the most precise statement by the Church leadership on this issue. It comes decades after the crisis started to emerge.

2.9.2. The Church in society

St Benedict, the founder of the Benedictine order of religious monks and the Patron Saint of Europe, proclaimed that the Church is at its strongest when it works on the margins. The literature on the Catholic Church rates it as the world’s second largest international development body after the United Nations. More than half of African hospitals are operated by faith-based organisations, with the Catholic Church in Africa providing nearly one quarter of all healthcare. Globally, the Catholic Church is one of the biggest healthcare providers. As of April 2014, it runs 5,246 hospitals, 17,530 dispensaries, 577 leprosy clinics and 15,208 houses for the elderly, chronically ill and people with physical and learning disabilities. A quarter of all Africa’s HIV care comes from Catholic Church agencies. The Church provides approximately 12 million school places a year in sub-Saharan Africa, offering
education to help many millions of young Africans to escape from poverty (Campbell, 2010).

These examples clearly indicate the Church’s commitment to those on the margins of society. But they also provide the context against which clerical sexual abuse of minors has taken place and fail to explain why safeguarding the marginalised victims of sexual abuse has not been given the same status as its care for other marginalised sections within society even though the “paramountcy principle” from the 1989 Children Act was adopted by the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales in 2001 to put the rights of children first.

2.9.3. Ministry to children in the wider context of the Church’s social teaching role

Catholic social teaching is the body of Church doctrine covering matters of social justice. Although its origins can be traced to the writings of St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and St Thomas Aquinas (1255-1274), it is also derived from concepts present in the Old and New Testaments. According to Pope Benedict XVI, the purpose of Catholic social teaching:

… is simply to purify reason and contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgement and attainment of what is just. The Church has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken spiritual energy without which justice cannot prevail and prosper. (Deus Caritas Est, 2005)

Integral to Catholic social teaching is the “preferential option for the poor”. This refers to a trend throughout the Judeo-Christian scriptures of giving preference to the
well-being of the poor and powerless. Accordingly, this doctrine implies that the moral test of any society is:

… how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor. (Gutierrez, 1973, pp. 68)

2.9.4. The Church and the law

Keenan (2011) notes the Church’s handling of the abuse scandal raises difficult questions about the relative order of civil, criminal and canon law in society.

Beal cites Neahaus (2004) who declares:

The niceties of canon law, due process, and elementary decency have in many instances taken a beating. As one cardinal archbishop said … it may be necessary for some priests to suffer injustice for the good of the Church. In the course of history, Caiaphas has not been without his defenders …. Another reaction claims to be realistic, which is to say hard-nosed: it’s too bad that some innocent priests may be hurt, but you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs, etc. Charming. But then, bishops have their own leadership credibility to worry about. (Neuhaus, 2004, p. 60)

This position is in direct contradiction of the Church’s Code of Canon Law and the advice given by the Roman Curia, the Church’s administrative structure based in

Canon law provides the Church authorities with a means not only of dealing with offending clergy, but also with a means of doing justice to victims, including paying compensation to them …. The commission has not encountered a case where canon law was invoked as a means of doing justice to victims. (O’Brien, 2009, p. 16)

In his doctoral thesis, Morgan (2014) says that the Church’s current treatment of accused priests ignores its own canon law:

The occasional treatment of priests in this way entered into direct conflict with the express language of the Code of Canon Law. Canon 348 provides:

“With special solicitude, a diocesan bishop is to attend to presbyters and listen to them as assistants and counsellors. He is to protect their rights and take care they fulfil the obligations proper to their state and that the means and institutions which they need to foster spiritual and intellectual life are available to them. He is also to take care that provision is made for their decent support and social assistance according to the norms of law.”

However, serious criticisms from a legal perspective were aimed at the Church’s failure to report accusations to the police. In response, American legislators, such as those in 2002 in Massachusetts, changed the law to make reporting of abuse to
police compulsory for the clergy of all religious denominations (Commonwealth of Massachusetts Legislature, 2002).

2.9.5. Bishops and priests

Fitzgibbon (2014) argues that clerical sexual abuse has resulted in a great deal of anger being directed at the hierarchy and he alerts us to the danger of bishops becoming increasingly isolated within the Church. He concurs with Walsh (2014) when he says:

Reflecting a long ecclesial tradition, the Second Vatican Council spoke of the bond between bishop and priest as that of father, brother and friend, envisioning a relationship of mutual trust and dialogue. As the domino effect of the crisis continues, such an understanding of the relationship between bishop and priest would seem no longer practicable or even tenable. (Fitzgibbon, 2014, p. 271)

Keenan (2011) has particular expertise of the abuse scandal in Ireland; but she argues the mistakes in handling abuse allegations by the Irish Church’s authorities are repeated worldwide. Keenan specifically refers to priests’ feelings of not being consulted, and how this contributed to low morale, something I was to find amongst all my interviewees. However, the concern for innocent priests in Keenan and elsewhere in the literature focuses more on giving them a greater role organisationally than on resolving their personal conflicts.

She captures this systemic dysfunctionality when she says:
Whilst the issues are complex, it is my view that the structures and systems of authority and power relations within the Church have allowed this secrecy and lack of openness and consultation to thrive. For many people it is the landscape against which much abuse including sexual abuse becomes possible. (Keenan, 2011, p. 602)

The John Jay Report (2010) identified five factors contributing to the American Church’s mishandling of sexual abuse. These factors appear throughout the global literature:

- failure by the Church leadership to recognize the seriousness of the problem
- overemphasis on trying to avoid a scandal
- use of unqualified treatment centres
- misguided willingness to forgive
- insufficient accountability


The Church’s handling of the matter must be set against the landscape of abuse and power of privilege (Keenan, 20011). Keenan notes:
“Them” and “us” thinking fails to take account of two fundamental principles: all abuse, including sexual abuse, takes place within a context of abuse of power and privilege. Secondly, abuse, however private its exercise, is never simply personal nor is abuse an isolated incident. (Keenan, 2011, p. 598)

Like Keenan (2011), I note the damage done not just by complaints but by how some priests are treated by their superiors. Whilst Keenan (2011) reports that relationships between bishops and clergy are at an all-time low in Ireland, my experience in England and Wales is that priests’ lack of confidence is not as pronounced but still could be described as shaky.

In Ireland, Bishop Jim Moriarty of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, who resigned after the publication of the Murphy Report (2009), wrote to the people of his diocese: “I fully accept that the attempts by Church authorities to ‘protect the Church’ and ‘avoid scandal’ had the most dreadful consequences for children and were deeply wrong.” He added:

Nor does it serve the truth to overlook the fact that the system of management and communications within the archdiocese [of Dublin] was seriously flawed. However, with the benefit of hindsight, I accept that, from the time I became an auxiliary bishop, I should have challenged the prevailing culture. (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 101)
Bishop Walsh (2014), the Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, acknowledges that bishops have a very serious obligation towards victims of alleged abuse; but they must not respond in a manner that might be unjust to the alleged abuser. He urges a commitment to regular reviews of guidelines and best practices in this area. Walsh notes continuing great concern among priests over the process of being stood down from ministry when allegations are made, the manner in which parishioners are informed and the provision of appropriate accommodation and support. Walsh further states that if a priest is found guilty and permanently removed from priestly ministry, the minimum requirement of any bishop is that the priest be treated with respect and compassion. If this is adhered to, it will have a profound effect on the well-being and confidence of priests against whom no allegations have been made (Walsh, 2014).

Along with Geary, Keenan (2011) takes issue with the Church’s handling of abuse complaints in Ireland. She reports from her study of priest offenders that not only did Church leaders fail to fully engage or deal adequately with offending clergy, but they also failed to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the problem. She reports that each bishop or religious superior seemed to adopt a defensive position in relation to either his diocese or religious order (Keenan, 2011, p. 273).

Again in his doctoral thesis, Morgan (2014) raises the issue of allegations against priests rendering them “operational casualties”. He goes on to elaborate:

The priest’s demise is choreographed by decision-makers who remain unaccountable, liberated from the need to explain or justify their procedures
and conclusions .... Experience has shown that the need for safeguarding is almost universally tendered as the sole and necessary rational basis for justification of decisions of this kind, with the impact upon the individual accused or merely suspected undeserving of mention. The injustice to the priest is considered to be the price one has to pay. (Morgan, 2014, p. 2)

Bishop Walsh (2014) states that the bishop/priest relationship exists on two levels: a one-to-one level and a group level. Both are important and the relationship is incomplete if one level is preferred to another. Both bishop and priest must engage with it, work on it and nurture it. Walsh is clear that bishops must respect a priest’s contribution and he cites the importance of this mutual support by quoting the Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops in the Church (*Christus Dominus*) 28, from Vatican II, which states:

> To ensure an increasing effective apostolate, the bishop should be willing to engage in dialogue with his priests, individually and collectively, not merely occasionally but if possible regularly. (Walsh, 2014, p. 277)

Walsh adds that a bishop should have an open-door policy and direct phone line for his priests, with the understanding that a priest may have access to his bishop at all times. This would help to create an atmosphere which means a priest can easily arrange an informal meeting with his bishop. All of this is founded on a deep respect and indeed love for every priest in the diocese (Walsh, 2014).
Rossetti (2011) urges bishops to affirm their priests, and to be encouraged to know that the majority of priests in the U.S. support and respect their bishop.

Although many observers assume that relationships between bishops and priests have been fatally ruptured, three-quarters of priests in the United States say they have a good relationship with their bishop and approve of his leadership. (Rossetti, 2011, p. xiv)

It remains to be seen whether bishops are able to provide the support innocent priests need, a subject to which I will return in Chapter 5 – Discussion.

2.9.6 Trauma within the Church

The literature on the scandal with priests in England and Wales, and globally, described such trauma for the victims of abuse, the Church and its priests that the Church instituted training sessions using a United Kingdom government publication, “Keeping Children Safe in Education”, to address the four different forms of allegation:

- **Substantiated**: there is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation;
- **Malicious**: there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been a deliberate act to deceive;
- **False**: there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation;
- **Unsubstantiated**: there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or
In his research paper “Sexual abuse perpetrated by Roman Catholic priests and religious” (2009), Farrell investigates the experiences of 12 victims of abuse by Roman Catholic priests. Farrell (2009) says his research participants describe what could be regarded as “theological trauma”, i.e. something that undermines the basis on which their spirituality is dependent, and that this in turn generates profound distress and dissonance. Farrell is adamant that these traumas heavily challenge the participants’ religious beliefs as they question priests, the Church, the Bible and God. It is as if their abuse had stolen from them a philosophy of life. He states:

> When a priest sexually abuses, such abuse is a unique dynamic of triangulation between the fundamentalism of Christian faith and belief, and the ultimate betrayal by a cleric or religious whose responsibility is to empower and nurture this doctrine. (Farrell, 2009, p. 48)

Farrell (2009, p. 46) quotes a victim of clerical sexual abuse who describes his trauma:

> I am confused what to believe of a priest now. I believed that a priest is chosen to represent Christ on earth. But this priest tried to rape me. Now, I have this awful struggle to separate out the priest from the man. At the same time, I was aware of the teachings of the Church, ‘give due respect for the human failings of the priest’, and that God can still act through them. I bared
my soul to this priest through the sacrament of confession and spiritual
direction; now I question the validity of the sacrament that I received from
him. (Farrell, 2009, p. 46)

The trauma for the Church was revealed in such documents as an extensive 2010
papal interview with German journalist Peter Seewald. Pope Benedict XVI regarded
the sexual abuse of children by priests as “so much filth” (Keenan, 2011, p. 224).
The Pope described it as almost like “the crater of a volcano” (Seewald, 2010, p.
23). Keenan (2011, p. 224) quotes the Pope as stating: “Above all, the priesthood
suddenly seemed to be a place of shame and every priest was under the suspicion of
being one like that too.”

Keenan (2011) further reports that, at least for the clergy in Ireland, the crisis
produced unforeseen consequences, creating significant problems. In Ireland, new
groups of casualties were emerging, primarily priests who were seemingly falsely
accused. Priests on both sides of the Irish Sea perceive that priests who are falsely
accused are regarded as “collateral damage” (Keenan, 2011). Other research I have
conducted amongst priests in England and Wales confirmed Keenan’s research.
“False” allegations were a great concern of the priests attending the training sessions
I have been involved with as the great majority of priests in England and Wales are
innocent.

2.9.7. The Church’s response to trauma

The Church is now addressing most of its failings in the abuse crisis globally in its
own publications. L’Osservatore Romano reported (28 March 2014) that Pope
Francis established the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors on 5 December 2013 and subsequently appointed its members, including lay people and women from five continents (Catholic News Agency, 17 December 2014). The first task of the commission – to draft statutes defining its competence and roles – was completed and published on 8 May 2015 (Catholic News Agency). The Director of the Holy See Press Office, Fr Federico Lombardi, SJ, says that the commission will contribute to “the safety of young people”. He also stresses that in establishing the commission Pope Francis is “continuing the commitment undertaken by his predecessors, and having heard the advice of a number of cardinals, other members of the College of Bishops and experts in the field” (L’Osservatore Romano, 2014).

At this point, the published statutes (Catholic News Agency, 8 May 2015) do not empower the commission to address the problems of innocent priests.

Bishop Scicluna (2103), speaking for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican, says the Church should be committed, in fairness and justice, to humbly acknowledging the problem with total and unequivocal respect for the truth.

In 2000, the Church in England and Wales asked Lord Nolan to review child protection in the Church. His review, completed in 2001, led to the establishment of the Catholic Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (COPCA). Nolan also recommended a further review after five years. The Cumberledge Commission carried out that review and in its report “Safeguarding with Confidence” (2007) recommended new national safeguarding structures which the Church adopted from 1 July 2008.
Cumberledge (2007) started from the principle that safeguarding is an integral part of the mission of the Roman Catholic Church: “Being loved and being kept safe go to the very core of the Church’s ministry to children and vulnerable adults.” It recommended that the term “safeguarding” be used instead of “protection” to emphasise that this is proactive work to prevent abuse taking place, not simply reacting and responding to allegations, although this remains a key part of the work. The commission very strongly supported the aim of a “one Church” approach, with the dioceses and religious congregations jointly owning the work and the safeguarding structures. It said more work was needed; but again, the issues troubling innocent priests were not mentioned.

2.10. The impact on non-offending priests

While the victims of abuse remain the primary concern, there are also impacts on a number of “secondary victims” (Greer, 2012b) especially, in the context of this thesis, the non-offending clergy who are affected by the fallout when abuse has taken place. While not guilty of any misdeed, it seems that they have to endure guilt by association.

In the context of the sexual abuse crisis within the Roman Catholic Church, Greer, a psychologist, psychoanalyst and child abuse specialist, states that:
“Secondary victim” provides a name for the inchoate distress felt by Catholics who have gradually learned about the child sexual abuse crisis among the clergy. (Greer, 2012, pp. 31)

She offers an extensive list of secondary victims of the clergy offender, a list that includes several categories of innocent priests: the offender’s religious order; brother priests and superiors; those to whom he ministered in the past; those to whom he ministered concurrent with the abuse:

The media must be used effectively to help people process what has happened, how it came to happen and what will be done to prevent it in the future. The impact on secondary victims’ faith and on their attachment to the Church should not be ignored. It must be accepted and addressed head-on. (Greer, 2012, pp. 37)

During the 1970s and 1980s, throughout the international Church there were commissions and reports that demonstrated only an initial awareness of and concern for this issue.

Doyle (2009), a non-offending priest, describes his own experience of being drawn deeper and deeper into what he refers to as “the total phenomenon of clergy sexual abuse”. He goes on to describe a “deep and gnawing pain” which he began to realise was beginning to affect the core of his priesthood. He cites what he calls his own witness of the “broad-based dishonesty and callousness of Church leaders”:
At first I could not believe what I thought I was seeing and it was only with intense emotional and spiritual pain that I finally accepted the reality of what I saw before me … the bishops were more concerned about themselves and hardly concerned about the victims. (Doyle, p. 242)

In his powerful and frank account, Doyle (2009) recalls:

In time I could no longer reconcile the official Church’s announced commitment to Christ’s healing love with their acceptance and enabling of a broad-based epidemic of rape, sexual devastation and spiritual destruction of so many innocent people by clerics, from deacons to cardinals. (Doyle, p. 257)

2.10.1. The perception of priests from a Roman Catholic diocese in the north of England

In 2007, I conducted research with 200 priests from a diocese in the north of England, the contents of which can be found in Appendix 4. The research was conducted by a written questionnaire to which the priests replied anonymously, enabling them to be as candid as they wished. Here are some of the responses to two of the seven questions (see Appendix 4).

Question: If you found yourself the subject of an allegation, are you confident that the Child Protection Commission would treat you fairly and with respect?
One priest wrote: “Once falsely accused, a priest could never prove his innocence.”

Another priest offered the following comment:

I’m not sure I would have answered question 6 so positively if I was not aware of how the commission has dealt with someone I know. I would probably have opted for “not sure” or “don’t know” – so if these are the main responses to that question it is probably because most people have not had any direct dealings with the commission.

Another respondent wrote as follows:

All animals are equal. Some are more equal than others. While the so-called paramountcy principle is maintained [the interests of a child are always paramount], justice will never happen or be seen to happen. It conflicts with the human rights of clergy and defies canon law. It is also possibly illegal as it discriminates on the ground of age.
I asked the following question and the breakdown of the response follows:

Question: Has the adoption of child protection policies and procedures given you confidence to continue your ministry with children and vulnerable adults?

**Figure 2.7. Northern England priests’ confidence in ministering to children**

Among the written responses were the following:

Credence must rightly be given to children – no problem – but not at the expense of denying other persons respect of their rights.

Two wrongs do not make a right. Not to listen to a child is wrong – and we need to create the situation where a child can freely speak knowing he or she will be listened to.
These responses indicate the struggle non-offending priests were having with concerns about the imbalance and injustice about the response to the allegations both as a Church and as a society.

According to feedback from safeguarding training which I facilitated with 96 Roman Catholic priests in 2011, the prevailing anxiety amongst the vast majority of priests seems to be the possibility of a malicious allegation. This observation is also based on my experience of being a Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator for 10 years, during which time it was the only anxiety that was voiced during both group and individual interviews with priests. This anxiety seems to be at the root of the marked decline I have noted in the provision of pastoral care to children.

2.11. **Identity of priests as a group**

My experience of nearly three decades as a priest is reinforced by the literature which describes the community of priests as a brotherhood with a significant place in the Church, a place which is being affected by the scandal. By virtue of baptism people become members of the” family” of the Church. It might help to explain here that members of the Church perceive it as “Mother Church” thus reinforcing the sense of family. God the “father “completes one of the principle images of “family” within the context of the Catholic Church. Ordination into the priesthood is an invitation into the “brotherhood of the priesthood”. For clarity, it is important to understand that at baptism the Catholic Church teaches that on “ontological” and thus irreversible change takes place in the person who has been baptised. To further
clarify, there are seven sacraments in the Catholic Church (baptism, confession, the Eucharist, confirmation, marriage, sacrament of the sick and ordination to the priesthood). For the purpose of this thesis, I simply note that only baptism and ordination involve an “ontological” change. Why the others don’t could be a possible research topic in itself.

Keenan’s 2011 study of the crisis in Ireland specifically mentions the contribution of an “elite clergy” to the ongoing systemic problem of abuse. She interviewed nine offending clerics and unearthed data about specific characteristics of clergy sex offenders. She states that from the early 1960s to the early 1990s, the period in which men in her study were abusing children, priests were presumed to be superior to laity and as such formed an elite within the Church (Keenan, 2011, p. 271). Keenan reports that the clergy offenders understood themselves as set apart and behaved accordingly. In their experience, the laity viewed them as “God’s men on earth”. This high status encouraged the attitude that priests could do no wrong. This stance primarily betrayed the trust of their victims and it also betrayed the trust of their brother priests who would have to bear the stigma of “Roman Catholic priest equals paedophile”.

Fitzgibbon (2014), when addressing the brotherhood of the priesthood, uses the term “ministry from below”:

For everyone’s sake it will be important for bishops and priests to internalise clearly that they are not a second “People” apart from the People of God.

They could not be ordained if they had not been previously baptised. The
Fitzgibbon (2014) himself a Catholic priest, suggests that we are now in an era when the trickle-down theology of the experts is giving way to the “percolating-up” theology of the “People of God”. This mindset, if lived out, radically challenges the notion of the brotherhood of priests as an elite club and begins to encourage and enable priests, whether offenders or not, to perceive victims primarily as equals. For Fitzgibbon, baptism is the starting point for all members of the Church since it is the fundamental sacrament through which ministers are called; all who are baptised share in the ministry of Christ and all who are baptised, regardless of subsequent ordination as priest or bishop, continue to be members of the priesthood of the faithful.

Despite the supposed high position of priests, Smyth (2009) refers to Erikson’s (1959) eight stages of development and notes that:

Interestingly and alarmingly, early research on priesthood within Western Europe and North America in 1971 revealed that only 10 to 15 per cent of priests were mature; 60 to 70 per cent suffered from a degree of emotional immaturity and 20 to 25 per cent had serious psychiatric difficulties. (Smyth, 2009, p. 473)

In contrast to assumptions that priests are often lonely and struggle to form healthy friendships, most priests have strong relationships both with other priests and with
laity. In fact, the strength of a priest’s human friendship turns out to be among the best predictors of the quality of his spiritual life.

2.12. The need for difficult conversations

It is clear from the literature that for most of this crisis, and even now in some areas, the Church has not seen a need or demonstrated a willingness to discuss with its priests their issues related to the scandal. Some such discussions have been held (see Chapter 5 – Discussion, section 5.3.1.), but for the most part such discussions are apparently still taboo. From the perspective of a professional doctorate in counselling, this research was dependent upon the ability and the willingness of the interviewees to engage in difficult conversations. Willingness and ability are also necessary if safeguarding and support procedures for innocent priests are to be effective; so my interviews would test the value of holding difficult conversations with innocent priests.

The concept of “difficult conversations” covers a myriad of contexts, such as conversations between teacher and pupil or employer and employee. They are often referred to as delivering home truths. Sometimes they are exacerbated when supposed home truths are not as accurate as some of the parties perceive or are not shared by all.

As the Safeguarding Co-ordinator, I saw that “having the confidence to have difficult conversations” is especially pertinent. In my experience, it was likely that
my determination to persist and to send the message that I was able to confront a particularly sensitive issue in turn would give confidence to the participant(s) to engage in the process. This is seen in the literature in this field which would underpin my interviewing to enable priests to deal with this difficult issue.

Rorty (1979) argues that conversation can be perceived epistemologically as a basic means of knowing. He says that our knowledge is based on conversations between people in a way which significantly differs from the knowledge gained from interaction with a non-human reality. The “conversation [is] the ultimate context within which knowledge is understood” (Rorty, 1979). Shotter (1993) goes further:

For conversation is not just one of our many activities in the world. On the contrary, we constitute both ourselves and our worlds in our conversation activity. For us they are foundational. They constitute the usually ignored background within which our lives are rooted. (Shotter, 1993, p. vi)

If conversations are integral to our perception of reality, then the concept of difficult conversations becomes even more important since not engaging in such conversations might mean missing the opportunity to engage with an aspect of reality which is challenging. They might be the key to experiencing a reality without which we will remain at least partly in the dark. In this context, the literature demonstrated that safeguarding can never be woven into the infrastructure of the Church, nor be an integral part of a priest’s ministry with children, without facilitating conversations.
Material on difficult conversations, in all their forms, raises many issues. Should others be confronted with interpretations of themselves, especially if they have not sought them and may not appreciate exploring areas which have not been previously negotiated? Difficult issues will often mean disagreement. This raises the question of the power dynamic between those having the conversation and by implication whose interpretation of reality informs the outcome. It is also important to consider who initiated the dialogue.

Rogerian principles uphold the intrinsic dignity of those engaging in conversations. As Rogers (1942) reminds us, before a person can receive help from a therapist or counsellor, certain basic or core conditions must be met. Thorne (2002) contends it is not overly simplistic to:

Affirm that the whole conceptual framework of Carl Rogers rests on his profound experience that human beings become increasingly trustworthy once they feel at a deep level that their subjective experience is both respected and progressively understood. (Thorne, 2002, p. 62)

Furthermore, whilst a client in therapy may want and be entitled to therapeutic conversations to facilitate insight and enable change, in research it can become unethical to instigate new interpretations which interviewees have not sought and might not welcome. This is especially true of taboos. This also has serious implications about the importance of therapeutic alliances: therapist/client, the trainer/trainee and the researcher/interviewee. How effective is an intervention and challenge if they fracture a therapeutic alliance? Should a particular taboo be
discussed if the conversation will result ultimately in alienation between parties?

Who sets the agenda and the pace of discussions, who decides when it is over and who interprets the interaction?

Shulman (2003) states that:

It’s as if all are respecting an invisible sign on the walls that says: In this group, we will not discuss sex, race, sexual orientation, death, abuse, rage, religion, class, shame, guilt, mental illness, disability, substance abuse, fears of all kinds, angry reactions to the worker or other members, or any other subjects that would simultaneously make the work of the group real but also painful and frightening for the members and the leader(s). Violation of these rules may result in social isolation or even exclusion from the group. Shulman (2003, p. 93)

As Shulman (2003) says: “We need to learn how to use our feelings, not lose our feelings.” The more we are open to new areas and explore the feelings that come with them, the more our ability to address taboos will increase.

The literature indicates an extraordinarily difficult balance must be struck during interviewing and what should take place before, during and after difficult conversations. It raises the question of how expression is best encouraged and how interpretations may be made during a conversation. Rogers (1959) says individuals possess vast resources of self-understanding and for altering their concepts of themselves. In a conversation between individuals, Rogers argues that three conditions create a climate to facilitate growth when the development of a person is
the goal. The first element he calls “genuineness” or “congruence” – the more the therapist is himself/herself, the more likely it is that the client will change. This can be applied to the dynamic of difficult conversations because “there is a close matching, or congruence, between what is being experienced, what is present in awareness and what is expressed to the client” (Rogers, 1959).

Rogers’ (1959) second element is “unconditional positive regard” which he says is imperative in therapy and, I argue, in a conversation. The therapist experiences a positive attitude to the client, thus making what Rogers refers to as therapeutic movement or change more likely. Unconditional positive regard is an integral part of any difficult conversation since it permits participants to recognise what is going on. This is fruitful not least because it encourages them to value each other in their totality rather than in a conditional way.

Rogers’ (1959) third core condition is “empathic understanding”: the therapist senses the client’s feelings and personal meanings and relates this understanding to the client. The therapist can be so deep in the private world of the client that he/she can help to clarify the insight(s) the client is seeking to communicate. The question here is whether, or how, this core principle can be applied to difficult conversations.

Integral to Rogerian therapy is sensitive, active listening, and Rogers (1959) notes that this type of listening is the most potent force for change. This change occurs as a result of people feeling they are accepted, prized and worthy to be listened to. They in turn become more genuine. This is essential for any worthwhile conversation, and especially so in difficult conversations.
McLeod (2001) stresses the importance of encouraging participants to talk about their experiences and opinions completely, honestly and authentically. For McLeod it is important to get closer to what the person really thinks and experiences. This has implications not only for difficult conversations but also for the dynamics within the research arena. The extent to which an individual or a group is given permission to participate and encouraged to do so honestly and openly is particularly important. This will be more likely if Rogers’ core conditions are an integral part of the interaction.

McLeod (2001) notes it can be extremely upsetting and intrusive if this is done badly with difficult topics. However, he also notes that, when done well, being interviewed can be both cathartic and liberating since a well-conducted qualitative interview/conversation can give the participants new insight. During a conversation, difficulties may arise when entering into new aspects of an issue. Consideration should therefore be given to who controls the agenda, time limits and at which point either party can close down the interaction. For this reason, McLeod (2001) suggests the adoption of a “process consent” procedure to deal with the immediate moral dilemmas arising from the intensity of a conversation.

Difficult conversations require participants to explore what Saffiotti (2006) refers to as “culpable blindness”: not wanting to see reality as it truly is, a common reaction to the sex abuse crisis. A mature willingness to participate in an adult conversation opens up the inevitability of discomfort, in particular relating to the realisation of one’s own contribution to the current crisis. He says:
The black or white thinking typical of the “you’re with us or you’re against us” mentality works wonderfully to discourage the effort required for complex analysis and to keep many individuals from becoming adult partners in dialogue and even leadership within the Christian community. This mentality also encourages splitting, an unhealthy psychological defence mechanism that virtually eliminates the possibility of integrating differing perspectives and of coming to a more comprehensive understanding of any given situation. (Saffiotti, 2006, p. 33)

Difficult conversations can be impeded by what Mearns and Thorne (1998 to 2013) list as five elements denoting a person’s lack of readiness for change. They argue none of these prevent change but may lengthen or shorten the process:

1. indecision about wanting to change
2. general lack of trust in others
3. unwillingness to take responsibility for self in life
4. unwillingness to take responsibility in the process of change
5. unwillingness to recognise and explore feelings about change.

Mearns and Thorne (1998 to 2013, p. 32) explain that the most difficult thing to predict in the process of change is its speed. Further difficulties arise because people can be stuck for different reasons, such as inability to grasp a concept, unwillingness to
confront unwelcome changes or facing too much change too fast. Five questions can reveal the stage of “stuckness”:

1. Are we indeed stuck, or am I misperceiving the process through my own impatience or perhaps because I expect the client to move in different directions from what is happening just now?
2. How does my client perceive the process at this time? ….
3. What is the source of our stuckness?
4. How far is it important to our process at this time that we are stuck?
5. How might we move on?

Mearns and Thorne (1998 to 2013, p. 42)

According to Mearns and Thorne (1998 to 2013), “stuckness” also occurs when a person experiences significant movement and realises there is no going back and to go on may lead to considerable unalterable and unwelcome life changes. It is then imperative that a person should be encouraged to pause, if only to gather energy and motivation to deal with the ensuing difficulties.
2.13 Betrayal

Conversations about the Church’s sex abuse crisis are made all the more difficult because one feeling underpinned more than any other the perception of this crisis shared by all concerned throughout the literature: betrayal. This feeling is divided by Ivereigh (2012, p. 74) into four different elements of betrayal:

1. **A moral crisis:** Revelations that some priests used their status to manipulate and coerce young people into illegal and immoral sexual relations.

2. **An institutional crisis:** The desire to preserve the Church’s good name led victims to be silenced or paid off while the perpetrators went unpunished.

3. **A crisis of local leadership:** There are an embarrassing number of reported accounts of bishops responding inadequately to alleged abusers and highhandedly towards alleged victims, and above all failing to report accusations to civil authorities.

4. **A crisis of universal Church leadership:** This is centred on accusations that Rome failed to force local bishops to take action against abusive priests and sometimes even obstructed that action.

Ivereigh (2012) says these forms of betrayal are effectively an attack on Christianity:

The perception is that children were not and are not safe within the Church.

The moral value behind the indignation is a deeply Christian one: the abuse
of innocence and the sacrifice of children on the altar of institutional reputation are a clear violation of everything the Gospel stands for. Ivereigh (2012, p. 74)

Priests who sexually abuse children primarily betray the victim; but they also betray their Church and their brother priests. Scicluna, in an article entitled “Description of the Problem from a Church Perspective” (2003), states that sexual abuse of minors by clerics is and always has been a serious violation of the Christian ethos and a tragic wound against the Church. This wound has also affected the well-being of non-offending priests. Scicluna cites St Matthew’s Gospel and the words of Jesus Christ concerning the scandal:

If any one of you put a stumbling block (scandal) before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks [scandals]! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come; but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes! (Mt 18, 6-7.) (Scicluna, 2003, p. 13)

Scicluna is unambiguous in his declaration that the scandal is a tragic wound to all members of the Church, clerical and lay:

Whenever a cleric, whether bishop, priest or deacon, sexually abuses a minor, a tragic wound is inflicted on the Church. Such conduct is reproachable on various counts:
1. It inflicts untold damage to the normal sexual development, self-esteem and human dignity of the minor concerned;

2. It is a cause of scandal to Christians and non-Christians alike, a stumbling-block on many a pilgrim’s progress in faith;

3. It invariably constitutes an abuse and a betrayal of the sacred trust which the People of God rightly have of their shepherds;

4. It damages the credibility of the Church and taints the beauty of Her testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life;

5. It discredits the ministerial priesthood and puts countless innocent clerics under the shadow of delinquency, crime and misdemeanour.

(Scicluna, 2003, pp. 16-17)

Scicluna (2003) emphasizes:

The Church will address the established occurrence of sexual abuse of [a] minor by a cleric in terms of working for the healing of [the] victim and the just punishment of the cleric. The well-being of the minor who has fallen victim to sexual abuse by a cleric is to be of paramount concern to the Church. Whenever possible, therapy should be offered to the offending cleric; but this does not exhaust the demands of justice. Penal procedures and disciplinary actions should foster and promote the common good. They should, as canon 1341 of the Code of Canon Law says, repair the scandal, restore justice and reform the offender. (Scicluna, 2003, p. 17)
Thomas Reece of the *National Catholic Reporter* (25 October 2013) wrote that Bishop Scicluna said sexual abuse was “an egregious betrayal of sacred trust” that “has the power to stint the normal development of people” and “cause depression, post-traumatic disorders, loss of self-esteem and, most tragically, loss of faith”. It “is an expression of the anti-Gospel, a betrayal of the message of compassion and love”.

His forthright description of a betrayal of leadership caused Frank Keating, a former Governor of Oklahoma in the United States and a former Federal Bureau of Investigation officer, to resign as chair of the American Church’s National Review Board. He defended his description:

> My remarks, which some bishops found offensive, were deadly accurate. I make no apology. To resist grand jury subpoenas, to suppress the names of offending clerics, to deny, to obfuscate, to explain away; that is the model of a criminal organization, not my Church. (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 91)

Betrayal is a key element in the Ryan Report (2009) in Ireland. It exposed collusion between the Church, religious orders, the criminal justice system, welfare agencies and the Education Department. The report was quoted in the *Irish Times* (21 May 2009):

> The department, “deferential and submissive” to the religious congregations, did not shout stop. Neither did anyone else. Indeed, perhaps the most shocking finding of the commission is that industrial school inmates were often sexually exploited by those outside of the closed world of
congregations, by “volunteer workers, visitors, work placement employees, foster parents”, and by those who took them out for holidays or to work. (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 94, ft. 48)

A similar comment is made in the Murphy Report (2009):

The state authorities facilitated the cover-up by not fulfilling their responsibilities to ensure that the law was applied equally to all and allowing the Church institutions to be beyond the reach of the normal law enforcement process. (Ibid, ft. 49)

The scandal and the media coverage and government enquiries throughout the Church, especially in Western Europe, created what O’Brien (2014) refers to as “shattered assumptions”. He explains:

And in the Church, not only the victims of abuse, but also the faithful, who had put their trust in priests and bishops, and in the probity and credibility of the Church and its ministers, were left feeling exposed. It should also be said that many priests, bishops and religious were victims of the failure of the system to cope with the sexual abuse of children. (O’Brien, 2014, p. 82)

The Church betrayed its work with those on the margins of society by being exposed for oppressing the vulnerable. Murphy (2009) explicitly refers to the concern of Church authorities for the protection of accused priests and brothers and the Church’s assets and reputation more than care for the victims. This betrayal
reportedly affected the perception of the Church by both its priests and laity, their confidence in the hierarchy and the perception of the Church as a place of care and trustworthiness. O’Donohue (2006) sums up the consequences of this perceived betrayal:

Then the utterly unthinkable: the explosion in the sanctuary. A psychic bomb went off, a bomb that had been unknowingly assembled for years from materials produced by the denial of the feminine, enforced celibacy, power, loneliness and sublimated politics of desperation. (O’Donohue, 2006, p. 464)

2.14. Conclusion

The literature therefore clearly articulates most of the elements of the crisis of child sex abuse by some clergy and the responses to it; but these elements are so serious that they overwhelm the psychological and spiritual effects on the innocent clergy which so far have been confined to a few personal observations, such as those by Doyle (2009). His experience of a deep fundamentally spiritual pain is, in my experience, shared by many priests.

Perhaps the Church has now advanced to a point where new research, such as that for this thesis, can enable it to recognize and address the problems of innocent priests as secondary victims in this most difficult issue.
Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of my research is to explore the effects on the psychological, emotional and spiritual lives of non-offending priests in the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales as a result of the sexual abuse of children by some priests in the Roman Catholic Church both domestically and globally. The Bishops’ Conferences of Scotland and of Ireland (including Northern Ireland) are separate conferences, hence the limitations of this study to Catholic priests ministering in England and Wales.

My research also explores the effects of this scandal on innocent priests’ day-to-day ministry with children. An examination of the effects on the institutional relationship of all priests with the Roman Catholic Church, its hierarchy and procedures, both in a spiritual and moral sense and as their trainer and employer, is a goal of this thesis as well. This is at least in part because the scandal of child sexual abuse is widely regarded in the literature (Keenan, 2011, for example), and in my own experience as a former Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator, as leading to a second crisis for the Church caused by its initial handling of abuse allegations.

I opted for a qualitative research tool to capture the “in-depth portraits” (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005) of the individual experiences of six randomly selected...
priests whom I would interview. I chose interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as my qualitative method and hermeneutic phenomenological methodology as the most appropriate and effective way to elicit the data which I wished to investigate. I assumed IPA would suit the philosophical and theological formation of my interviewees. However, I could not know for sure until I tested it. I was especially interested in whether IPA was appropriate or even possible when applied to research with fellow Roman Catholic priests to glean some insight into how their experience of fellow clergy committing such atrocious acts has impacted on, or been assimilated into, their world view.

Finding a balance between psychology, sociology and theology is one of the most difficult tasks in this research, particularly for me as an “insider researcher”, a priest researching fellow priests and the practices of my Church. Swinton and Mowat (2006) noted that practical theology is valuable in considering critically and theologically the interaction of the practices of the Church with the practices of the rest of the world:

> Practical theology seeks to reveal and reflect on the intricate, diverse but complementary meanings of Christian practices and to enable faithful presence and action. (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p. 10)

3.2. Methodological decision-making
Faced with a task that would be difficult, as the priests to be interviewed had not
discussed their personal perspectives on the issue before and my research would
focus on the taboo subjects of sexual abuse of children and the role of their Church,
it was imperative to select the methodologies that would best handle the situation.

3.2.1. Qualitative versus quantitative

From my perspective as a researcher, I was initially faced with the challenge of
trying to capture the experience of 5,868 Roman Catholic priests (2014 Catholic
National Directory) working across England and Wales. Adopting a quantitative
approach would make it difficult to reach conclusions with any certainty, given the
size of the cohort and the lack to date of Church discussion about the effects on
innocent priests. I therefore favoured a qualitative method because I considered it
would be the most appropriate way of investigating the complexity of the sensitive
issues involved.

3.2.2. Phenomenology

In general, phenomenological research seeks to clarify experiences from a person’s
everyday life. As such, phenomenology strives to be as true as possible to the
phenomenon and the context of its occurrence in the world of the interviewee
(Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). My aim was to capture as closely as possible the
first-hand accounts of my interviewees and the way in which the phenomenon was
experienced by them.

3.2.3. Interpretative phenomenological analysis
IPA is an approach to qualitative research that examines people’s detailed personal lived experiences to see how they make sense of their lives in the context in which they live. This context is sharply focused on their lived experience of the topic. IPA tries to understand the world from the participant’s perspective (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), mediated by the context of cultural and social historical meaning (Shinebourne, 2011). Thus, the process of making sense of the participants’ experience is inevitably interpretive and the role of the researcher in making sense of the participant’s account is affected by the researcher’s own pre-conceptions (Shinebourne, 2011).

Although IPA is grounded in the experiential, it “endorses social constructionism’s claim that sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives, including the stories we tell about these lives” (Eatough and Smith, 2008, p. 184).

IPA has been described as “an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.11). I discuss these further below.

IPA originated in fields of enquiry, such as phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (discussed below), which hold that human beings do not passively perceive an objective reality. Rather, they interpret and understand their world by forming their own stories in a way that makes sense to them (Brocki and Wearden, 2005). Thus IPA research has focused mostly on exploring participants’ experience,
understandings, perceptions and views (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). IPA is phenomenological as it deals with individuals’ subjective accounts rather than forming objective accounts (Flowers, Hart and Marriot, 1999). Whilst as an IPA researcher I attempted to access “the participant’s personal world” (Smith, 2006, p. 218), IPA allows for the fact that “access depends on and is complicated by the researcher’s own conceptions … required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity” (Smith, 2006, p. 218).

By choosing IPA for my research methodology I committed myself to exploring, interpreting and situating the means by which my interviewees made sense of their experience of this especially testing topic.

IPA requires me, as a researcher, to concentrate on interpreting accurately the experiences related to me by my interviewees. The process of selecting the interviewees is detailed later in this chapter. I chose IPA as my qualitative research methodology because I believed that my primary concern was to be faithful to the interviewees’ reported experiential meaning. I wanted my research to be firmly embedded within phenomenology. It could be argued that the principal aim of phenomenology, when used as a research tool, is to facilitate the exploration of the details and rich descriptions offered by the interviewees and to be as faithful to their lived reality as they perceive it and report it. As Wertz (2005) writes:

Phenomenology is a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived
experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known. (Wertz, 2005, p. 69)

Swinton and Mowat (2006) note that practical theology approaches its task, including self-reflection, with the hermeneutic of suspicion (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p. 10), a method of interpretation that does not take motives at face value. They explain that:

In order to understand what is actually going on within that situation it is necessary to understand the meaning of the actions, the way the situation is being interpreted by those performing within it and the reasons behind the ways individuals and communities act in the particular ways that they do. The quest for this type of understanding forms the heart of qualitative research and is a fundamental dimension of practical theology’s endeavour to critically reflect on the nature of situation. (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p. 38)

As the researcher, including with the complexities of being an insider researcher which I will discuss further below, I found Swinton and Mowat’s contribution invaluable. They further explain:

It is a critical discipline because it approaches both the world and our interpretations of the Christian tradition with a hermeneutic of suspicion, always aware of the reality of human fallenness and of the complexity of the forces which shape and structure our encounters with the world. (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p. 76).
3.3. Theoretical foundations of IPA

Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are leading figures in phenomenological philosophy. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) refer to the work of these phenomenological philosophers as the foundation on which IPA is built. They cite Husserl’s work as establishing the importance and relevance of a focus on experience and its perception. They cite Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre as developing Husserl’s (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) work further as each of them contributes to the notion that “a view of the person as embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 21).

The core concepts for IPA can be summarised as follows:

1. IPA’s phenomenological component maps out the participant’s concerns and cares – their orientation toward the world – in the form of the experiences that they claim for themselves (e.g.: How has this phenomenon been understood by this person?)

2. IPA’s interpretative component contextualizes these claims within their cultural and physical environments, and then attempts to make sense of the mutually constitutive relationship between “person” and “world” from within a psychological framework (e.g.: What does this mean for this person, in this context?)
3. The overall outcome for the researcher should be a renewed insight into the “phenomenon at hand” – informed by the participant’s own relatedness to, and engagement with, that phenomenon.

(Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006, p.117)

3.3.1. IPA as a basis

IPA is an inductive approach; it is “ground up” rather than “top down”. It does not test hypotheses and it avoids prior assumptions (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA seeks to determine and examine the meanings that people assign to experiences. People are experts in their experiences and can provide researchers with insights into their thoughts, commitments and feelings by telling their stories, in their own words and in as much detail as possible. People are recruited because of their expertise in the phenomenon being explored (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). Through rigorous and systematic analysis, researchers reduce the complexity of experiential data. The analytical process employed consists of people making sense of the world and their experiences, for the person and the analyst (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005).

As a researcher, I did not find IPA an easy option but was attracted to it for its accessibility, flexibility and applicability. I found it especially useful in my attempts to capture the lived world of my interviewees with regard to extraordinarily challenging issues. IPA’s first aim is to understand the person’s world and describe it, hence its phenomenological base. However, it is inevitable that IPA, like all qualitative methodologies, will fall short of this target since, whilst trying to capture “a person in context” in their meaningful world, which I tried to observe and report,
it can never fully escape the preconceptions that I bring to the research from my own world and experience.

Moreover, IPA explicitly acknowledges that analysis is inherently interpretative, hence the double hermeneutic. This is a term that Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) use to describe a dynamic between interviewer and interviewee. By this I understand that the interaction between the two itself produces a new dynamic influenced by both, thus becoming a double hermeneutic. As the researcher, I found the process bidirectional as both parties made a significant effort to immerse themselves into the process. I found this to be especially pronounced given my stance as an insider researcher. The important point is that success as a phenomenological researcher did not ultimately depend upon my revealing an interviewee’s “pure” experience: it was dependent upon my reporting the most sensitive and accurate account I could. Heidegger supports this stance:

For Heidegger this means that our subjective worlds are not primarily mental, or “hidden inside”, because the very nature of our being is to “be there” out in the world, located and observable in our relatedness to some meaningful context. (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006, p. 109)

IPA gives researchers the chance to learn from the insights of the experts, i.e. the research participants themselves (Smith, 1996). IPA offers a researcher the opportunity to engage with a question at an idiographic (i.e. particular) level:
The participant’s “lived experience” is coupled with a subjective and reflective process of interpretation which the analyst or researcher explicitly and intentionally introduces into the research process. (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005, p. 28)

From the outset, IPA urges continual awareness of the contextual and cultural background against which data is received. For this research, the context was the lived experience of six Roman Catholic priests in regard to the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church in England and Wales from the 1980s to the present. As an IPA researcher, the account of my participants’ experiences, i.e. their phenomenological world, was central to the process. IPA’s underpinnings are discussed further in section 3.3.8.

3.3.2. Ontological and epistomological foundations

Critical realism

Braun and Clarke (2013) say ontological positions specify the relationship between the world and human interpretation and practices. They go on to argue that there are many variations. They range from a view that reality is entirely independent of knowing about it – what Braun and Clarke (2013) describe as “mind-independent truth” (i.e., realism) – to a view where reality is entirely dependent on human interpretation (i.e., relativism).

Realism assumes a knowable world which can be comprehended through research. It is the ontology underpinning most quantitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Relativism argues that there are multiple constructive realities rather than a single
reality or a mind-independent truth (Crombie and Nightingale, 1999). Thus, what is “real” and “true” differs with person and time and context. This relativist ontology underpins some qualitative approaches including IPA. Between these extremes lies the “critical realist” position (Braun and Clarke, 2013) which is the foundation for several qualitative approaches including interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The critical realist position proposes that people must claim that some “authentic” reality exists to enable them to access knowledge which could “make a difference” (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1997).

**Symbolic interactionism**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) refer to Mead (1934) as the founder of symbolic interactionism, an epistemological stance identified with phenomenology, and sum up his theory:

> Our understandings of our experiences are woven from the fabric of our many and varied relationships with others. Crucially, accounts of enculturation and intersubjectivity which are broadly consistent with these positions can be drawn from symbolic interactionism. (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 194)

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), by referring to Mead, are thus proposing that any phenomenological research at least in part has to give some attention and recognition to the cultural position of the participants. This position raises further issues about the stance of an “insider” and “outsider” researcher. They go on to explain that a researcher will need to do some work in order to properly understand
the interviewee’s terms of reference. For my own part, as researcher/priest my appreciation of the participant’s cultural terms of reference gave me a considerable advantage.

The term “symbolic interactionism” (Blumer, 1986) is used to describe a particular approach to the study of human experience and conduct. Blumer (1986) says symbolic interactionism is a social, developed interaction with others. He sets out three basic principles when introducing this theory into research. They are as follows:

- Humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to these things.
- The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.
- These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.

(Blumer, 1986, p. 59)

Thus, in the context of this research topic, symbolic interactionism describes the process by which my interviewees ascribed meaning to their experience. The interviewees were all non-offending Roman Catholic priests interacting with a culture which they reported as promoting the idea that Catholic priests are a threat to children. Thus, they were formulating their responses out of that particular societal context. Their interaction with that context has been shaped by the perceived view that all priests are a danger to children.
3.3.3. Key elements of IPA

One of the many strengths of IPA is that it is a process in which most people can engage. Smith (2004) is adamant that IPA research enables us to hear the voice of participants from across the sociocultural spectrum and that the only requirements for their participation are their ability to understand the principles of their involvement, to consent and to engage with the interviewer with the confidence to express their experiences and opinions as they understand them. When employing IPA, by and large the chosen method for qualitative data collection is a semi-structured interview (Smith, 2007, p. 62). Like all researchers, as an IPA researcher I was aware that any interview is not a “neutral” means of data collection.

The context in which information is shared and interpreted needs to be acknowledged and recognised from the outset. Smith (1996) advocates one-to-one interviews since they are more easily managed, allow rapport to be developed, give participants time and space to think through their responses and to feel they are being heard, and facilitate in-depth and personal discussion. This is something which I found to be true in my own experience of one-to-one interviews for this thesis. Personal contact was an essential part of the process and made accurate interpretation more likely because I was able to pick up more nuances such as facial expressions and body language. For example, my experience of personal one-to-one semi-structured interviews enabled me to participate more fully as the process evolved. My therapeutic experience of face-to-face work also played a significant part in my choice of one-to-one semi-structured interviews.
A key element of IPA is that analysis should stem from rich verbatim excerpts from the data (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA is intended to help the researcher to develop an “insider perspective” on the subject. My role was to document this in the form of interpretative commentary, using verbatim examples for illustrations.

Taking the “insider perspective” is only the beginning of the analytic process. As researcher and analyst, I sought an interpretative account of these perceptions in the particular context of an interview (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The IPA researcher begins by hearing people’s stories (phenomenological, insider) and prioritises the interviewees’ world view. Having done this, the researcher must then attempt to make sense of the participants’ experiences and concerns (interpretative, outsider). In my own case, this process was facilitated by the introduction of coding, organising, integrating and interpreting of data. Smith (2004) acknowledges that this is detailed and labour-intensive but also extremely rewarding, and as such is a non-negotiable part of the process of analysis. Having employed these methods, I can verify that whilst extremely labour-intensive the data produced was certainly worth the effort.

The main result of an IPA study is the meaning that particular experiences, events or perceptions hold for the participant. Phenomenology is integral to this methodology as it involves detailed examination of what Smith describes as the participant’s “life world” (Smith, 2004). It attempts to explore personal experience and is about an individual’s personal perception of some event or thing rather than about producing an objective statement about it (Smith and Osborn, 2003 to 2008).
IPA also emphasises the critical importance of the research exercise being a dynamic process with a fully acknowledged active role for the researcher in this process. Although the researcher seeks to get close to the participant’s phenomenology and foster an “insider perspective”, from the outset it is important to recognise that this goal can never be achieved completely. I can verify that I found it impossible to explore the interviewees’ phenomenology without engaging with what Smith (2004) describes as the “hermeneutic circle”, a term which is discussed further later in this chapter.

Access to another person’s world depends on and is complicated by a researcher’s own preconceptions, without which interpretation would be impossible. Smith and Osborn (203 to 2008) introduce a two-stage interpretation process which they refer to as a “double hermeneutic”. Whilst the participant/interviewee is trying to make sense of and communicate the reality of their world, the researcher in turn is trying to make sense of the participant/interviewee trying to make sense of their own world. This illustrates perfectly how IPA is integrally linked to hermeneutics. IPA uses both empathic hermeneutics and questioning hermeneutics (Smith and Osborn, 2003 to 2008). Thus IPA is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participant/interviewee. At the same time, an IPA analysis can also involve asking pertinent questions from the text such as: “What is the participant trying to say?”, “Has something been divulged without intention?”, “Is the participant aware of the implications of what they have just disclosed?” (Smith, 2004, p. 21)

3.3.4. IPA as a detailed analytical tool
Thus, any IPA study is committed to the particular in the sense of the detail and depth of analysis. As a methodology, IPA seeks to understanding how a particular event, experience or process has been understood from the perspective of the participant with due regard to their context. Because of the intensity of this methodology, IPA advises carefully selecting participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This is because IPA is principally concerned with a detailed account of an individual’s experience; perhaps more than anything else this identifies it as a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue that it can be very problematic to meet IPA’s commitment to detail with a large sample.

When embarking on professional doctorates, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest the number of interviews should be between four and 10. They deliberately use the term interview rather than participant because it leaves scope for more than one interview with each individual whilst at the same time keeping the overall number of interviews within the suggested range. Thus a researcher might choose only three participants but interview each of them twice whilst another researcher might, as I did, choose six participants and interview each of them only once. Both researchers end up with a total of six interviews to subject to the rigorous analytical process that IPA demands. Whilst it might be useful to be able to engage in more than one interview with each individual, I found that each of my six interviewees gave me such rich data in a single one-hour interview that I had more than enough detail to analyse and produce a thorough research study.
IPA is ever mindful of the importance of the participant as a cognitive, affective and physical being, and assumes a connection between what people say and their emotional state. Also, IPA researchers are urged to realise that this chain of connection can sometimes be very complicated (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). At times people can struggle to express or articulate what they are thinking and feeling and I was aware that, again due to the sensitive nature of the topic, there may have been reasons why the interviewees did not wish to self-disclose certain things. This aspect was further complicated because some of the interviewees may have adopted a defensive perspective, perhaps seeking to minimise the responsibility of the offenders who were fellow priests. For example, three of my interviewees when referring to the plight of victims used the term “it takes two to tango”. On my part, as the researcher, this is an observation rather than a criticism: I am not suggesting that the interviewees were in any way difficult; far from it, they were extremely co-operative.

I found that IPA was a useful tool to find out how my interviewees perceived the particular situation they were facing in the sexual abuse scandal. IPA was especially useful since, as researcher, my concern was with a very complex topic and interviewees whose experience of this topic was also complicated by the fact that they were Roman Catholic priests being interviewed about a situation involving offences by fellow Roman Catholic priests. Smith (2007) describes this as “novelty”, by which he means unusual or challenging people and circumstances. When addressing the issue of more challenging participants, or participants dealing with a more challenging topic, it is even more critical that appropriate preparation be given to the construction of the research questions.
It is impossible for any researcher to be divorced from their own subjectivity and, whilst some people might accept this as a necessary evil, phenomenological research perhaps more than any other qualitative method presents this as an opportunity rather than a burden. Finlay (2009) argues that it is precisely the acceptance and realisation of the interconnectedness between the researcher and the participant that characterises phenomenology; thus the subjectiveness of both the researcher and the researched becomes intersubjective. She points out that the question at stake is to what extent researcher subjectivity should be acknowledged, monitored and interpreted.

As Giorgi (1994) has firmly stated: “Nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so elimination is not the solution.” Rather how the subject is present is what matters, and objectivity itself is an achievement of subjectivity. (Finlay, 2009, p. 12)

3.3.5. Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is considered to be the founder of the philosophy of phenomenology. He began with the problem of how objects and events appear to consciousness since nothing can be discussed or witnessed unless it comes through someone’s consciousness (Husserl, 1922).

Phenomenological research always begins with concrete descriptions of lived situations; more often than not they are first-person accounts which are usually communicated in simple everyday language. According to Finlay (2009), the
researcher’s role is to reflectively analyse the descriptions and data presented by the interviewees by going beneath the surface and then reading between the lines while remaining faithful to the interviewee’s first-person account. This raises the question of determining to what extent this approach involves going beyond what the person has said and risks becoming nothing more than the interviewer’s interpretation. During my interviews, I was conscious this was a difficult balance to strike.

Finlay (2009) details how this pitfall can be negotiated. She explains that although phenomenology is descriptive, in that it aims to describe rather than explain, there are a number of scholars and researchers who distinguish between descriptive phenomenology and interpretative or hermeneutic phenomenology (Finlay, 2009). With descriptive phenomenology (Husserl-inspired), the aim is to reveal the essential general meaning of a phenomenon; the researcher stays close to what is given in all its richness, without losing any of the complexity. On the other hand, interpretative phenomenology has come from the hermeneutic stable and philosophers such as Heidegger who notes:

… our embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships, and the inescapable historicity of all understanding. The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 37)

I have followed the Heideggerian stance as the most effective one in this process.

3.3.6. Hermeneutics
Each of the interviewees, in common with all priests throughout the world, will have had two years of studying philosophy as part of their minimum of six years’ formation. Through those philosophical studies they would each be familiar with Greek mythology, Hermes messenger of the gods and the term “hermeneutics”. Hermes, as the inventor of language and speech, is credited with having the wisdom to discern truth from falsehood. This is familiar territory for my interviewees so this would facilitate the use of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutics focuses primarily on the meaning of qualitative data, especially textual data.

Interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study. This object must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory – in one way or another, unclear. The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense. (Taylor, 1976, p. 153)

Hermeneutics suggests that “prejudice”, prejudgement or prior knowledge is important to our understanding (Myers, 2007). Myers argues that attempts to understand a text always involve prior knowledge or anticipation of what the text is about. In fact, he says understanding a text requires some understanding of the language.
Hermeneutics is a major theoretical underpinning of IPA, which is apt given that it is the theory of interpretation. Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer are the leading thinkers and authors of the three hermeneutic schools which IPA draws from. Whilst each has a unique contribution, it is not within the remit of this thesis to detail how each approach has in its own way helped formulate the hermeneutics which are peculiar to IPA. However, it is important to acknowledge that Smith’s inclusion of hermeneutics as an integral part of IPA has firm foundations in the above philosophical schools (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA goes much further than a description of somebody else’s experience, hence the employment of hermeneutics as a tool for interpreting that experience.

Pertinent to hermeneutics is what Gadamer (1997) refers to as the “fusion of horizons”. He argues that people have different backgrounds and cannot be removed from their background, history, culture, beliefs and ways of thinking. Researchers may seek to engage in understanding a conversation; but the fact remains that interpretation cannot avoid past experiences and prejudice. Gadamer defines this fusion:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of “situation” by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence, an essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of “horizon”. The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point …. A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, “to have an horizon” means not being limited to
what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it … Working out the hermeneutical situation means the achievement of the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition. (Gadamer, 1997, p. 302)

In the context of this research I was conscious that, as the researcher, I was coming from a different place to each of my interviewees. All people come from different places and have different opinions; these differences create what Gadamer (1997) refers to as “prejudice”. By receiving information from interviewees, and acknowledging the reality of prejudice, a new vision and wider horizon can emerge for both the researcher and the interviewee. This is even more evident when the researcher has an “insider perspective” (Gadamer, 1997).

3.3.7. The hermeneutic circle

However, an IPA analyst is taking more than the “insider’s perspective”. Integral to IPA is a researcher’s willingness and ability to offer an interpretative account of what it means for the participants to have any given phenomenology. Hermeneutics within IPA views the knower and the known as fundamentally interrelated, hence the notion of a hermeneutic circle:

… a hermeneutic circle [is one] in which the interpreter’s perspective and understanding initially shapes his [sic] interpretation of a given phenomenon, and yet that interpretation, as it interacts with the phenomenon in question, is open to revision and elaboration, as the perspective and understanding of the
interpreter, including his biases and blind spots, are revealed and evaluated.

(Tappan, 1997, p. 79)

The hermeneutic circle describes the process of understanding a text hermeneutically. Heidegger (1927) developed the hermeneutic circle to “envision a whole in terms of a reality that was situated in the detailed experience of everyday existence by an individual (the parts)”. By this I understand that neither the complete text nor any individual section of it can be understood without referring to the other; thus the circle is established.

This theory emphasises that meaning is discovered only within a text’s cultural, historical and idiographic context. The hermeneutic circle deals with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole at a series of levels. Therefore, to understand any given detail you have to look at the whole; and to understand the whole, you have to examine the details (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

An advantage of the establishment of a hermeneutic circle meant that I was able to move back and forth in terms of thinking about the data rather than being limited to a chronological interpretation. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) advocate the use of hermeneutic circles because they enable a researcher to enter the meaning of a text at a number of different levels, most if not all of which will offer different perspectives on both the individual details and the whole text. Using the hermeneutic circle also allows the researcher to return time and again to each particular point and, in doing so, to enter more deeply into analysis and understanding.
The hermeneutic circle is a very valuable resource to the IPA researcher. However, when used with specifically challenging participants, such as Roman Catholic priests, there are bound to be serious considerations, especially being an insider researcher. As a result, it became clear to me that any attempt to embark on an IPA research study with this particular group of participants needed considerable forethought and preparation and, not least, extensive supervision. I remain convinced that IPA was an invaluable tool to employ with Roman Catholic priests in trying to capture their experience of the recent sexual abuse crisis in England and Wales.

3.3.8. Idiography

A major influence upon IPA is what Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe as “idiography”: that which is concerned with the particular. They explain:

This is in contrast to most psychology, which is “nomothetic”, and concerned with making claims at the group or population level, and with establishing general laws of human behaviour. (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 29)

An idiographic approach strives to focus in-depth on the particular and on a commitment to comprehensive analysis of the actual life and lived experience of the participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA is idiographic in that it examines particular instances in detail, either in a single study or in research into a small group, *i.e.* between four and 10 (Brocki and Wearden, 2005). The analytical
process starts with the detailed examination of each case, followed by close examination of similarities and differences among cases. This produces accounts of patterns of meaning (Brocki and Wearden, 2005).

3.4. Methods

3.4.1. The sample

From 26 to 29 April 2011 I was part of an organising committee for a national conference entitled “Safeguarding as Ministry”. The primary purpose of this conference was to explore priests’ experience of ministry to children in light of the child sex abuse scandal and the introduction of robust safeguarding policies and procedures. At the conference there was a priest representing each of the 22 Roman Catholic dioceses in England and Wales.

I informed the delegates of my intention to do further detailed research about the sexual abuse crisis in the Roman Catholic Church and how this has affected non-offending priests working in England and Wales. The delegates all agreed to be part of a resource bank out of which my then supervisor, Dr William West, would randomly contact six delegates with the request that they engage in a one-to-one semi-structured interview.

After randomly contacting six delegates, my supervisor informed me of those whom he had chosen and who were willing to be interviewed. After approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee, the interviewees were invited to
engage in a one-to-one IPA interview, the process and purpose of which was outlined for them (see Appendix 1). To preserve their anonymity and respect their privacy, the real names of the six are not used in this thesis.

3.4.2. The interview process

Over a six-month period I interviewed each of the six for approximately one hour. Each was asked the following questions:

Q1. Can you tell me about your journey to becoming a priest?
Q2. Can you tell me about the experience of being a priest in the shadow of the child abuse scandal?
Q3. Can you tell me what resources are there to help you in this particular ministry?
Q4. How do you feel about the training/support you have received in this area?
Q5. How does your ministry to children compare to when you were first ordained?
Q6. Have you got a sense of how the policies and procedures adopted by the diocese have affected your ministry with children?
Q7. How do you think the hierarchy dealt with this issue?
Q8. Do you have a sense that being a Catholic priest singles you out as somehow different from other denominations/faiths with regard to this issue?
These questions were asked in the context of a semi-structured interview which allowed for certain nuances. All eight questions were covered in each, but the depth of response was largely determined by the interviewees. Out of each interview emerged a unique double hermeneutic which facilitated the opportunity for greater immersion into the data.

Smith and Osborn (2003 to 2008) advocate the following advantages of a semi-structured interview:

- There is an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent.
- The ordering of questions is less important.
- The interviewer is freer to probe interesting areas that arise.
- The interview can follow the respondent’s interests or concerns.

(Smith and Osborn, 2003 to 2008, p. 60)

Due to the dynamic nature of the interviews, every question did not have to be asked in the same order or exactly the same way. I could therefore determine how a particular question was phrased depending on how the participant was responding. Whilst I could move away from questions on my schedule, consideration also had to be given as to how much movement was acceptable. The research questions in IPA focus upon a person’s experiences or understandings of particular phenomena in particular contexts. As suggested by Shaw and Flowers at a 2010 conference on IPA I attended at Aston University, all IPA research questions are open, exploratory rather than explanatory, should focus on meaning and sense-making, and are both
answerable and worth answering. The primary focus should relate to the experience at hand and the participant’s/interviewee’s understanding of it.

You may, however, have a secondary question, informed by prior experience, theoretical interest or applied concerns. You can’t guarantee that you’ll be able to answer it; but, provided that you remain focused on what your participants can tell you (i.e. aren’t testing a theory, or making inferences about causality, or “what happens”), its fine to set these. (Shaw and Flowers, 2010)

Given that central to IPA is an attempt to enter as deeply as possible the phenomenological and social world of the participant, I knew that opportunities had to be given for the interviewees to introduce topics which I had not envisaged. The participant should always be regarded as the experiential expert on the subject and be given the maximum opportunity to tell their story as they understand it; this is what I attempted to facilitate. The questions served as a prompt to draw out appropriate data.

One of the main advantages of a semi-structured interview is that it facilitates rapport, allows for flexibility and enables an interview to go in unexpected directions and, as such, increases the possibility of producing valuable data. On the other hand, as Smith and Osborn (2003 to 2008) point out, this form of interviewing reduces the control a researcher has over the interview. It takes longer to complete, and is more difficult to analyse. When balancing costs and benefits, I believe the semi-structured interview and its flexibility were worth the extra work because it is
important to recognise and explore surprises as they arise. Often an unexpected and hitherto unrecognised reality proved to be the most valuable, precisely because it had been unprompted and, as such, was often particularly important for the interviewee.

As a researcher, I was anxious to be as faithful as possible to the data the interviewees were sharing with me, and to do my best not merely to analyse the information, but also to capture the very hermeneutics that each interviewee brought to the process. I therefore made every attempt, in accordance with Kvale (1996), to accompany the interviewees and attempt to share their journey through this very difficult issue. Kvale (1996) describes this role:

The interviewer as traveller … wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as “wandering together with”. (Kvale, 1996, p. 4)

To report the experience of the interviewees as faithfully as possible, I attempted to weave the hermeneutics of empathy into the hermeneutic circle which was very evident with each participant (Ricoeur, 1992). I attempted to adopt a Heideggerian approach to empathy, both during the interviews themselves and the later analysis of the text of each interview. The diagrams below are two examples of many ways of employing a hermeneutic circle.
As researcher, having explored the various types of hermeneutic circles, I chose the one from Shaw and Flowers because I found it was the one I could best engage with given the subject of my thesis and the interviewees who were participating.

Kvale (2008) refers to the analogies of the researcher as a “miner” or “traveller”. In the “miner” metaphor, it is assumed that the data is buried and needs to be located
and dug up. As a member of the Child Exploitation Online Protection Academy (CEOP) of the National Crime Agency (NCA), I found myself, sometimes consciously and often having reflected on the interview afterwards, having fallen into the trap of “mining” for information in much the same way as one would during an investigation or risk assessment. On reflection, I have acknowledged in my findings that this dynamic, at least in part, patterned the process. At times, I unintentionally judged the interviewees for some of their responses, something which needed recognising and untangling in supervision. As a researcher, I was constantly mindful of my role as an insider researcher. As a researcher and an ordained priest, I was occasionally aware that knowing too much about my interviewees was not always an advantage. I had to be aware of the danger of comparing my own experience with that of my interviewees. The fact that both interviewer and interviewee shared very similar perspectives was something I was acutely aware of. On the plus side, the data and information I was able to glean through this “mining” process was invaluable in my attempt to thoroughly analyse the experience of my interviewees.

Interestingly, Kvale’s metaphor of researcher as “traveller”, which I was also able to empathise with and employ, gives quite a different perspective to the interviewing process. He explains:

The journey may not only lead to new knowledge: the traveller might change as well. The journey might instigate a process of reflection that leads the traveller to new ways of self-understanding, as well as uncovering previously taken for granted values. (Kvale, 2008, p. 49)
I found this to be the case with particular reference to the hermeneutic circle. I sought to build upon the “traveller” metaphor in which, as a researcher, I intended to use “maps” of particular topics to negotiate the conversational journey. Through the interviews/conversations I sought to explore in-depth “taken for granted values” (Roland and Wicks, 2009).

… the informant is given the opportunity to reflect upon, articulate, and clarify particular practices and values hitherto taken for granted as natural elements of the informant’s culture. (Roland and Wicks, 2009, p. 253)

3.4.3. The analytical process

As with many other qualitative methodologies, analytic focus lies at the heart of IPA.

In IPA’s case, that focus directs our analytic attention towards our participants’ attempts to make sense of their experiences. (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 79)

In detailed form (cf. Smith, 2007) this involves:

- close line-by-line analysis of each text
- identification of emergent themes – within and across the interviews
- organisation of all the data in a format that allows analysis to be traced right through the process
• reflections on one’s own perceptions, conceptions and processes

To make the process more manageable for those who, like myself, are new to IPA, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) present a template which is a guide to undertaking IPA analysis. As they point out, these six steps are a guide rather than steps in a recipe. The stages are:

**Step 1 – Reading and re-reading:** This stage ensures that the interviewee becomes the focus of the analysis.

**Step 2 – Initial noting:** This step examines the words and language used on an initial exploratory level. This involves looking at the language used by the interviewees whilst being conscious of the context of their concerns about the research focus. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) divide initial noting into three sections:

- Descriptive comments: In general, key words, phrases or explanations which the interviewee uses are recorded.
- Linguistic comments: This is concerned with language use. The analyst concentrates on the ways in which the transcript reflects how the content and meaning were presented.
- Conceptual comments: “Conceptual annotating will usually involve a shift in your focus, towards the participant’s overarching understanding of the matters that they are discussing. This stage asks a lot of the analyst. It takes time – for discussion, reflection, trial-and-error and refinement of your ideas” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 88). One possibility is to break
the narrative flow of the interview by, for example, taking a paragraph and reading it backwards, to get a feel for the use of particular words. This is analogous to stroking a dog backwards and thus trying to identify where particular themes spike.

**Step 3 – Developing emergent themes:** Having followed the two previous steps, it should become apparent that the text is beginning to reveal emergent themes. This is done by changing the focus of an analysis to working with the initial notes (Step 2) rather than the transcript. If the exploratory commentary is comprehensive, this step should closely reflect the original transcript.

**Step 4 – Searching for connections across emergent themes:** This is a critical stage. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that not all emergent themes have to be incorporated into this stage of the analysis. Their incorporation is dependent upon their relevance to the overall research question. From the template which Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest, I used the following methods:

- **Abstraction:** This is a basic type of identifying patterns between emerging themes to develop a “superordinate” theme. It involves clustering similar developing themes and giving the new cluster a “superordinate” label.
- **Subsumption:** This analytical process, whilst similar to abstraction, is applied when an emergent theme has the status of a “superordinate” theme and will be the focus to cluster other similar emergent themes

**Step 5 – Moving to the next case:** At this stage it is important to treat the next interview text in isolation from the previous analysed text, in recognition of its own
individuality. Whilst this is a noble aim, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) accept that it is virtually impossible not to be influenced by what has already been found in previous interviews.

**Step 6 – Looking for patterns across cases:** This involves pointing to ways in which participants present “unique idiosyncratic instances but also shared higher order qualities” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 101). When applying this particular tool, although much of my time was spent listening to the interviews and reading the individual transcripts, the analysis in large part was done in the absence of the texts. Rather than fall into the trap of simply describing the data reported to me by my interviewees, I spent many hours pondering the deeper meaning of what had been shared as I sought to immerse myself into the worlds of my interviewees.

The qualitative research interview examines human existence in detail. It opens up subjective experiences to enable researchers to describe intimate aspects of someone’s world. I was conscious of the fact that I was exploring extremely delicate and sensitive issues, which the findings show had a profound effect on each of the six interviewees:

> The human interaction in qualitative inquiry affects interviewees and informants, and the knowledge produced through qualitative research affects our understanding of the human condition. (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005, p. 157)
Consequently, qualitative research is littered with moral and ethical issues (Kvale, 2005). Given the extraordinary and sensitive topic I was researching, I found it necessary to access increased supervision.

One of the most persistent demands in social science is that scientific knowledge should be quantitative:

Quantification is often considered as the very criterion of science which, when not taken as self-evident, is legitimated by referring to the natural sciences .... The degree to which observations are quantified is considered an index of the maturity of a science. (Kvale, 1983, p. 46)

The qualitative research interview can be criticised as unscientific since it does not result in such quantitative data; but Kvale argues that the best response to the standard critiques of qualitative research is “to produce new, worthwhile qualitative knowledge, compelling in its own right” (Kvale, 1983, p. 47). I feel confident that adopting a qualitative methodology has borne fruit that may well have been lost had I adopted other methodological tools. My focus with each of my participants was on the qualitative research interview which Kvale (1983, p. 47) defines as “an interview whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena”.

3.5. Validity and trustworthiness
There is also now considerable discussion among qualitative researchers about the assessment of the quality of qualitative research. Some guidelines for assessing quality or validity of this type of research have been produced (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin favour two approaches which present general guidelines for assessing the quality of qualitative research (Elliot, Fischer and Rennie, 1999; Yardley, 2000, 2008).

Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) present what they describe as “a set of evolving guidelines for reviewing qualitative research to serve four functions: to contribute to the process of legitimizing qualitative research; to ensure more appropriate and valid scientific reviews of qualitative manuscripts, theses and dissertations; to encourage better quality control in qualitative research through better self- and other monitoring; and to encourage further developments in approach and method” (p. 215).

Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) remind us that the aim of qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences of people as they encounter and live through situations. Along with other qualitative researchers, they accept that it is impossible to set aside one’s own personal perspective. They list seven guidelines for qualitative research. These specific guidelines include: owning one’s perspective, situating the sample, grounding in examples, providing credibility checks, coherence, accomplishing general versus specific research tasks and resonating with readers. As far as I was able, I kept these guidelines as a reference point during my own data collection and analysis.
Yardley (2000, 2008), whose approach also informed me, presents four principles to use to evaluate the quality of qualitative research, which were reasserted as central to assessing the quality of IPA studies by Smith (2011). These are: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance. Yardley argues that good qualitative research demonstrates sensitivity to context. IPA researchers should show they are sensitive to the context in the very early stages of the research process. It is a methodology which closely engages with the idiographic and the particular of the interviewee (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Commitment and rigour can be demonstrated in a number of ways with IPA; it is assumed that the researcher must show commitment and attentiveness to the interviewee during the collection of data and will ensure commitment throughout the process of analysis. Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the study as well as the quality of the interview and the completeness of the analysis undertaken (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Transparency refers to how clearly the stages of the research process are described in writing the study. An IPA researcher should ask the questions: Do the themes fit together logically? Is anything vague or contradictory dealt with clearly (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009)? Yardley’s final principle, impact and importance, emphasises that the real test of its validity lies not in how well the research is conducted, but whether it tells the reader something useful or is interesting (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

In this study, I applied Yardley’s four principles in a number of ways.

With reference to the first principle, *Sensitivity to Context*, she argues that a good qualitative research study should demonstrate sensitivity to the context in which the
study is situated. She goes on to argue that the relationship between the researcher
and participator (interviewer and interviewee) is a context to which one should be
sensitive. I decided that it would be more appropriate to conduct the interviews in
each of the interviewee’s home/place of work. The advantage of this was that I felt it
would in some way empower my interviewees since the interviews were taking
place in familiar surroundings and my hope was that they would feel they “owned
the room” and thus were more likely to engage with the process without any fear of
intimidation.

As regards to principle 2, *Commitment and Rigour*, Yardley (2000) argues that
commitment can be tested by the degree of engagement demonstrated. Rigour refers
to the thoroughness of the study in terms of the appropriateness of the sample of the
question in hand and the completeness of the analysis undertaken (Smith, 2008, p.
233). Since I made the effort to visit my interviewees from as far afield as London to
the North East of England, there could have been little doubt as to my commitment
to the process. During the interview I made every effort to remain attentive and
respectful and as such I am confident that my interviewees felt that they had been
heard and that their contribution was invaluable. The rigour I applied was thorough
in so far as each interview was taped and later transcribed by an independent third
party. The individual interviews took an average of six weeks to analyse, the details
of which can be found earlier in this chapter.

As regards to principle 3, *Transparency and Coherence*, this refers to how clearly
the stages of the research process are outlined in writing the study. Yardley (2000)
suggests that the coherence can also refer to the research carried out and the
philosophical assumptions of the approach being followed. This can be evidenced by the clear stages of the research process as described in this chapter. The superordinate themes reported by the individual interviewees correlated logically and I believe contradictions were identified and dealt with clearly.

The independent audit is an important tool when it comes to the validity of research (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In order to ensure that my research data was valid and trustworthy, I have kept a transparent “trail” of each of the six interview processes (see Appendix 2). Thus from selection to final analysis each interview can be tracked to ensure validity. Each of the quotations from my interviewees is page and line referenced, e.g.:

“This guy was chaplain to a handicapped fellowship group. For the first time ever in my priesthood, I felt ashamed of being a priest; I didn’t want to wear clerical dress ever again.” (Daniel, p. 10, ll. 37-40)

“When I hear about priests in the press I think ‘oh, not again’. I wonder how long ago this one was. Is it historical or something? That’s still going on; most of the time we’ve become a laughing stock.” (Gerald, p.14, ll. 1-3)

My data was filed in such a way that somebody could follow the chain of evidence that leads from the initial documentation through to the final report. The trail for all six of my interviews followed the following format: the research proposal, the interview schedule, audio-taped interviews and annotated transcripts, tables of themes, draft report and final text of the thesis.
Finally, principle 4, *Impact and Importance*: Yardley (2000) argues that however well a piece of research is conducted, a key test of its validity is whether it actually tells us anything useful or important or makes any difference. For example, it can be best measured by the reported impact on the interviewees themselves. Each of the interviewees commented that this was the first opportunity that they had had to seriously and thoroughly discuss the impact the child abuse scandal had on their lives/priesthood. Whilst each interview was idiosyncratic, they shared a commonality as regards what I would describe as a cathartic experience which enabled them to voice previously unheard and unrecognised opinions and experiences. Another measure of *Impact and Importance* was the reaction of my brother priests to whom I reported the initial findings. To my surprise, there seemed to be an insatiable appetite for the received data. To date, every priest with whom I have shared some of the initial findings has voiced the opinion that this research into non-offending priests is long overdue. This experience convinced me not only that qualitative research is capable of yielding hitherto untapped knowledge, but also that it is as legitimate a form of science as any other methodology since it is capable of unearthing hitherto unexpected and unknown realities. This is discussed further in Chapter 6 – Conclusions.

In IPA it is assumed that the researcher has a basic interest in learning something about the participant’s phenomenology. This was certainly true in my case. Meaning-making is central to the process and as such, the aim is to try to understand the content and the complexity of those meanings for that particular person. As an IPA researcher attempting to understand and do justice to the meaning-making of
the interviewees, I managed to have a sustained engagement with the texts as the data emerged. This involved the process of deconstruction, part of which was to read the text from back to front. Each reading gave the potential to dig ever deeper into new insights (Smith and Osborn, 2003 to 2008). As a researcher, I was surprised at the increasing depth of analysis afforded after each engagement with the individual texts.

3.6. Reflexivity: my role as a researcher and an “insider”

Insider research refers to situations when researchers themselves belong to the populations being studied (Kanuha, 2000). The researcher shares an identity and experiential base with the interviewees (Asselin, 2003). Merton (2006) defines the “insider” as “an individual who possesses a priori intimate knowledge of the community and its members” (Merton, 2006, p. 253).

This can be advantageous as it may allow researchers quicker and more complete acceptance by their participants. It can be argued that participants will be more open with researchers whose commonality can be a basis of mutual trust. However, Adler, et al (1990) point out that being an “insider” can potentially cause problems. Researchers might experience role conflict if they find themselves caught between “loyalty tugs” (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 70), or role confusion, for example when a researcher answers participants or analyses data other than as a researcher (Asselin, 2003).
As an insider researcher interviewing fellow Catholic priests, I assumed I would be perceived principally as a brother priest and this turned out to be the case, although this was not a term any of the interviewees used. That relationship of brother priests automatically created a particular dynamic between me and my interviewees. The complexities of this dynamic are explored below. This dynamic also gave rise to another consideration, given my previous role within the Catholic Church as a Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator. I knew that, whilst I saw my safeguarding role as promoting the Church’s Safeguarding Policies and Procedures (Nolan, 2001), there was every likelihood that I would be perceived by the interviewees as a person who was responsible, along with the statutory authorities, for investigating allegations and disclosures. Thus I was potentially an insider researcher in two ways: first as a fellow priest and secondly as someone intimately bound up in the area of experience I was asking my interviewees to share with me.

Another tension that arose for me was that between theology and psychology. Christie (2014), a priest who has been a psychotherapist for 35 years, specifically addresses this tension which he observes in the Catholic Church as a body. He states:

Meanwhile, all psychological approaches (and everything by Freud in particular) were being viewed by the Church with the deepest suspicion that they were pernicious libertarian nonsense and not worth studying. (Christie, 2014, p. 15)
In fairness to Christie, he goes on to acknowledge a significant mind shift in recent years on behalf of psychologists and theologians. As a Catholic priest who is also a registered therapist, I found it a tremendous challenge to perform this exercise without attempting to integrate theology into the discussion. The challenge lay in remaining loyal to the clinical purpose of the thesis, whilst acknowledging and respecting the theological world view of each of the interviewees. The subject was specifically about Catholic priests, about the Catholic Church in England and Wales and about a live crisis in the universal Catholic Church. Whilst the study is principally a clinical one, I felt I could not do it justice without acknowledging and exploring the theological perspectives that the interviewees demonstrated. I explore this particular issue in more depth in Chapter 4 – Findings.

As an insider researcher I was conscious of the danger of what might be called an over-rapport with the participants. I was slightly anxious that my overfamiliarity with the world my interviewees inhabit might be perceived by others as leading to a lack of objectivity which could foster torn loyalties. Whilst over-rapport is a common criticism of insider researchers, I have already argued this can be an advantage, given the nature of religious knowledge and the role of faith in the work of the clergy interviewees.

The particular Roman Catholic context meant that, as an insider in this community, I could best access and understand the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the clergy participants. The complexity of this dynamic required a degree of insider status to enable me as the researcher to engage in meaningful conversation with fellow clergy members about their experience, especially the sensitive topic. It is my
belief that, certainly in this case, the advantages of an insider perspective far outweigh any potentially adverse effects of over-rapport. As Robertson (1983) observes: “the collection of life stories cannot be done well without first acquiring a thorough knowledge of the culture or subculture in which one is working” (Robertson, 1983, p. 84).

As a fellow Catholic priest and an insider researcher, I found Robertson’s observations echoed my own experiences whilst interviewing the participants. Robertson puts it succinctly:

It was advantageous to our communication that the researcher had had a theological education. We could use “shortcut terminology” and still have mutual understanding .... Our rapport was such that I don’t recall moments when there was a lack of understanding or misunderstanding that was not cleared up by subsequent questions. (Robertson, 1983, p. 92)

The data collected by an insider researcher using semi-structured interviews leads to a description of the interviewee’s life world in much more detail than would otherwise have been the case. I found it valuable to research my peers in settings familiar to them (their place of work/home) as that it afforded me enhanced rapport with the interviewees. Because we came from a “shared world”, the level of engagement was both immediate and rich.

It seems to me that the dynamic which IPA encourages a researcher to create is dependent, as far as possible, on the interviewer bracketing off preconceptions,
resisting the temptation to prejudge and faithfully respecting and recording the account of the participant. With this in mind, on the advice of the University Research Ethics Committee, I had the interviews transcribed by an independent third party.

I found bracketing off preconceptions, as far as IPA allows, one of the most challenging aspects of the interviews. I often struggled with my experience, significant knowledge and passion for safeguarding and affiliation with and affection for my brother priests. This tension was especially testing when I heard them say things about safeguarding which I knew to be untrue. For example, a number of interviewees said that any accusation of sexual abuse meant that their ministry was finished. Not only is this contrary to the Church’s national policies and procedures, but I know that only accusations that have been sustained have resulted in withdrawal from ministry. I was torn between being frustrated at their lack of understanding about such a vital topic and their lack of training, about which they each expressed concern.

In his doctoral thesis, “Sexually offending and non-offending Roman Catholic priests: characterization and analysis”, McGlone (2001) echoes my own experience of being a priest interviewing brother priests and my realisation that the depth of engagement by the interviewees was influenced by the fact that I was a fellow priest. Regarding his research, McGlone (2001) wrote:

Noteworthy in the demographics is the fact that 67 per cent of the priest participants in this study would not have participated in this research had the
researcher not been a priest. This is important for future researchers to understand, and argues that priests need to engage in research. The necessity of gaining more information about the priest population is primary to advancing the field. (McGlone, 2001, p. 17)

For each of the ways that an insider researcher enhances the understanding of the participants being interviewed, questions about objectivity and reflexivity of the proposed research undertaken are raised. I was aware that I perhaps knew too much about the experience of being a priest in the context we were exploring and that my own *gestalt* was very similar to those I interviewed. I was also conscious of the potential “role confusion” mentioned above (Asselin, 2003) in that there was potential for me to interpret their experiences from my own safeguarding role or from my training as a counsellor.

Adler and Adler (1987) identified three “membership roles” for qualitative researchers: peripheral member researchers who are not involved in the core activities of group members; active member researchers who participate in the central activities of the group without fully committing themselves to its values and goals; and complete member researchers who already belong to the group or who become fully affiliated during the research (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). I was confident that I fitted into the third membership role since I have been either in training or active as, a priest for the last 35 years.

Overall I believe that acceptance by the group one is studying is one of the significant advantages of this insider research stance. The common identity can lead
to a level of trust and openness in the participants that would probably not have been present otherwise (McGlone, 2001). As a Roman Catholic priest interviewing other priests, I was afforded access to a group that might otherwise be closed to “outsiders”. All the interviewees were fully aware that I was a fellow Catholic priest, with special responsibility for the subject being researched. The participants seemed to be more willing to discuss their experiences because there was an assumption of mutual understanding and shared distinctiveness, and a feeling that I was “one of us” and not an outsider who did not understand (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

3.7. Ethical issues

I am acutely aware that as an insider researcher there are particular issues as regards enlisting volunteers to be interviewed. With this in mind, as detailed above, my then supervisor acted as an “agent” to recruit the six respondents. I played no part in their selection. My then supervisor was an appropriate person to act in this capacity given his understanding of my research topic.

All information received during the interviews, and contained in this thesis, belongs to me as the principal researcher and comes under the jurisdiction of the University of Manchester and its ethical guidelines and requirements.

This research study conformed to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and
Psychotherapy and the Ethical Guidelines for Research. Ethical approval for the study was applied for through the University Research Ethics Committee after approval of the study was given by the University Research Panel. After my application, the Chair of the Committee invited me and my then supervisor, Dr West, to an interview with the whole of the Ethics Committee and I surmised that this was due to the sensitivity of the proposed research topic. The first question I was asked by the Chair was: “Are you working for the university or are you working for the Church: since you are a priest, how can we be assured that you won’t tell the bishops what they want to hear?” I was able to assure them that I was a postgraduate student at the university first and foremost and that I was thoroughly supervised and accountable to my supervisors for the standard and integrity of my research. The interview turned out to be a very productive meeting, after which I was asked if I would share my research with other professional bodies, who might find it useful. This I have agreed to do.

The semi-structured interview format was conducted and reported on in such a way as to minimise the likelihood of personal information identifying any individual participant. Even their names have been changed to assure their anonymity. Informed consent was sought with the use of a consent document (see Appendix 1). Boundaries as regards confidentiality were in accordance with those set out by the BACP Ethical Guidelines, with particular reference to mandatory reporting of any disclosed abuse taking place as long as the interviewee was not the victim. The subject researched was especially sensitive; during the interviews I was aware of the possibility of potentially opening wounds of past abuse in the lives of the interviewees, and also the possibility of any disclosure of current abuse. I made the
boundaries of confidentiality clear before any interview took place, and I also ensured the discussions had boundaries in terms of my role as researcher rather than therapist or priest.

All information and data collected has been held in an environment which assures confidentiality and every effort has been made to ensure that the participants were offered anonymity within the presentation of the study. Written information and recordings of the interviews have been stored in a locked storage cabinet. Only I as the principal researcher have had access and responsibility for the secured information. This was stated in the consent form, a copy of which was given to all interviewees and is contained in Appendix 1.

3.8. Conclusion

As I have stated repeatedly in this chapter, I have been acutely aware throughout this period of research that, as an insider researcher there were tensions between the roles of researcher and priest, further compounded by the fact that I am also a trained counsellor and have worked in the area of safeguarding on both a local and national level for many years. Also, whilst conducting a research thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Counselling, balancing a psychological perspective with a theological perspective was a constant challenge.

I am also aware that I have sometimes had to introduce discussions of theology into this thesis, which is an uncommon topic in the context of counselling research.
However, given that all my interviewees were priests, it was inconceivable that they would not bring a theological perspective into the dialogue. This was further complicated by the fact that, as the interviewer, I share the theological world inhabited by my interviewees. I have attempted to explore this in more depth in Chapter Five – Discussion below.

The tension between my roles as researcher and priest was a frequent topic during my supervision sessions. Whilst I could not totally resolve this tension, I hope that I was sufficiently aware of it to ensure that it did not compromise my application of the IPA process in terms of handling and analysing the data presented by my interviewees. I am convinced that the findings of my research and its analysis that are presented in the next chapter demonstrate that the methods I have employed have produced important results that can assist the Catholic Church and its innocent priests to resolve the remaining issues stemming from the sexual abuse of minors by some in the clergy and the Church’s prior mishandling of the issue. The research enabled innocent priests to voice their issues for the first time and should point to ways for the Church – and all similarly affected institutions – to respond effectively to these concerns.
Chapter Four

Findings

4.1. Introduction

Of the six priests I interviewed, five belong to a diocese (i.e. a geographical area overseen by a bishop) the other was from a religious order overseen by a religious superior. Chart 2.5. (p. 42) clearly shows that from 2004 to 2012 the percentage of abuse allegations against diocesan priests (39.96 per cent) is nearly double that of allegations against priests from a religious order (18.37 per cent). To my knowledge, there is no data to explain why allegations against diocesan priests are considerably more common that those priests from a religious order. Bullivant’s data (2014) clearly shows that priests/religious are the major alleged offenders, making up nearly 60 per cent of the allegations. The other 40 per cent are made up of church lay employees or volunteers, with nearly 7 per cent of all allegations against nuns.

During a supervision session about my overall findings and superordinate themes, I mentioned to my supervisor that I was concerned that the findings didn’t contain any “good news”. Having acknowledged that, my supervisor went on to enquire as to the whereabouts of the priests whom I interviewed. I informed her that each of my interviewees was a non-offending priest and that each of them was still in post and content. She remarked that, given the superordinate themes, this was very surprising. It was this comment that sparked a “eureka” moment which made me realise that, perhaps due to the fact that I am an insider researcher, I missed significant themes
which I now realise were in plain sight. The superordinate themes below reveal some surprising “good news”. As St Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth in 57 AD:

We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; we have been persecuted, but never deserted; knocked down, but never killed; always, wherever we may be, we carry with us the suffering of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:8-11, Jerusalem Bible Translation)

The tension of being an insider researcher was addressed in Chapter Three. This dynamic was further challenged because each interviewee was aware that I was both a researcher and a fellow priest who had previously been a Safeguarding Co-Ordinator for his diocese and had been responsible for interviewing some of the priests accused of sexual abuse against children which, in the opinion of some commentators, has been the biggest crisis for the Catholic Church since the Reformation.

Being a brother priest seemed to far outweigh the role of a Diocesan Safeguarding Co-Ordinator. As will be seen, each interviewee was prepared to share extensive data related to their experience of being a priest in ministry during this crisis. Each interviewee spoke openly and candidly from the moment the tape recorder was switched on until the end of the interview, and there appeared to be no need to establish a “therapeutic alliance” to enable personal sharing to take place. This greatly helped the research process and the dual role of priest and researcher, far
from being a problem, appeared to facilitate the research task. The level of trust that was established with all six participants enabled me to be confident that the findings were both authentic and worth analysing.

During the semi-structured interviews, the first question asked of each of the participants pertained to their journey to the priesthood. The purposes of this introductory question were: to ease the way into a conversation, which in turn would facilitate a deeper encounter; to gain some appreciation of the participants’ unique journey to priesthood and their unique experience of being a priest; and to enable me to compare and contrast participants’ perceptions in the light of what most of them described as the “explosion” of the Church’s child abuse scandal. The journey to priesthood for each of the participants seemed to have a unique and profound effect on their perception of the “brotherhood of priests” and to affect their perception of the Church as an establishment and their role within it.

Whilst the focus of the study was an exploration of the effect on priests working in England and Wales, each of the candidates referred to the scandal in other parts of the world, especially the Church in North America, Ireland and Australia. The Boston child abuse crisis of 2002 and reports that were published in Ireland in 2009 (the Ryan Report and the Murphy Report) were referred to by all interviewees. Each interviewee viewed the universal Roman Catholic Church as “one body” so anything that happened anywhere in the Church affected the whole Church. Each interviewee referred to the sexual abuse of children by priests in other parts of the world and reported that the crisis outside England and Wales had a profoundly detrimental effect on him (see below).
4.2. Overall findings

The interviews which I conducted separately with each of the six non-offending priests produced near unanimity. As the following table shows, their comments on the effects of the scandal on them can be divided into eight superordinate themes and then subdivided into subordinate themes. All six commented on seven of the themes and five commented on the remaining theme. It should be noted from the outset that these superordinate themes were not necessarily chronological and on many occasions overlapped each other.
### Table 4.1. Findings by themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes</th>
<th>Number of Interviewees Raising this Theme</th>
<th>Subordinate Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Existential Crisis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>• Holocaust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Earth-shattering/Horrific</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Unbelievable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Feeling of being overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief and Loss</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Loss of core identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of authority and lack of confidence in the institutional Church</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of reference point</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Fear for the future of the Church</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Fear of false allegations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Fear of working with children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betrayal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Betrayal by perpetrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Betrayal by Church authorities (national and international)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame and Isolation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Collectively branded</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Adverse media coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ridicule and humiliation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impasse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Tension between reconciling clergy perpetrators and justice for victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of leadership from bishops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Confidence in the Institutional Church as regards this issue</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Lack of openness and transparency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Disillusionment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resilience and Commitment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Loyalty</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Tenacity</td>
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<td>• Forgiveness</td>
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<td>• Faith</td>
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</table>
4.3. Superordinate theme 1: existential crisis

The interviewees reported that their experience of the child abuse scandal was, in the words of one of them, a “tectonic” shift, which implies overtones of something fundamental, foundational. Apart from one who was recently ordained, the interviewees described how both the scandal and the initial mishandling by Church authorities had a profoundly negative effect on their identity as priests and their opinion of those Church authorities. By mishandling I am referring to their accounts of bishops initially refusing to believe what was going on, and then seeking to protect the institutional reputation of the Church at all costs. This alleged mishandling was, according to my interviewees, compounded by the bishops’ seemingly “hanging out to dry” anyone against whom an allegation was made. Over half the interviewees used the term “hanging out to dry” to describe their fear of being abandoned by their bishop/religious superior if an allegation was made against them.

Their reaction can be accurately described as a crisis – a moment of judgement – because it affected the very core of who they were aspiring to be. Thus it was a crisis which can accurately be described as existential in nature. In particular, the crisis lies in the fact that they reported fundamental changes in how they viewed other priests and how they perceived themselves to be viewed by lay Catholics within the Church. The issue seriously dented their confidence as priests both in themselves and in the establishment they served. These points are further detailed in the following subordinate themes.
4.3.1. Holocaust

One of the main themes to arise from the interviews was the complete sense of horror and disbelief as the scandal unfolded. One of my interviewees chose to describe this by using the word “holocaust”. The word “holocaust” has strong emotive connotations. The use of the word indicates the profound effect that this experience had on the lives and perceptions of these priests and helps the reader to get in touch with the stark reality of how difficult this experience has been for them.

There is no denying ... this is almost like a holocaust. (Matthew, p. 25, l. 7)

I can’t believe this. No one could make it up. (Philip, p. 18, l. 3)

Despite being aware of the emotive connotations associated with the word holocaust, as the researcher I felt obliged to report my interviewees’ experience and views as accurately as I could. Whilst I wasn’t surprised to learn that my interviewees were shocked by the child abuse scandal, I was taken aback by the profound effect it had on their identity as priests. I was aware, anecdotally, that priests were having a difficult time coming to terms with the crisis; but my research brought me in touch with the stark reality of just how difficult some priests have found the crisis, and the effects, both long- and short-term, it has had on them.

4.3.2. Earthshattering/horrific

This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me as a priest. (Matthew, p. 13, l. 7)
Being exposed to the scandal has defiled my innocence. (Matthew, p. 14, l. 7)

The first disclosure I heard changed me forever. (Philip, p. 15, l. 4)

These quotes are further evidence that the priests I interviewed felt shattered by the abuse crisis. The quotes are very explicit and unambiguously report a very significant, almost traumatic, experience. This is a theme I take up in more detail in Chapter Five – Discussion. The interviewees said that the crisis was the worst thing that ever happened to them as their innocence was defiled and their lives were changed forever, hence the existential nature of their reaction.

I was thrown straight into the horror of it. It caused tectonic changes. (Philip, p. 15, l. 2-6)

Well … I was horrified. He was a priest and part of a paedophile ring.

(Daniel, p. 11, l. 7-10)

These quotes proved further evidence of the overwhelming impact this crisis had on the day-to-day ministry of the interviewees. Reports of “tectonic changes” and horror cannot be taken lightly. The language used by the interviewees and the level of hurt and distress the crisis caused them indicates the possibility of psychological distress.
4.3.3. Unbelievable

It was the shock. It was especially pronounced because it was against children, my predecessor here was imprisoned. (Christopher, p. 4, l. 3)

This particular quote refers to the first time that one of my interviewees disclosed that they had been appointed to replace a priest who was a convicted child abuser. This quote raises the first account of split loyalties between the offending brother priest and the victim. For this priest, the split loyalties were further complicated by the fact that the parishioners in the parish he had inherited were themselves victims of split loyalties. Some parishioners simply refused to believe that their previous parish priest was guilty; others believed that, even if he was guilty, he should be forgiven.

This conflict will be familiar to Diocesan Safeguarding Co-Ordinators who have to go to a parish to address the issue of the removal or arrest of a parish priest and its impact on the parishioners. In my own experience, I remember some parishioners making the unfortunate comment that “it takes two to tango”, a comment also made by some of the interviewees. Priests who are asked to succeed a predecessor who has been removed, arrested or convicted of child abuse are more often than not asked to do so without any input or guidance as to how to support parishioners as they process the news in their different ways. This was echoed in the responses from one of the priests I interviewed.
My initial reaction was denial, really. I thought it must be some sort of anti-clericalism. Then more and more cases came out of Ireland, and then all the problems in America. (Daniel, p. 15, ll. 6-8)

The depth of betrayal felt by the interviewees was very pronounced. Their first reaction was to assume it was either untrue or exaggerated. This was a position, as will be seen below, they quickly moved away from. Interviewees who expressed this view went on to explain that when the crisis initially erupted there was little or no communication between bishops and their priests. This meant that the interviewees not only had to respond to and process the crisis personally, but they also felt that they were left in the dark by the bishops as to what they could and could not say. The shock of what happened, which they described as “unbelievable”, was not initially addressed. The interviewees reported an experience of floundering which was compounded by their experience of being kept in the dark.

4.3.4. Feeling of being overwhelmed

I feel absolutely drained by this. (Matthew, p. 17, l. 21)

I don’t understand what goes on with a paedophile. I don’t want to know. It’s exhausting just coping with all this stuff. I feel contaminated. (Philip, p. 19, ll. 1-4)

All of the interviewees expressed concern about the fact that, as regards being able to comprehend the reasons for the scandal, along with trying to rationalise the bishops’ initial response, they felt both unprepared and out of their depth. This
experience resonated with similar experiences of being left to flounder and grapple with something that was far beyond their comfort zone. They expressed a feeling of being exposed by a system they trusted. Five of the six interviewees expressed concern about and a lack of confidence in the way that the Church had prepared them during their seminary formation.

They inadvertently displayed symptoms of grief for the loss of a Church they thought they knew. Some voiced fear for their future ministry and fear for the future of the Church. This is a theme which is developed in greater detail in superordinate 8 below. This does not negate the fact that the fears reported at the time were genuine and were accompanied with the understandable anxiety they generated. Some of the interviewees reported an inability to know who to trust, something that they had never experienced in their priesthood. They felt misled and betrayed, and that it occasionally led them to feelings of despair. These descriptions generated in me, as the researcher, an increasing concern for the long-term psychological welfare of these men. They went on to report an increasing sense of injustice and anxiety about themselves as possible collateral damage. By this they meant anxiety about being deserted by their bishop if an accusation of child abuse was made about them. This particular anxiety had a profoundly detrimental effect on their relationship with their own bishop and their view of the institutional Church. Five of the six interviewees reported a loss of confidence in the Church authorities, whom they considered to be more interested in the good name of the institution rather than the welfare of victims and innocent priests. Interestingly, the only priest who didn’t share this view was the priest who had only been ordained for two years. This particular priest was unique among the interviewees because he was the only priest
to be trained and ordained after the abuse scandal had been exposed. This theme, in many ways, encapsulates other themes as differing responses of fear, sense of betrayal, loss, *et cetera* came together in a sense of personal existential crisis for these priests.

### 4.4. **Superordinate theme 2: grief and loss**

Grief and loss were articulated by these men on several levels. In the first instance, they reported a loss of confidence in Church authorities which they previously found to be trustworthy. Secondly, they reported a sense of loss as regards their own identity and their role in the wider scheme of things in the Church. The interviewees all reported that the scandal was their first experience of being made to feel untrustworthy by the general public. Last but not least, their sense of grief and loss also related to a sense of being betrayed by brother priests, which was accompanied by uncertainty about who, amongst their brother priests, could be trusted. This experience, perhaps more than any, profoundly impacted on a later superordinate theme of betrayal, which is explored in more detail below.

#### 4.4.1. **Loss of identity**

There is immaturity in us about lots of things. As a priest, a big eye-opener was realising I had a very puerile relationship with my bishop. That’s not unusual: priest to bishop, priest to people, we need to grow up. (Philip, p. 53, ll. 3-6)
This particular quote is significant because it was said by a priest who had been ordained for many years. It was the first time that the notion of institutional dysfunctionality had been introduced. The quote infers that if the church was not so dysfunctional as an organisation, then this crisis might not have happened, or it would at least have been handled more justly. This has relevance to a sense of loss of identity and focus because, perhaps for the first time, this priest was beginning to have serious reservations about the integrity of the organisational structure that he was part of. This particular interviewee went on to extrapolate what he regarded as other symptoms of dysfunctionality (e.g., the way the institution handles its financial affairs). It is interesting to hear a very experienced priest suggest that the child abuse scandal seemed to have, somewhat inadvertently, lifted the lid on institutionalised dysfunctionality. This loss of identity and focus is understandable given the particular relationship that exists between a bishop and his priests, which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five – Discussion.

A number of priests think that their bishop should be defending them. It was very painful trying to have good, open relationships between priests and bishops. There is little support for priests and a lot of ignorance on the part of priests. They are ignorant of procedures and ignorant of protection for anyone else. (Philip, p. 40, ll. 1-3)

I still have a feeling that if it meant hanging one of us out to dry, he [the bishop] would. I don’t know if that would be for the sake of the children or the Church. (Gerald, p. 27, l. 26)
These quotes refer to an undermining of the whole point of reference for the interviewees. It raises the very concerning prospect that these priests feel that their very identity and their place in the Church has been taken from them. This injustice is compounded by their innocence as regards the child abuse crisis. Five of the six interviewees expressed concern about brother priests whom they either knew personally or had heard about and who they felt had been treated unjustly in response to an allegation of child abuse. Most of the interviewees felt that if a malicious allegation should be made against one of their brother priests, the bishop would “hang them out to dry”. The truth or otherwise of these stories did not detract from the fact that they feared that in similar circumstances this could also happen to them. This left them with a feeling of being exposed, which in turn fostered their feeling of loss of identity and focus. These views are expanded upon in even more detail below.

4.4.2. Loss of authority and lack of confidence in the institutional Church

Cover-up by Church authorities is worst because it’s systemic. (Matthew, p. 39, l. 14)

The biggest shock was that the Church was more concerned with its image than with doing the right thing. (Gerald, p. 6, l. 32)

It made me question the Church. Why didn’t the bishops realise? (Daniel, p. 14, l. 6)
Whilst each interviewee reported a sense of shock at the child abuse scandal, their experience of the institutional Church’s initial response had a very damaging effect on their attitude towards the bishops of England and Wales. All of the interviewees reported that, in their view, the child abuse crisis caused two scandals. The first scandal was the fact that the abuse took place at all, and the second was that the bishops of England and Wales seemed to respond so ineffectually. All of the interviewees reported that what they described as the second scandal was harder to bear and had a more negatively profound effect on them than the fact that brother priests were guilty of such atrocious acts.

4.4.3. Loss of reference point leading to a lack of trust

The Church has lost its moral high ground. People are saying, “We can’t trust them, they are all paedophiles”. (Daniel, p. 38, l. 12)

There’s a lack of confidence about lack of professionalism in the Church. (Philip, p. 35, l. 13)

Their solution is to get priests to say more prayers and to separate them [from lay students studying theology] during formation. It’s so naïve; it’s not grappling with the issues. (Gerald, p. 29, l. 20)

The relationship between a priest and his bishop is not the same as that between an employer and an employee. It is a relationship established on trust. When a priest is ordained he enters into a life-long “covenant”, integral to which is a mutual commitment not just to the Church’s teaching but also to the bishop and his
successors. This relationship is bidirectional, as mentioned in Canon 348, with the bishop having an obligation not just to secure the welfare of his priests but also to actively promote it. It would seem, from the comments made by five of the six interviewees, that there is a very serious concern about the fracture of this integral dynamic, which is a theological, moral, spiritual and (in a canonical sense) legal one between a bishop and his priest.

Each of the interviewees expressed grief in terms of depression and secondary trauma. They all displayed “traumatic bereavement” (Worden, 2010), that is each interviewee expressed concern and a sense of loss both for a Church they thought they knew and a Church with which they were familiar and which they trusted.

4.5. **Superordinate theme 3: fear**

Whilst this superordinate theme could be subsumed into the later superordinate theme of “shame and isolation”, it emerged as so important for the interviewees that it merited its own superordinate theme. The fear described by the interviewees manifested itself, for the most part, in fear of false allegations. Their fear lay in the fact that they were vulnerable to false allegations being laid against them, either due to misinterpretation or vindictiveness. This fear was compounded by the further fear that they would be “hung out to dry” by the bishops, even if the allegation was false or malicious. They feared that, given previous attempts by the bishops to protect the institution, the bishops would continue to do the same even if it meant some of their priests had to be sacrificed for the greater good. This fear, in turn, fed into other superordinate themes such as “betrayal” and “questioning of the Church”, both of which are explored further below.
We need a bit more understanding. Priests need to know they are safe. It’s caused an awful lot of fear. (Philip, p. 41, ll. 5-7)

4.5.1 Fear for the future of the Church

I’m just hoping and praying that there are no more accusations, or people finding things that have gone wrong in the past. (Christopher, p. 37, l. 6)

We need more courage. Blow the insurers. We need to be radical. (Philip, p. 31, ll. 9-11)

All of the interviewees spoke about how they believed their ministry within the Church meant they were members of a very well established and reputable institution whose future was never in doubt. The crisis in England and Wales, and indeed throughout the world, had arguably shaken the very foundations of the Catholic Church’s credibility. Apart from the interviewee who was ordained after the crisis erupted, the other five reported that when they were first ordained they could never have imagined anything that would undermine the Church in such a profoundly damaging way. Whilst they reported anxieties about the future of the Church, they didn’t report any doubt about the possibility of its ceasing to exist in the future. But they did speak about how it would have to change and become much more accountable than it has perhaps ever been. Interestingly, each interviewee described this potential for greater accountability as one of the very few positive things to come out of the crisis.
4.5.2. Fear of false allegations

Five of the six interviewees expressed concern and reported a degree of personal fallout as a result of the sexual abuse crisis in Ireland, and its inevitable accompanying publicity. They had friends who were priests in Ireland who reported feeling somewhat vulnerable and fearing that if an accusation were made against them they would be removed from their duties with great publicity, without due process and without a proper opportunity to defend their good name. Some Irish priests reported to the interviewees a feeling something akin to being “cannon fodder”. The priests whom I interviewed were all unnerved that their fundamental right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty might be sacrificed in the same way that Church authorities appeared to sacrifice the rights of the alleged perpetrators. However, even priests who are guilty have rights and are entitled to due process.

The presumption of innocence underpins our state legal system, and associated with this presumption is the right of the accused to be made aware of an accusation and the fundamental legal principle audi alteram partem – hear the other side (Connolly, 2006). The interviewees were not confident that these fundamental rights would be afforded them by the Church authorities. They also reported their disappointment that the secular world showed more concern for their well-being than their own bishops. Individual reactions vary from expressed concern through to developed fear.

I am still a bit concerned about malicious allegations. (Christopher, p. 32, l.1-3)
I had a fear of being accused because of what some others did. (Christopher, p. 18, l. 11)

It shocked, shocked me when people started being accused. (Gerald, p. 7, l. 17)

4.5.3. **Fear of working with children**

I had a fear of being accused. I was frightened to be alone with a child in any circumstance. (Christopher, p. 18, ll. 11-12)

When I was first ordained it was good practice to pick children up and hold them. I wouldn’t do it now. You’d be leaving yourself wide open. It would be inappropriate. (Daniel, p. 12, ll. 16-17)

I threatened to stop going into the school. The Head told me that if I withdrew completely the whole ethos of the school would change. It was wise counsel. I subsequently realised that he was correct; but I was still furious with the priest abuser. (Daniel, p. 8, ll. 28-30)

Some priests used the excuse that bishops would hang them out to dry if they were accused. Some priests think bishops assume you are guilty and you have to prove you are innocent. (Daniel, p. 29, ll. 17-18) [Daniel was speaking about priests choosing not to minister to children]

It is important to note that the interviewees, with one exception, reported that they were not frightened of working with children; but they had become wary of how
other adults would perceive their ministry with children in the light of adverse media coverage. The one priest who did not express this view explained that his lack of engagement with younger children was not a result of the scandal but simply recognition that this particular ministry was not his forte. I found it interesting to note that all of the interviewees expressed their confidence and gratitude to Diocesan Safeguarding Commissions for their attempts to continue to foster their ministry with children. Whilst this is an encouraging and laudable position for the safeguarding commissions to take up, this does not negate the fact that the experience for all of the interviewees resulted in considerable distress.

4.6. **Superordinate theme 4: betrayal**

Each of the interviewees reported concern about what they considered to be a degree of deception on the part of the bishops. For me as the researcher and as a brother priest, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that the sense of betrayal, in its many guises, had perhaps the most profoundly negative effect on my interviewees. Whilst none of the interviewees explicitly used the term “friendly fire”, the phrase suggests itself when we read the accounts of feelings of being betrayed on all levels listed below.

4.6.1. **Betrayal by perpetrators**

Fury at priest abuser. (Daniel, p. 8, l.10)

It was a betrayal of trust. I couldn’t comprehend it. Why would a priest take on such a role? It doesn’t make sense. (Anthony, p. 4, ll. 1-5)
I would’ve been quite happy if I’d found out that he’d topped himself, to be honest. Looking back, I suppose you shouldn’t ever think like that of anybody. At the time, [it seemed] almost like this sort of Victorian morality – taking the honourable way out, although it wouldn’t have been moral. (Daniel, p. 9, ll. 18-20) [Daniel was referring to a predecessor who had been convicted of child sexual abuse]

It’s completely incompatible. I couldn’t get my head round it. Their whole life would be completely sordid. (Daniel, p. 12, ll. 2-4)

Common to all interviewees was a reference to what they called “the brotherhood of the priesthood”. However, each of the six interviewees expressed a feeling of betrayal by brother priests who had sexually abused children. As a researcher, and a brother priest, I found it interesting to note how each interviewee had conflicting feelings towards priests convicted of sexual abuse of children. As well as feeling betrayed, each described a feeling of bewilderment and each described the feeling of compassion for brother priests for whom their public ministry had ended. It was not just the fact that their brother priest’s ministry had finished, it was the accompanying shame and scandal that they had to endure. This feeling of compassion, in turn, triggered a feeling of guilt by the interviewees since it seemed to undermine their standing as priests and their ability to continue to minister with integrity. This term bears further exploration since its impact has had significant implications regarding how victims are viewed and dealt with. Unless this term is fully understood, it is almost impossible to fully appreciate the dramatic effect it had on the interviewees. Having a sense of brotherhood brings with it the dangers of specialness and elitism,
more commonly known as clericalism. This is a particularly thorny issue as it touches the core of the role of the priest in the Catholic community and their identity. It has also been suggested that clericalism was a contributory factor to the culture in which abuse happened.

This has profound implications on the mindset of priests and their attitude and response to “brother priests” who have sexually abused children. This can often take the form of misguided loyalty to a brotherhood, which instead of being inclusive is, in reality, exclusive and is perceived as such by victims of clerical abuse. The irony is that a lack of concern for victims of clerical abuse is in fact a betrayal of the “brotherhood of the priesthood” to which we are all called by virtue of our baptism. The notion of a brotherhood of priests does not exclusively pertain to fellow ordained Roman Catholic priests. Baptism invites us to share in the priesthood of Christ. Thus any abuse of any member of the Church is a betrayal of the brotherhood of our common priesthood. It should be noted that all the interviewees (see quotations above) viewed abuse by brother ordained priests as especially pronounced and hard to bear.

4.6.2. Betrayal by Church authorities (national and international)

I would be one of those people who said there were two scandals. The way the Church behaved and is still behaving is wrong. It is still a scandal.

(Gerald, p. 8, l. 27)

There were several complaints about a priest, and bishops were reprehensibly moving them on. (Daniel, p. 35, l. 2)
It appears they are more interested in the good name of the Church rather than care of individuals. (Anthony, p. 19, l. 9)

Betrayal of Church authorities [is] harder to bear than initial scandal. (Matthew, p. 39, l. 14)

Priests have no confidence in bishops. (Philip, p. 38, l. 28)

The biggest shock was that the Church was concerned about its image rather than doing the right thing. (Gerald, p. 6, l. 32)

All of the interviewees reported that, as hard as the initial abuse by priests was to believe, what was even more disappointing was the initial handling by the Church authorities, by which they meant the bishops both in England and Wales and indeed in any country where the scandal erupted. As can be seen by the quotations above, the interviewees were scandalised and embarrassed by what they described not merely as an inadequate response but a grossly unjust response. They reported that it left them not only disillusioned as members of the Church but also frustratingly in the position of trying to defend the indefensible. This fracture between the relationship of priests and their bishops is explored in greater detail below in superordinate 7.
4.7. **Superordinate theme 5: shame and isolation**

All of the interviewees reported the toxic effect of the scandal and how it was handled by Church authorities. They described the regular experience of feeling ashamed about being a priest and struggled with how they believed they were perceived by the general public. For all of the interviewees, this was a unique experience in their priesthood which left them with a feeling of shame, despite their innocence, and a feeling of isolation because they didn’t believe there was anywhere they could process what they were going through.

4.7.1. **Collectively branded**

Someone came to the door looking for money. When I refused he said, “You’re all a load of bloody child abusers”. (Christopher, p. 24, l. 6)

You don’t expect children to have the intellectual maturity to differentiate the difference between a good priest and a bad priest. It seemed that the kids in school had come to the conclusion that all priests were tarred with the same brush, which is sad. Initially I was very angry. (Daniel, p. 8, ll. 19-21)

Only very occasionally has someone said, “You are all the same, you are all paedophiles”. That really hurt. (Gerald, p. 9, l. 39)

In a way we are all being labelled. It’s an undermining of the priesthood. (Philip, p. 21, l. 6)
All six interviewees reported that one of the most difficult things to bear about the fallout from the abuse crisis was what they perceived to be other people’s perception of them. Several priests reported that the experience of priests being ridiculed by comedians was quite hard to bear. This experience was made worse when they were watching television with friends or family members. They reported that they felt trapped because they didn’t feel that it was appropriate to profess their innocence. They also felt uncomfortable because they wondered what people, watching television with them, were thinking and whether they were embarrassed by it for different reasons. These feelings of embarrassment as a result of being collectively branded were common amongst the six priests despite their very varied ages and experiences. This seemed to compound their sense of injustice since in each instance none of the interviewees was guilty of any abuse.

4.7.2. Adverse media coverage

The negative feedback is what’s feeding society’s perception of faith and religion. (Anthony, p. 23, l. 26)

I still wonder if there’s a concerted campaign in some quarters. There is certain anti-clericalism especially in Ireland. Clergy in Ireland were far too powerful. (Daniel, p. 17, ll. 12-14)
What makes me angry are the comments, the jokes. They diminish the Church and diminish peoples’ opportunity to come to Christ. (Anthony, p. 24, ll. 1-2)

The interviewees reported that they had become an easy target and akin to cannon fodder for anyone in the media who wanted to label all Catholic priests as potential child abusers. They each reported the difficulties they had endured with comedians taking what they described as cheap shots at priests in the Catholic Church. This experience in turn engendered a sense of anger at and betrayal by the tiny minority of priests who had abused children and exposed their brother priests to explicit derision. This situation was further exacerbated because the interviewees felt that they had no forum in which to defend themselves against assumptions pedalled by people in the media, whom they regarded as prejudiced.

4.7.3. Ridicule and humiliation

I remembered jeers and sniggers and they used to spit on the back of my coat. Other priests who went into the school experienced similar things. I had been away for a month so didn’t realise what had happened in my absence. (Daniel, p. 7, ll. 15-18)

Somebody came to the door begging for money. When I refused to give him some he shouted, “You are all abusers”. I don’t take much notice of someone who’s coming to beg and doesn’t get what they want. (Christopher, p. 34, ll. 24-25)
All of the interviewees described at least one occasion in which they had to endure ridicule and abusive comments. Because of the humiliation attached to this particular scandal, the interviewees did not feel that they were in a position to defend themselves against people who were abusing them lest they fan the flames and get accused of denial and cover-up. This experience left them with a sense of helplessness and a notion that they had no other choice but simply to endure provocation for acts for which they were not responsible. The six priests I interviewed, selected by one of my supervisors (Dr William West), proved to be a varied group of priests as regards number of years ordained and where they exercise their ministry within England and Wales. Whilst they were bound by all being Catholic priests working in England and Wales, they each presented in a very unique way during their interview. The number of years ordained and the places they worked were idiosyncratic for each of the interviewees. All six interviewees provided very rich data and uniquely contributed to the content of this thesis.

4.7.4. Stigma

We are all suffering for all those who have done the abusing. (Christopher, p. 35, l. 7)

The whole thing has undermined our integrity. (Philip, p. 14, l. 20)

I used to be proud to be a priest, but I feel a bit wary about it now.

(Christopher, p. 3, l. 10)
I was almost ashamed to go out of the house with a collar on. (Philip, p. 21, l. 8)

This guy was chaplain to a handicapped fellowship group. For the first time ever in my priesthood, I felt ashamed of being a priest; I didn’t want to wear clerical dress ever again. (Daniel, p. 10, ll. 37-40)

When I hear about priests in the press I think “oh, not again”. I wonder how long ago was this one? Is it historical or something? That’s still going on; most of the time we’ve become a laughing stock. (Gerald, p.14, ll. 1-3)

All the interviewees reported a degree of concern about how they were perceived as priests. They each wrestled not merely with how they were perceived, despite the fact that they had not committed any abuse, but also with their own perception of brother priests who had sexually abused children.

4.8. **Superordinate theme 6: impasse**

Interviewees each described the tension between their core beliefs (*e.g.* forgiveness, reconciliation, brotherhood of priests) and their responsibility as priests for the pastoral welfare of those on the margins of society, in this context the victims of child abuse. As the researcher, it is interesting to note that this was the only area in which they felt a sense of torn loyalties. Any disagreements or differences of opinion as regards dogma or practices of the institutional Church were reported as
more of a cerebral tension rather than torn loyalties which affected the core of their identity.

**4.8.1. Tension between reconciling clergy perpetrators and justice for victims**

This guy is my brother, so is this guy. (Matthew, p. 8, l. 11) [Matthew was referring to one of his brother priests who gave his life to save some children, and to another brother priest who was convicted of child sexual abuse.]

I couldn’t comprehend why a brother priest would do this. (Anthony, p. 4, l. 4)

There’s a real sadness about anyone in prison. (Philip, p. 34, l. 20)

It’s a chronic psychological complaint. If someone has offended once, they will do it again. In the past we didn’t realise that. We have been compromised and handicapped because we emphasise forgiveness and reconciliation. (Daniel, p. 24, ll. 27-30)

One feels that they should be given a chance to say sorry. I don’t know if they are. Perhaps more priests were unjustly condemned. (Christopher, p. 24, ll. 25-26)

It is difficult to untangle the torn loyalties the interviewees shared as regards their brother priests who were perpetrators of child abuse and the victims themselves. As
the quotes above suggest, the interviewees seemed to be trying to process where their loyalty to their brother priests ended and where they ought to hold their brother priests accountable for their actions. Some of the interviewees described the difficulty of having sympathy for brother priests who had been imprisoned, with a notion that, whilst their actions deserved imprisonment, their imprisonment in turn engendered a feeling of sympathy.

4.8.2. Lack of leadership from bishops

When I realised what had happened, I was disappointed – I’m trying to find a word that is stronger than disappointed – I suppose shocked would count.

They have put the Church before the individual. (Anthony, p. 19, ll. 4-8)

From the victim’s point of view, it looks like these priests are being kept and looked after. Where’s the justice? (Gerald, p. 8, l. 34)

To some victims it must seem like the priest got away with it. (Gerald, p. 19, l. 12)

Throughout a priest’s ministry, there will be many times when he will look to his bishop for advice and guidance. As far as the response to the child abuse crisis goes, all the interviewees reported a lack of confidence not only in initial reactions but also about how bishops would respond if the reputation of the Church came under threat. The notion of “better for one man to die for the people” (Gospel of John 18:14), whilst not explicitly referred to, was implied.
4.9. Superordinate theme 7: lack of confidence in the institutional Church in regards to this issue

Questioning aspects of Church teaching and organisation is normal for Catholic priests. It has been my experience and, it would seem, the experience of my interviewees that there has been for the most part a healthy challenging search for the balance between Church teaching and the reality on the ground (i.e., day-to-day ministry). The priests I interviewed displayed the same attitude to the implementation of teaching as the experience of people to whom they were sent to minister. However, in the context of this thesis, the level of questioning of the Church was of a different order. It was more than simply chewing things over and respectfully disagreeing. It involved a profound sense of a loss of confidence in the institutional Church which, in every other context, was their point of reference. One of the consequences of this was their feeling of being abandoned.

4.9.1. Lack of openness and transparency

I don’t feel like I have a coping mechanism. This scandal shows up the infantilisation of priests and people. We need to grow up and have honest and adult relationships. (Philip, p. 39, ll. 6-8)

We need to talk about this in very explicit and practical terms. (Matthew, p. 29, l. 13)

Priests can become too professional, in the wrong sense, not really engaging with people, just celebrating the sacraments. I think we’re in danger of becoming fundamentalists. (Daniel, p. 27, ll. 1-2)
As previously noted in this chapter, each interviewee reported divided loyalties between what they perceived as allegiance to brother priests and the anger they felt toward and their sense of betrayal by the priest offenders themselves. They reported that the actions of what they described as a “tiny minority” had seriously impinged upon their own ministry and how they perceived they were viewed by other people.

All six interviews expressed similar sentiments to Keenan’s (2012) finding that Irish priests were generally unaware of inappropriate behaviour by the “tiny minority”. Experiences of priests in other parts of the world are relevant to these findings since all six interviewees regard the Church as one body. The participants felt a degree of naïveté and embarrassment about what they now consider, in retrospect, to be blatantly obvious. When the individual and institutional dimensions of the problem are brought together, what becomes evident is how the individual perpetrators, the bishops, religious superiors and Catholic laity are related in a web of interacting dynamics and relationships that contributed to the evolution and maintenance of the problem (Keenan, 2012).

There is a lot of fear and a lack of trust. I feel hurt by the attitude of priests towards their bishop. They have no confidence in them. (Philip, p. 38, ll. 22-23)

That was the biggest shock for me: that the Church was more concerned with its image than doing the right thing. (Gerald, p. 7, ll. 26-28)
A recurring theme throughout the one-hour interviews was a sense of disillusionment with how the priests perceived themselves, how they felt they were perceived by others and how they in turn perceived their bishops. This subtheme overlaps with “a sense of betrayal”, “a sense of lack of leadership” and “the loss of a moral compass”.

4.10. Superordinate theme 8: resilience and commitment

Having reflected on the experience of the interviews and their content, it occurred to me as the researcher that it is remarkable that all of the priests I interviewed are still in post. Given their reports of disillusionment with and betrayal by the Church authorities, none of the interviewees ever gave a hint that they had had enough and were going to resign. As their interviews progressed, several of the interviewees expressed compassion for their bishop, the same bishop who they earlier condemned for ineptitude. Each interviewee expressed continued commitment to offending priests, again in sharp contrast to the anger and sense of betrayal expressed early on in each of the interviews. Their sense of commitment was both admirable and encouraging; it forced me to consider my own position in the Church as a fellow priest. I can concur that my own experience echoes those reported in these interviews. Despite feeling overwhelmed at times, each priest reported his determination to remain committed to his ministry as a priest serving what he described as an imperfect institution. To my surprise, not only as the researcher but also as a safeguarding trainer, each of the interviewees expressed a desire for more training about safeguarding. This contrasts sharply with evidence, albeit anecdotal,
of priests refusing to engage with this training because they considered it to be too depressing.

4.10.1. Loyalty

I’m 40 years a priest. I’ve always been positive and never consciously regretted my decision to be ordained. Sometimes I’ve thought sod this for a game of marbles. (Daniel, p. 40, ll. 6-8)

Perhaps one plus that’s come from this terrible thing is that we don’t feel so much up there. (Christopher, p. 3, ll. 7-8)

Where it always appeared that the Church was being harsh, now it can be appealed and reviewed and it makes you think hold on, there might be more to the story than I’ve been told. (Gerald, p. 17, ll. 1-3)

I also found it interesting that, despite the reported frustration, despair and betrayal, the anger that was expressed by the six interviewees did not dominate their responses. They each, in their own way, reported traumatic experiences of being an innocent priest caught up in the child abuse crisis. However, far from appearing to be consumed by what could be considered to be justifiable anger, they instead displayed compassion for all parties concerned. Thus it would seem that it wasn’t a question of anger versus compassion, but rather the case of the interviewees managing to be angry whilst maintaining the ability and willingness to show compassion. They reported sympathy for Church leaders and sympathy for offending priests and each recognised the absence of malice on behalf of the bishops
on England and Wales. “Wounded but still standing” is perhaps the most accurate
description of the priests who were interviewed. This tension as regards anger at
brother priest offenders and the initial response by the bishops seems contrary to the
interviewee’s expression of sympathy for both offending priests and bishops. As a
researcher, I simply note this contradiction and I believe it is indicative of the fact
that the interviewees were processing the effects of the scandal. I believe that this
process was developed and enriched by the experience of each interviewee of being
interviewed and being allowed to talk openly and frankly about the effects of the
scandal on their own priesthood.

None of the priests expressed any regrets about being a priest. Significantly, they
also reported that their religious belief and their faith in the Church remained intact.
At a human level this is quite remarkable. Another pleasant surprise for me as the
researcher and fellow priest was the reported determination by each of the
interviewees to make sure the child abuse crisis did not affect their future ministry
with children, although they did mention a current degree of unease in conducting
this part of their ministry. I must confess that, as the researcher, this was most
unexpected. Added to this unexpected revelation was the discovery that all of the
interviewees expressed gratitude for and confidence in the guidance given to them
by each of their Diocesan Safeguarding Commissions.

4.10.2. Tenacity

If I was exonerated I’d be taken back by fellow clergy. None of this was
even on my horizon before the explosion. (Daniel, p. 37, l. 14)
They should have normal relationships with children, with women, with other men. You can be tactile and friendly when appropriate. A priest’s house shouldn’t be a place where he pulls up the drawbridge. (Daniel, p. 26, ll. 31-33)

People in the parish have contributed to my confidence. The parishioners, the parents seem to understand. That gives you a certain amount of confidence. (Christopher, p. 21, l. 12)

All six interviewees displayed remarkable tenacity. The experience of being an innocent priest in the midst of the scandal has had an exceptionally adverse and challenging effect on all six participants. They reported an experience which tainted the very core of their identity as members of the Church and as priests/office holders of the Church and their ongoing role within the institution. None of the priests interviewed even alluded to the possibility of leaving the priesthood or the Church. As a researcher, and brother priest, I found this quite remarkable given the level of existential angst, betrayal and abandonment that each interviewee, to a greater or lesser extent, reported. This might go some way to explain the extent of the damage done to priests against whom no concerns or allegations have been raised. For each of the interviewees, the priesthood was much more than either a job or a career; it identified the very core of who they were. Whilst this gave them an extraordinary degree of loyalty to the institutional Church; it also compounded the depth of pain which they expressed. Their reaction to the betrayal from Church authorities was much more pronounced than the hurt they reported by being stigmatized by the
media and society at large. As a fellow priest and therefore an insider researcher, I can empathise at their reaction to what seems like “friendly fire”.

4.10.3. Forgiveness

Whatever the public perception is, I have found the bishops to be good men, very mutually supportive. All the bishops were very kind and genuine people; that’s a very important thing to say. (Philip, p. 58, ll. 21-22)

The findings illustrate the interviewees’ extraordinary ability to hold on to and manage the tension between the profound anger they experienced and their capacity to show compassion. Also manifest amongst all interviewees was a similar ability and willingness to hold the tension between exasperation at Church authorities and a willingness to forgive and recognise their lack of malice.

4.10.4. Faith

I’m confident that we wouldn’t cover up a scandal again. I think the bishop would take appropriate action if an accusation was made. (Gerald, p. 27, l. 17)

It’s exceptionally horrific. I think the bishops’ commitment is genuine. They are wanting to do the right thing … by survivors, perpetrators, families, communities, everyone. (Philip, p. 61, l. 2)
It doesn’t seem to stop people coming into the Church, joining the Church.
People have still got great confidence in the Church, also in the priest.
(Christopher, p. 36, ll. 4-6)

I thought it had to be dealt with. I was given a terrific welcome. People here are very good to their priests. (Christopher, p. 11, l. 16)

I’ve got confidence in myself, in other people interpreting what I do. I’ve been here and the people are gaining confidence in me. (Christopher, p. 31, ll. 9-10)

Ok, priests made mistakes and did wrong things, and perhaps that’s what we’ve got to accept; but I am very optimistic and positive. (Christopher, p. 36, ll. 28-30)

4.11. Conclusion

All of the interviewees displayed an extraordinary depth of faith in their own ministry both present and future, in the resilience of their parishioners and in their continued, deeply-held personal religious belief. All of this happened despite the trauma. Perhaps the experience of the interview enabled each participant to voice their concerns and process the effects which, in turn, seems to have brought them full circle back to a place where they can begin to rediscover confidence in the future of the Church, despite its imperfections.
As the researcher, I simply note that the interviewees sometimes contradicted themselves and thus fostered a degree of ambiguity. Rather than questioning the integrity of the findings, this is more likely indicative of the traumatic effect of the crisis and their ability to process its effects, which in part led to some confusion. It is also possible that they were working out their thoughts in the process of the interviews, as all of the priests said that this was the first opportunity they had each had to have a thorough, focused conversation about the abuse crisis and its effect on their lives, priestly identity and ministry. In such circumstances, they may have been adjusting and nuancing their thinking in the process of hearing their own answers and interacting with me, the interviewer.
Chapter Five

Discussion

As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, the focus of this research is the effect of the child abuse crisis on Roman Catholic priests who have not been accused of inappropriate sexual behaviour towards children. My experience of working with priests as the Safeguarding Co-ordinator for the Diocese of Salford had led to a concern for priests in terms of their confident ministry with children. It had also led to a broader concern for their well-being, which resulted in the focus of the research for this thesis.

My first assignment for this doctorate was a paper entitled “Developing confident ministry with children”. This work confirmed that the taboo of child sexual abuse is having such a negative effect on some priests that it effectively undermines their ministry with children. The threat posed by the fear of being accused of inappropriate behaviour and possibly of abuse includes not knowing what to do or how to respond in pastoral situations. My impression was that some priests have become more cautious in their behaviour, some avoid being with children and some feel paralysed regarding how best to respond.

I identified eight superordinate themes in the analysis of the interviews with the six priests, as described in Chapter 4 – Findings. The eight themes are: crisis, grief and loss, fear, betrayal, shame and isolation, impasse, questioning the church, and
resilience and commitment. Along with these superordinate themes a number of other significant topics emerged which merit discussion. These themes and additional topics are discussed here under three broad headings recognizing, first, that this is a multidimensional crisis which has, secondly, evoked strong feelings of grief and a sense of loss. Thirdly, this research has identified or reinforced ways to help both innocent priests and the Church to move forward from this scandal.

5.1. A multidimensional crisis

The scandal has produced a crisis both for the Roman Catholic Church and, in terms of this thesis, for the many thousands of innocent priests whose lives have been deeply affected. The seriousness of the crisis for the Church, along with its paramount concerns for the children who were abused and for safeguarding those in its care, have largely overshadowed concerns for innocent priests. The responses of the participants in this study demonstrate that these latter concerns have been exacerbated by a lack of attention from Church authorities. The crisis for the Church and its priests takes many forms, which are discussed here under the following categories:

- holocaust
- anger
- meaning-making
- spiritual crisis
- fear
- betrayal
• shame and isolation
• identity

5.1.1. Holocaust

It is hardly surprising that the scale of the crisis is reflected in the interviews with the six priests. This can be seen, for example, in Michael’s use of the word “holocaust”. This emotive word refers to the central theological concept of Christ’s death as a holocaust, an offering for sins, and the modern understanding of the murder of six million Jews during the Nazi era. Other priests said that they found the ongoing revelations of child sex abuse “earth-shattering”, “horrific” and “unbelievable”. These are strong words and effectively communicate the impact of the crisis on these priests. In the way that initial reports of the murder of Jews during the Second World War were not believed until the overwhelming evidence was presented to the world after the Allied armies entered Belsen and other camps in 1944-45.

The priests said that they at first found the accusations about clergy child abuse unbelievable until overwhelmed by the sheer number of allegations. The word holocaust also suggests that innocent people suffered. This points to the extent of the problem as revealed in the United States and Ireland especially.

The idea of holocaust communicates the scale of the crisis, the number of victims, the suffering and the number of countries involved. It also implicitly communicates that religion was involved in the abuse, as the holocaust relates to the redemptive suffering of Christ in Catholic theology and the way that the Nazis targeted the Jews
because of their faith. Within a Catholic context, this word communicates the depth and extent of abuse and suffering, as well as the innocence and powerlessness of those affected.

5.1.2. Anger

The anger expressed by the priests echoes that found in Bates’ 2003 study of priests of the Rosminian Order, the Institute of Charity in Ireland. Her findings bore a remarkable resemblance to my own findings for this thesis. She researched the emotions which members experienced from cases against some members of the institute past and present and she recorded five forms of anger.

First, she found there was anger that anyone would do something to discredit himself or the institute. This is reflected in my study, for example, in Daniel’s observation:

You come into a Church, assuming you trust in the Church and believe in the Church and then somebody, not just anybody within the Church but a brother priest, offends in such an atrocious way. (Daniel)

Then there was anger that all members are regarded as being guilty. A number of my interviewees used the phrase “tarred with the same brush”. Daniel, for example, said:
There was a lot in the media and press about paedophilia and it would seem that they had come to the conclusion that all priests were tarred with the same brush, which was just sad. (Daniel)

In the Bates (2003) study, anger was also directed at those religious personnel in charge of formation and at those in authority who seemed to forget the lack of attention paid in the past to psychosexual development during formation. Most of the priests I interviewed spoke about their early experiences of seminary formation. Those ordained before the abuse crisis spoke about the lack of human formation and the lack of room for emotional development. Speaking about his seminary rector in the 1960s, Peter said: “He was living in the 1930s. So what we regarded as normal dialogue and conversation and questioning and all the rest of it, he regarded as insubordination”. Later in the interview he said that he emerged from the seminary at 24 years of age and was “sheltered”. He later said that “there is an immaturity in us (priests) generally about lots of things”.

The priests in my study spoke about the limitations of their formation programmes, but tended to frame this as part of the “system” and the Church culture at that time. All of them wanted to see more emphasis on human and psychosexual formation, not only as a result of the crisis, but in order to better equip priests to live healthy lives and to function effectively and safely in ministry.

A fourth form of anger in the Bates (2003) study was directed at bishops/superiors who were aware but did not act. It has often been said are two crises: the crisis of abuse by clergy, and the crisis of poor leadership by bishops and religious superiors
(Keenan, 2011). In my study, Gerald, for example, said: “I would be one of those people who would say that there are two scandals.” The priests responded in different ways to the failure of leadership. Michael, for example, referring to his elderly mother who lives in Ireland, said:

My lovely old mammy is over there trying to process this stuff .... She is just stunned, you know, that the bishops have been lying and people are fed up with this, and … priests seem to be still okay in her eyes. It’s the failure of the bishops. (Michael)

Daniel’s sympathetic response, “we were all taken in”, shows priests experienced anger but also understood the difficulties bishops often faced when dealing with these situations.

Finally (Bates 2003), there was anger at the Irish government which let things get out of hand without owning up to its responsibilities. The priests in my study did not demonstrate anger against the U.K. government, apart from Daniel who, as we have seen, sensed that the state authorities and the bishop were taken in by the perpetrator to whom he refers.

Bates’ (2003) findings detail the depth and breadth of the trauma for non-offending priests in Ireland. The results of her research and this thesis confirm a similar, but not identical, pattern of response among non-offending priests in England and Wales.
5.1.3. Meaning-making

Werdel and Wicks (2012) address the whole area of faith, suffering and religious coping in the context of post-traumatic stress and recovery. They cite Pargament, Desai and McConnell (2006) who suggest that:

In difficult times, three critical growth aspects of faith are that: (1) they can play a critical role in meaning-making; (2) they can offer support and empowerment; and (3) they can foster life-changing transformations for personal priorities and goals. (Werdel and Wicks, 2012, p. 166)

The language used by the priests in my study suggests that they felt traumatised by the crisis. As Geary has explained (2014, p. 51), trauma usually applies in medicine to the severity of injury, whereas in psychology it refers to a threat to a person’s assumptive world. Arguably, Catholic priests lived with a certain set of assumptions about the Church and their fellow priests although there is a lack of research to identify these assumptions.

Amongst the clergy in Ireland, Keenan (2012) found that “non-offending” clergy were not aware of any unusual behaviour of their convicted clerical colleagues, such as being alone in their room with children for long periods of time or having “friendships” with children and young people in the absence of more adult relationships.

While they may have been aware generally of inappropriate behaviour by priests, and may have known specific stories of priests who behaved inappropriately, none
of them could have imagined the scale and depth of the crisis, nor would they have understood the effects of abuse on children or their families. Also, what they regarded as the defensive response of bishops, which often re-traumatised victims and treated them as enemies rather than as parishioners in need of pastoral care and support, shocked these men and undermined their confidence in the Church leadership. The priests needed to find ways to make sense of the crisis and their responses show they continue to struggle to do so.

Werdel and Wicks (2012) suggest that religious and spiritual beliefs have a central role in the meaning-making process. They argue that, for many people, faith provides a unique framework to make sense of difficult times. They further suggest that for a significant number of people a religious belief system can be an unfailing way to make meaning of injustice, suffering and trauma that non-religious forms of coping cannot provide. However, as a researcher I find myself asking: “What happens when the religious institution to which one belongs and the religious belief of the person are the sources of the grief and trauma?” As the researcher, this was a critical finding. I am absolutely convinced that this brings another dimension to the sense of trauma, one which has existential repercussions for all my interviewees. Peter, for example, asked, “Where is God in all this?” This is a profound question and shows the depth to which this crisis has taken some priests in their reflection, faith and sense of self.

5.1.4. Spiritual crisis

West (Gubi, 2015) refers to a spiritual crisis, indeed any crisis of the human condition, as part of the human journey. He cites Anandarajah and Hight who state:
Spiritual distress and spiritual crisis occur when individuals are unable to find sources of meaning, hope, love, peace, comfort, strength and connection in life, or when conflict occurs between their beliefs and what is happening in their life. (Anandarajah and Hight, 2001, p. 83.)

Amongst all the interviewees there was, to varying extents, a spiritual crisis which was exacerbated by the fact that the reference point for the expression of their spirituality, and indeed their core identity, was the primary cause of their spiritual crisis.

5.1.5. Fear

The six priests who were interviewed revealed three fears as a result of the crisis: a fear of working with children, which was the initial motivation for this research; a fear for the Church, which they are part of and love; and a fear of false allegations. The Catholic Church has a network of schools across England and Wales. Priests, in their role as chaplains, would have been welcome visitors to schools and were (and are) often called upon to lead masses and other liturgies. Many parishes have youth clubs, groups of altar servers, youth events such as pilgrimages and social gatherings and, in recent years, many young people have participated in World Youth Day, a biennial gathering of young adults from the Catholic Church throughout the world. Priests acted as role models and sources of authority, often as mentors, in the lives of young people. This study demonstrates that the crisis may have had a damaging effect on this part of pastoral work of the Catholic Church. Christopher, for example, still visits primary schools and families, but is more cautious as a result of the crisis. Michael does not work pastorally with children but said that he would be more
careful and attentive to things. Safeguarding officers may be at pains to indicate how to work safely with young people; however, the combination of policies and protocols, which appear to cast suspicion over priests, and the feeling priests now have of a lack of freedom and creativity in their work with young people seem to have created a climate which is undermining their ability to work with young people.

Significantly, stories of false allegations and the way that priests are treated when an allegation is made against them have affected the priests deeply. Weafer (2014) shares accounts by two priests who were accused in the course of their ministry (Weafer, pp. 150, 154, and 165-67.) Both priests speak honestly about the necessity for protocols, even regarding investigations into priests who are accused. Both, however, felt that they had been badly treated by their bishops in the course of the investigation and, after being cleared, were hurt that the bishop would not write to their parishes saying that they had been found “innocent”. This suggests that the accusation leaves a stain on the priests’ life and ministry.

Priests who are aware of such stories are understandably afraid of the possibility of an accusation against them. No doubt there are priests who look back on behaviours and activities with young people which may have appeared innocent at the time – youth events, parish outings, sports matches or holidays – but which can be viewed differently in the light of recent allegations and convictions. Policies and practices were not the same when some of these men were young ordained priests working with young people.
The relevance of all the cited data from Weafer (2014) is its extraordinary similarity to that reported by my six interviewees and their mistrust of bishops (see above). The priests I interviewed said how unhelpful the lack of dialogue with bishops was. The purpose of the data from Weafer is to provide the context for my conclusions about the importance of healthy adult development in priests in order to have adult conversations with their bishop without fear.

5.1.6. Betrayal

It is worth beginning this section by quoting one of the priests who reveals the sense of shock and disappointment at the response of the bishops:

When I realised what had happened I was disappointed, I’m trying to find a word that is stronger than disappointed, I suppose shocked would count.

They have put the Church before the individual. (Anthony)

The issue of secrecy and “cover-ups” has been part of the discourse related to this crisis. Geary (2011) cites the review board of the United States and the Murphy Report which both note that bishops often appeared to have been chosen more for their orthodoxy than their management skills. While orthodoxy is desirable from a theological and moral perspective, it can be the antithesis of the very foundations of safeguarding. In these cases, it led to secrecy, lack of consultation and the concentration of power in a small number of clergy. This stance is in stark contrast to the Nolan Report’s call for “openness and transparency”.
This resonated with the six interviewees who saw the bishops’ approach and Church policy as betrayal (superordinate 4). Anthony spoke of priority being given to “the good name of the Church rather than care of individuals”, while Gerald went further to say the “biggest shock was that the Church was concerned about its image rather than doing the right thing”. Matthew found that the “betrayal of Church authorities is harder to bear than the initial scandal”. Philip said he thought that “priests have no confidence in bishops”.

The priests spoke about the need for change in the Church. Gerald, for example, said, “So, in a sense, I can say I belong to that institution and would like to see it change.” Daniel said that “it made me question the institution”. Peter spoke about “awkwardness,” a lack of “straightforwardness” and a need for “honesty” in the Church. Michael referred explicitly to a “cover-up” when he spoke about “the failures of leadership”. Later in his interview he referred to “the silencing of the victims”, which he found “appalling”. He also referred to a culture that allowed this evil to flourish and spoke about the need for a culture of “truth telling” to replace secrecy and silence. Gerald described the way the institutional Church has behaved and is behaving as wrong.

Referring to earlier decisions by bishops, Andrew, who was inclined to give the bishops the benefit of the doubt (“Please God our bishops are holy men”), spoke about some “silly and naïve decisions”, which “at the time … were probably prudent”. Prudence suggests a tendency to be cautious and to withhold information rather than share it. He said he was “disappointed” but did not use the word “anger” or related words.
The priests give the impression that they had moved from a Church where they felt secure and safe to one where they had to be careful about their behaviour and how others might interpret their behaviour. They could not take the bishop’s support for granted and would be more vulnerable if faced with an accusation.

The priests said that they had also been betrayed by the perpetrators. Speaking of a priest who had abused, Daniel said, “I also felt he’d betrayed us – the other priests he worked with.” Gerald, speaking about priests who had abused said, “I feel that they’ve brought a lot of good people into disrepute.” It is understandable that priests feel betrayed by men who were committed to the same life and ministry and who had behaved in ways that undermined the ministry of others and appeared to tarnish their work. Peter was particularly upset as there was a sacrilegious element involved in a story of abuse that he recounted. This abuse of the sacraments was something that he described as evil and, in that sense, represented a betrayal of all of his values as a priest.

5.1.7. Shame and isolation

The six priests all spoke about the sense of shame they experienced as a result of the behaviour of the priests who abused, and the criticism directed at the Church as a result of the handling of allegations by bishops. The scale of abuse and the impact of personal stories of victims led to a feeling of being collectively branded by the media, commentators, citizens and fellow Catholics. The Boston crisis (2001), the Ryan and Murphy Reports (2009) and individual cases involving abuse by a Catholic priest, bishop, monk or brother all lead to adverse media coverage and a recycling of old stories. Recent high-profile cases involving celebrities, while not
directly implicating the Catholic Church, do little to reduce the sense of shame felt by these men as the issue continues to receive prominent media attention.

Leith and Baumeister (1998) have written about the connection between shame and empathy. Shame is an emotion which involves an overall sense of being a bad person, with a global sense of being deficient, damaged or lacking in worth. The natural shame reaction involves hiding from others. This can be seen in abuse cases where the accused covers his face to avoid meeting people or being seen face-to-face. It is understandable that priests, whose ministry involves working with people, and who are often in a prominent position, feel vulnerable and embarrassed by the media attention they experience in the abuse crisis.

Tangney (2003, p. 388) contrasted the relationship between guilt and empathy and shame and empathy. She found that guilt and empathy “go hand in hand” (2003, p. 388). Shame, on the other hand, appears to interfere or “derail” the empathic processes. She writes that “the shamed individual is inclined to focus on himself or herself, as opposed to the harmed other” (Tangney, 2003, p. 389). These are important findings as they suggest that the shame priests are experiencing could have an inhibiting effect on their normal empathic response. In particular, it could lead to a lessening of empathy towards the victims of abuse, the very people who have been harmed most in this crisis.

The issue of clerical sexuality was a taboo area for most of these men’s lives. Keenan (2012, p. 30) writes that clerical sexuality in Ireland has been surrounded by a “conspiracy of silence”. It is arguable that the situation in England and Wales was
not substantially different. Suddenly, as a result of the crisis, it became a matter of
discussion and debate in national media. Daniel, for example, said: “Priests and
paedophilia … seem to be synonymous and I think we are an easy sort of target. It’s
very easy to say, ‘Well, you can’t trust them on any of these moral issues because
(a) they’re celibate or (b) they’re paedophiles.’ … And a lot of it is being perceived
as being celibate is weird anyway.” Michael said that “the Church’s teaching on
sexuality in general, together with the child abuse scandal, just makes me very
vulnerable because these are just incomprehensible to people”.

5.1.8. Identity

I noted earlier that Peter spoke about being a “convert” to the issue of clergy child
abuse. It is interesting that he used a religious image to communicate this change.
This suggests a change of beliefs and values, and sums up the experience of other
priests. The assumptive world of the priests, regarding the behaviour of priests, the
support of bishops and the regard of other people, has been changed profoundly and
this is reflected in my interviews.

Laing (1960) introduces the notion of ontological insecurity. This theory is derived
from an existential position which he refers to as “primary ontological security”. As
a researcher this term resonates with me as it equates to one of the superordinates in
Chapter 4 – Findings which pertained to insecurity as regards the interviewees’ core
identity (superordinate 2). Laing (1960) uses “ontology” as a derivative of the term
“being”. He goes on to expand on the notion that ontological insecurity is
experienced as the following:
The partial or almost complete absence of the assurances derived from an existential position of what I shall call primary ontological security. (Laing, 1960, p. 39)

Laing characterises three types of anxiety experienced by the ontologically insecure person: engulfment, implosion and petrification.

“Engulfment” refers to an experience where a person feels the need to argue simply to preserve their existence; it is similar to being cornered. Engulfment is not envisaged as happening simply. Laing (1960) uses various images to describe ways in which identity is threatened: “being buried, being drowned, being caught and being dragged down into quicksand” (Laing, 1960, p. 45).

Laing (1960) defines “implosion”:

This is the strongest word I can find for the extreme form of what Winnicott terms the impingement of reality. Impingement does not convey, however, the full terror of the experience of the world as liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate all identity as a gas will rush in and obliterate a vacuum. (Laing, 1960, p. 45)

With “implosion” a person feels that, like a vacuum, he or she is empty. Any contact with reality is then felt to be a dreadful threat.
“Petrification” refers to a particular form of terror, *i.e.* turned to stone. The dread is that of being depersonalised from a living person into an inanimate thing, from a “someone” to an “it”. Depersonalisation is a widely used technique to deal with the other when he/she becomes too tiresome or disturbing (Laing, 1960, p. 46). At this stage, the person requires constant confirmation from others of their own existence as a person. Laing (1960) suggests that most relationships are based on some partial depersonalisation tendency. He goes on to suggest that an ontologically insecure person experiences this risk in a greatly enhanced form.

The priests also spoke about a relationship of trust with the Church and Church leaders. Peter said he was “very, very naïve” as a young man. Gerald described the Church as “nurturing” and Daniel spoke of priests he knew as a child who were “inspirational”. Michael spoke about retreats where he could experience God in a personal way. Daniel agreed that he “lived and breathed” the Church from an early age. The Church that is revealed in these quotations is one that inspired these men to dedicate their lives to the service of others and to make a promise or vow of celibacy. They immediately were given a place of esteem within the Catholic Church and society. Christopher said that when he was first ordained he felt “very much put on a pedestal”. The abuse crisis revealed things through the media that were “horrific”, “sordid”, harmful, scandalous and embarrassing.

A number of the priests I interviewed spoke in ways that demonstrated that internal adjustments had taken place. Gerald said that during his formation he experienced the Church as “powerful, structured, nurturing” and that he “easily identified with the Church”. It was somewhere he belonged, a “Catholic cocoon”. He referred to his
shock at the number of abuse cases as the parish priest was the face of the institutional Church and that “you then become the representative of a body which was deceptive”. He asked himself, “How do you live with that?” He added that “your position is untenable, in that you can’t not be the parish priest”. These excerpts reveal that Gerald wrestled with his role and identity when faced with both the facts of what had happened and the reactions of other people. He moved to a point of hoping that people could still see good in the Church. He realised that in order to continue as a priest in the Church he had to accept the accusations made against it.

This analysis of Gerald’s words reveals a lot of processing regarding self-identity and his relationship with the Church. He struggles with the question about how to be the public face of the Church, maintaining his own integrity while acknowledging the failings of the institution. He suggests that all of this is necessary in order to have a new sense of self and to retain credibility with parishioners and the public. The other priests spoke about similar issues. Peter, for example, spoke about the move away from conformity in all aspects of priestly life. This suggests a new relationship between priests and their bishops, and their accepted role in the Church.

Worden (2010) suggests that part of the task of adjusting to the loss requires spiritual adjustments which relate to one’s values, beliefs and assumptions about the world. The priests note a level of hostility against the Church, particularly from the media and comedians but also from children. Gerald said priests had become a “laughing stock”. Daniel said some of the bishops are just like lawyers, who now assume that a priest is guilty and that the priest has to prove he is innocent. Gerald
spoke about needing to watch his own back and the institution’s back. Peter spoke about having had a juvenile relationship with his bishop when he was first ordained and about “having to grow up a bit”.

5.2. Grief and loss

The second superordinate theme which came out of my interviews was that all six felt grief and a sense of loss. This adversely affected the identity which they thought was theirs as priests, their respect for and confidence in the authority of the Church and at least some of the reference points which guided their lives.

The shock of the revelations led the participants to a reappraisal of the way that the Church authorities had handled such cases in the past. With the exception of Andrew, who was ordained after the abuse crisis became a focus of media attention, the other priests said that they had been unaware of such behaviour by priests. Chris, for example, said that he was “completely innocent of any thoughts that way”. The Nolan report and the Irish scandal led to a realisation that “some terrible things” had gone on.

The Church they are part of has survived; but it is different in many ways so that aspects of that Church, and the ways of believing, thinking and acting that were part of it, have also been changed. In this context it is useful to explore models of grief and loss to help to understand the experiences of the priests.
5.2.1. Kübler-Ross’s stages of grieving

Viewed as a whole, the superordinate themes that were explored in the findings chapter have some similarity to the stages of grief as described by Kübler-Ross (1969) in her seminal work *On Death and Dying*. She identified five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. She proposed that each stage represented a different emotional state that people go through when facing death, traumatic events or any significant life change. Subsequently, psychiatrists and grief experts added two more stages to the cycle which is now known as the seven stages of grieving. As will be seen, the stages do not exactly match the experiences of the priests, and some stages resonate more than others.

**Shock:** The first stage of the grieving process is both internal and external shock. It may take several minutes to comprehend what has happened before experiencing symptoms of physical shock: difficulty breathing, a sensation of extreme coldness, numbness and becoming pale. While the six priests did not describe physical symptoms, all of them spoke in terms of the shock that they experienced as a result of the crisis. The sense of shock is communicated effectively in the following response:

> I was shocked and annoyed when I heard what some priests had done. I couldn’t believe it. (Christopher, p. 24, l. 16)

**Denial:** The second stage involves continuing on with normal life as if nothing had happened. It is marked by a refusal to talk about what has occurred and by a belief that there must have been a mistake and that everything is fine after all. All but one
of the priests in this study said that their initial response to the crisis was denial. Daniel, when asked about his initial reactions in the mid-nineties on hearing the first reports of sexual abuse of children by priests, said:

   My initial reaction was denial, really. I thought well this must be some sort of anti-clericalist secularist thing to discredit the Church. (Daniel)

   It would not be accurate to say, however, that they continued to be in denial about the crisis at the time of the interviews. In terms of Kübler-Ross’s model, it seems that the priests had passed through this stage and no longer denied that abuse had taken place or the scale of it. They also, for the most part, no longer tried to defend the response of the bishops and religious leaders. The one exception was Andrew, the most recently ordained, who took a more sympathetic view of the good intentions and poor response of the bishops. Interestingly, all of the interviewees acknowledged that their initial response was denial; but it seemed to me that what they were referring to was more akin to disbelief than denial.

All six priests acknowledged that there had been denial by the Church as an institution, which was reflected in the response of bishops and the avoidance of any discussion or training about the issue of child sexual abuse by clergy. Gerald, for example, commenting on the Church in Ireland, said, “I still feel that the Church’s reaction … or solution to the Irish situation seems to be ‘well, if people were more prayerful, if priests were separated in training it would all go away’. It still seems to be completely naïve.” This suggests that he thinks the Church is still in denial about aspects of the crisis and its implications. The interviewees also said that they
avoided talking about it in sermons and did not discuss it with parishioners. All six priests were clear that the Church could not go on as before.

**Anger:** Then there is an explosion of anger, often with the theme of “Why is this happening to me?” According to Kübler-Ross’s model, other people are blamed for the problem, possibly including those who are unaffected because they are not suffering. The focus of the anger varied for each of the priests, with considerable overlap: anger at the priests who had abused, anger at bishops for their poor response, and anger over betraying the Church, the victims, innocent priests and priests who had been accused or found guilty of abuse. They were also angry at the media for the way priests were presented, especially by comedians on television. The anger issue has been discussed in more detail earlier in this chapter and elsewhere.

**Bargaining:** This involves clinging to often unrealistic schemes or ideas in the hope that the problem can be solved and everything will return to normal. The priests spoke of their appreciation of the safeguarding measures being put in place in dioceses, even though the measures had affected their ministry. Daniel, as we have seen, spoke about a “loss of spontaneity”, and this is reflected in the responses of other priests who spoke about the way they had changed their behaviour in some circumstances, especially regarding their ministry with children. The policies, reports and safeguarding procedures could be interpreted as a response of the Church as an institution in order to be seen to be dealing with the scandal in an appropriate way, so that it could then return to its work as a Church and retain the structures as they were before. Chris, for example, spoke about the paramountcy
principle (Children’s Act, 1989), adopted as national policy by the Catholic Church in England and Wales (2001), as a burden, but could see that it enabled him to continue with his ministry. Other priests echoed similar sentiments.

**Depression:** On realising there is no way to bargain away the problem, depression follows. This stage can last for extended periods and can be debilitating. It can include believing that nothing good will ever happen again and rebuffing all attempts to find constructive solutions. As far as I could determine, none of the priests I interviewed was suffering from depression in a clinical sense, though all reported what might be described as “low spirits”. This can be seen in their use of words and phrases such as: “perplexed”, “uncomfortable”, “the damage it had done”, “coping with”, “undermining”, “upsetting”, “unease”, “sadness”, “drained”, “deadening effect” and “insecurity”. It can also be seen in their comments on the damage to the Church’s reputation and on the effect on the relationship between priests and bishops.

**Testing:** The sixth stage involves looking for ways to change thinking to lift the depression. The priests come across as what Weafer (2014) calls “pastoral pragmatists”. They all spoke about how they have adjusted their pastoral practice so they are not alone with children, are more cautious in social situations and use the Diocesan Safeguarding Commission, brother priests or friends to know how best to deal with specific situations. In that sense there is evidence of “testing” out how best to adjust their pastoral work in the light of the scandal without compromising their ministry as priests. Michael, for example, talking about his own practice, said, “There are things that I wouldn’t do now that I might have done previously in terms
of socializing with students.” David spoke about a situation here, responded very carefully and wondered if he was being overly cautious.

All the priests spoke about ways that they were more aware of safeguarding issues and did not want to put themselves in situations where there could even be an appearance of inappropriate behaviour. They spoke about being cautious, using common sense, being more aware; they provided specific circumstances where they had consulted friends, parents, teachers or safeguarding officers to be sure about how to proceed. The priests were clearly going through a stage of testing new ways of understanding and behaviour in order to protect children but also to protect themselves from the possibility of a false allegation.

**Acceptance:** The final stage of grieving involves actively moving forward to deal creatively with future needs. The priests in the study expressed anger, sadness, disappointment, shock and betrayal; but they also demonstrated a sense of accommodation with what had happened in the positive sense of wanting to move on with their pastoral work. There was a level of acceptance about what had happened. Regarding the Church, which he had criticised for its poor response, Gerald said, “Even the institutional Church that, as you say, I represent, there is good in it.” They all continued their pastoral work, albeit with adjustments to their behaviour in the light of new policies and procedures.

5.2.2. Worden

As can be seen, the stages of grief outlined by Kübler-Ross, and later developed by others, have some value when trying to understand the experience of these six
priests. When we turn to the work of Worden (20010), we find a different and potentially more useful approach. Worden, building on the work of Kübler-Ross, conceptualises grief in terms of tasks rather than stages. He distinguishes between mourning, where the individual adapts to the loss, and grief, which refers to the personal experience of the loss (Worden, 2010, pp. 25). He explains that people who are bereaved are faced with important questions such as: “What will my life look like now? What did the deceased’s life mean? How can I feel safe in a world such as this?” (Worden, 2010, p. 5).

Worden proposes tasks for grieving and emphasizes that people do not engage with or complete them in any particular order because grief is slightly different for everyone:

Each person’s grief is like all other people’s grief; each person’s grief is like some other person’s grief; and each person’s grief is like no other person’s grief. (Worden, 2010, p. 8)

Mourning does not proceed in a linear fashion and some parts of the process may need to be revisited or reworked at later stages (Worden, 2010). Worden incorporates into his model ways of conceptualising the grief process in phases or stages. He prefers the idea of tasks to stages as this presents grieving as a more active process than the rather passive idea involved in passing through stages or phases. It also benefits from Freud’s idea of “grief work” (Worden, 2010, p. 27). The individual can actively process the grief and can be helped to do this by others.
The tasks relate to the loss of a loved one, and can be adapted to understand the loss and grieving of the priests in this study, who are all deeply committed to and “love” the Church. The priests spoke of their loss of a former identity as priests, the loss of focus and authority, their loss of confidence in the institutional Church and the loss of a reference point in their lives and work as priests. Worden proposes four tasks of grieving.

**To accept the reality of the loss:** Worden’s first task of grieving involves a number of Kübler-Ross’s stages, from the initial shock, denial or disbelief to the acceptance of the reality of the loss with the changes that this involves. Worden suggests that there needs to be an intellectual acceptance of the fact of the loss. This can be seen in the way the priests spoke about moving from their initial denial of the first accusations to the impossibility of denying what had taken place. Peter, for example, said, “I just thought, you know, this is all unreal.” He goes on to report how changes occurred: “And I just remember how it changed a very easy relationship … with schools in particular … but everywhere really. They were suddenly very aware.”

Gerald said that he realised that the Church was “into self-preservation”.

Worden (2010) requires an emotional acceptance of the loss. In Peter’s case, the emotional acceptance came through his personal experience of listening to a victim of abuse in a particularly horrific and unsettling case. Peter said, “I suppose that was really my first direct experience of it, and I just hadn’t any notion of it and of the depth of the destructiveness of it … So of course, then in a sense, I’m almost a convert.” It is interesting to note that Peter makes use of religious language to make sense of the process of emotional change. I will return to this later in the discussion.
Worden (2010) notes that traditional rituals can help people to move towards acceptance. None of the priests mentioned a parish, deanery or diocesan liturgy or meeting being organised to help the priests to acknowledge the impact of the abuse and the feelings involved.

Worden (2010) makes it clear that not everyone experiences grief in the same way. This can be seen in the responses of the six priests in this study. Those who, like Peter, had personally met victims seemed to be affected more profoundly than others. The priest who was most recently ordained, Andrew, appeared less affected than the priests who had been in ministry for some time. According to Worden (2010), the easiest way to avoid the work involved in this task is to cut off from painful feelings and deny that the pain exists. All of the priests in this study spoke of some degree of upset or distress. This may reflect personality differences as much as anything else.

**Work through the pain of grief:** It appears that the six priests are struggling to come to terms with the pain, grief and other emotions they experience as a result of the loss. As Worden (2010) identifies, a person’s experience of loss leads to an insecure attachment to or conflicted relationship with that which was lost. In this situation, the insecure attachment affects their relationship to the Church as an institution and their particular diocese as a specific part of their day-to-day lives. This particular superordinate theme is complicated because each interviewee retains both common and individual responses to the crisis.
Adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing: Worden (2010) identifies three different adjustments that are part of the third task of grieving: first, there are external adjustments that relate to how the loss affects one’s normal functioning in the world. Secondly, the loss involves internal adjustments which relate to how the loss affects one’s sense of self. Thirdly, there are spiritual adjustments that relate to the person’s “beliefs, values and assumptions about the world” (Worden, 2010, p. 32).

All of the priests spoke about how they had adjusted their pastoral practice as a result of the revelations of abuse, the changed perceptions of lay people and the media and new policies and procedures. Andrew, for example, said that the crisis had not changed the way he did things, as seminary had prepared him for this new reality. At the same time, he said he had thought how best to manage confessional practice, where a priest will find himself alone with a child. The old Church has gone for these men, with the assumptions, securities and blind spots that were part of it, and the priests now operate with more awareness. There is loss involved in this, particularly the loss of a certain freedom in ministry. Peter referred to being cautious in the playground with children, and Chris said that he stopped taking the altar servers to McDonald’s as a treat once a year. He spoke about being “quite wary about children”.

To find an enduring connection to the deceased while embarking on a new life: All of my interviewees expressed a sense of grief and loss over a Church with which they felt familiar but which had now been undermined. The priests who were interviewed continue to be priests in good standing with their dioceses or religious
orders. In a sense, their whole life requires a continued connection to the Church, which was also the source of their suffering. The priests did not embark on a new life; it might be more accurate to say that they continue with their chosen life but with new awareness and changed perspectives of themselves, the Church as an institution and of the world where they work and minister.

5.2.3. Spiritual grieving

A distinctive feature of Worden’s model of grieving, which is particularly relevant to priests, is his identification of the spiritual task of grieving. Doyle (2009) notes his loss was fundamentally spiritual in nature. Worden (2010) explains this in terms of meaning-making. He suggests that, in order to move on from the loss and grief, a person has to construct a new understanding of reality that acknowledges the loss and creates a new meaning structure which includes the loss but is not defined or paralysed by it. He writes: “Most people ... usually decide that they must fill the roles to which they are unaccustomed, develop skills they never had and move forward with a reassessed sense of themselves and the world” (Worden, 2010, p. 35). We have seen this in the way they have had to implement safeguarding policies and practices, make adjustments to pastoral practice in their work with children and discuss with colleagues, family and friends appropriate behaviour in certain circumstances.

The trauma which Doyle (2009) explores could not be recognised until he was able to connect with his denial and his dependence on the Church system for security. He echoed my own experience of interviewing the six participants who described the Church as their past, present and future. The findings from the interviews I
conducted, whilst not as pronounced, certainly echoed many of Doyle’s concerns (Doyle, 2009). Like Doyle, my interviewees found it hard to reconcile the responses of the Church leadership with the official teachings of the Church. Peter, for example, asked if the Church culture prized integrity as much as it should. And asked if “there isn’t an awkwardness and a straightforwardness and an honesty that we need to have”. Implicitly, he is acknowledging these things are lacking in the Church as an institution. Similarly, Anthony said, “The Church has made some rather silly and naïve decisions.”

5.3. Moving forward

It is clear from the interviews that all of the priests have a profound sense of loyalty to the Church. They are all, to the best of my knowledge, still in ministry. They have overcome their initial disbelief, have read the reports, watched television programmes and endured the mockery of comedians and rejection from some people. Yet they still continue to function as priests in the Church in a range of settings. They speak of finding forgiveness for the perpetrators, and of the need for the Church to extend its care to them. Many said that they feel more confident now as a result of improvements in safeguarding policies and practices, and as a result of the positive response of friends, families, parishioners and fellow priests. In itself this is a remarkable story of faith, tenacity and resilience.

As discussed in Chapter 2 – Literature review themes, Weafer’s (2014) research touches on some of the comments made by my six interviewees:
I’ve got confidence in myself, and in other people interpreting what I do. I’ve been here and the people are gaining confidence in me. (Christopher, p. 31, ll. 9-10)

It’s exceptionally horrific. I think the bishops’ commitment is genuine. They are wanting to do the right thing … by survivors, perpetrators, families, communities, everyone. (Phillip, p. 61, l. 2)

In the earlier part of this thesis I discussed feelings of shock, shame, sadness, anger and fear. These are considered as negative emotions, and they tend towards behaviours which are designed to protect the self. Focusing on one specific action or response often does this, for example, when experiencing fear the person feels an urge to fight or escape. If the person feels angry, it suggests that a boundary has been crossed and the anger response is a way to communicate this to the other person. It has been suggested that sadness leads to the person retreating within themselves to regroup in order to adjust to loss before being able to pick up their lives and move on as normal (Weafer, 2004).

Frederickson (1998, 2000, 2001) has researched what she refers to as “the role of positive emotions”. She explains that the dominant model for understanding emotions is that an emotion is a result of meaning that a person gives to an event. She argues, as shown above, that whilst negative emotions narrow a person’s thought and focus (i.e. to fight, flight or freeze, whichever seems most beneficial for survival), positive emotions have a potential to broaden a person’s thoughts and
perspectives. For her, positive emotions have the potential to restore flexible thinking.

The interviewees discussed serious issues, yet there was often humour and shared appreciation of an amusing comment or anecdote when talking to the priests. They were focused and had moved to a place where they were able to continue with their ministry in a positive way with support from inside and outside the Church. This social support is a valuable resource which enables them to remain resilient in the face of the enormity of what has happened.

If, as Frederickson proposes (2001), the fostering of positive emotions is related to how people construe personal “meaning”, then religion is ideally placed to provide a meaning structure for people, in both ordinary events in life and major life changes. Worden (2010) has related the task of grieving to spirituality. He suggests that spirituality for the grieving involves finding meaning in the loss. Frederickson’s theory is a valuable resource when we consider how to respond, for example through therapy, to any non-offending priest. Geary and Greer (2011) challenge the Church, as a grieving community, to put aside its disillusionment and accept the task before it without flinching. It appears that the priests in this study have resources they can call on to face this challenge.

5.3.1. The importance of facilitating difficult conversations

One of the outcomes of this study has been the positive experience of the priests to the interviews, as it created a space where they could share their feelings about the crisis and have their feelings heard and respected in a non-judgmental way. I raise
this particular issue because it bears direct relevance to the experience reported by the interviewees in Chapter 4 – Findings.

As noted in Chapter 2 – Literature review themes, the effects of a well-conducted qualitative interview/conversation can give the participants new insight into the topic. We find examples of this honesty in the comments of some of the priests who were part of this study. Matthew expressed the “need to talk about this in very explicit and practical terms”, while Anthony admitted that he “sometimes feel inadequate, despite the training”. Daniel said priests, as men, should be more “in touch with their emotions”.

A related issue is the capacity of priests to have adult conversations with their bishops. As far as I know, none of the bishops of England and Wales has called the priests of his diocese together to a meeting with a facilitator to explore issues related to the abuse crisis, or about sexuality and celibate priesthood. In other countries there have been workshops or speakers have addressed priests as Dr Robert Wicks addressed Boston priests and Fr Timothy Radcliffe, OP, a highly regarded priest and speaker, spoke to the priests of Dublin. Archbishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican City, spoke to the priests of Motherwell diocese in Scotland after the scandal involving the reports of sexual behaviour and the 2013 resignation of Cardinal Keith O’Brien. But nowhere, to my knowledge, has a diocese called priests together to reflect, discuss and dialogue with the leadership about the abuse, its implications and the consequences for priests and for their relationship with their bishop.
Weafer (2014) notes that priests who speak honestly to bishops are often seen to suffer for their honesty. Daniel quoted another priest as saying “that’s typical of bishops. They don’t want to know you if they think they are going to hear something they don’t want to hear or would be uncomfortable to hear. And if anything happened to you they would hang you out to dry.”

According to Weafer (2014), bishops have various ways of “punishing” priests, from appointing them to unattractive parishes (especially financially) to keeping them on the margins of the diocese. He writes:

Most of the research participants are aware of priests who have been punished by a bishop, and many of them gave personal accounts of being bullied by a parish priest. (Weafer, 2014, p. 217)

Writing of younger priests, he comments:

Some of them said they are frustrated by the lack of consultation and domineering attitude of their superiors. Typically, they are appointed to their parishes by bishops, without consultation, and they are expected to obey their parish priests. (Weafer, 2014, p. 217)

He quoted one curate as saying that it is never wise to challenge your bishop in public as “it will be noted” (Weafer, 2014, p. 173). He said that most priests acted out of fear and had learned discretion. He goes on to say that, although they are
afraid of confronting their bishops because of possible consequences, the priests of all ages develop a certain independence of action in their own parishes:

My research suggests that while Irish diocesan priests are constrained in many ways by a highly structured and strictly hierarchical Church, they also have the capacity to think and act relatively independently in certain circumstances. (Weafer, 2014, p. 217)

While priests have learned a certain pastoral pragmatism in their parish work, Weafer (2014) writes that there is a danger of a kind of developmental splitting, where they act as adults in their parishes and children with their bishop. One priest in his study said:

In my experience bishops have very poor people-management skills and guys get hurt when wrong decisions are made because the proper conversation never happens. (Weafer, 2014, p. 172)

It is reasonable to conclude from Weafer’s research, the results of the interviews with the six priests who participated in my research and anecdotal evidence amongst priests, that there is still not a healthy culture of adult conversations between many priests and their bishops. Peter, for example, said that in the past priests were expected to conform. He said, “I think things ought to be a lot more open” and that “there was a lack of trust in the bishop”. He added, “I think that’s where we have got to grow up a bit in our relationships … the honesty thing …. We ought to be able to
have an adult relationship.” Peter is voicing the experience of many priests and he reflects the research undertaken by Weafer (2014).

5.3.2. A new model for the formation of priests

In exploring how the priest-bishop tension has contributed to the crisis, Keenan (2012) identifies an unhealthy dynamic that appears to lie at the heart of the experience of diocesan priesthood: how to be an adult in a system that rewards dependent and collusive behaviour. Weafer (2014, p. 159) reports that the majority of priests said that seminary did not prepare them well for life as an adult. The same comments are found in the priests who were interviewed for this study. Peter said that “it was very much a matter of keeping the rules and all that sort of stuff”.

These observations indicate a need for a model of human development for priests which takes account of their promise of obedience. Fairbairn (2015), a Scottish psychoanalytic thinker, proposed an elegantly simple model of human development which takes account of the human propensity to become stuck in dependent relationships. Fairbairn proposed that we move from the absolute dependence of infancy, through the quasi-independence of adolescence, to the mature interdependence of adulthood. Infantile dependence is clearly not a healthy place to be for an adult, yet the descriptions of some of the behaviours of some priests seems to fit his description. Rubens writes:

The state of mature dependence implies a recognition of the separateness of individuals, even while they are involved in the most intimate and interdependent of relationships. Separateness thus in no way implies
isolation, or even disconnection. Rather, separateness hinges on the recognition of the existence of the selfhood of the other …. It should be clear that perhaps the most salient practical touchstone for this sort of separateness will be the recognition and acceptance of individual responsibility. (Reubens, 2015, p. 102)

The pastorally pragmatic priests described by Weafer (2014) – those who try to “keep their heads down” but who are somewhat afraid of their superiors – appear to have established a way of acting that reflects quasi-independence. They have not achieved true selfhood and do not develop responsibility for themselves in their relationship with their bishop. They relate to their bishop in terms of his role and not as a person “who is in a role”. Mature interdependence requires a capacity to behave in an adult way, and to engage in adult conversations with peers and those in authority, respectful of their role but not losing a sense of self and autonomy in the process. This also requires a similar capacity and skill among the bishops.

5.3.3. Systemic and individual dysfunctionality

The secrecy and other systemic dysfunctionality evident during my research indicate a serious flaw in the Church’s handling of sexual abuse by some clergy. The clerical culture created a culture of entitlement to respect for simply being a priest. The hierarchical system of the Church and loyalty to its hierarchy has been in place since the first century. Its members are expected to do what they are told and go where they are sent. Dissent is perceived as intolerable betrayal (Smyth, 2005). This hierarchical system is still very much evident. Priests often have little or no say in
the major decisions that affect their lives. A possible consequence of this
dysfunctionality is arrested development.

As a long-serving priest and, in this case, an insider-researcher, I have seen that in
most areas priests have highly tuned and effective social skills. Their role demands
considerable competence and ability. However as a researcher and a therapist, I see
arrested psychosexual development as contributing to the clergy’s response to this
very difficult scandal.

The hierarchical nature of the Church means that addressing the contribution of the
clerical culture to the scandal can only come from the top down. Those who
challenge the institution can find themselves isolated and deserted by those from
whom they would like support. My interviewees reported that they felt
overwhelmed when new allegations emerged in the media. While they raised
concern about what, if anything, they should say to their parishioners, they did not
take Geary’s (2011) more radical options of remaining a deviant or leaving the
group.

The more I reflected on what the interviewees shared, the more I saw unanimous
gratitude for being allowed to have a conversation about such a critical issue. Each
participant acknowledged the Church had finally begun to react appropriately and
had introduced robust safeguarding policies and procedures. Each of the
interviewees appreciated the opportunity to share their experience of being innocent
priests in the shadow of this scandal. As Philip said: “It’s just horrendous; I have
never spoken to anyone about this.”
This research appears to show that difficult conversations and training about taboo subjects can only be achieved if either a conversation or a training module is mandatory. Can change, other than superficial change, ever take place in the absence of a substantial therapeutic alliance and adherence to the following six Rogerian core conditions?

1. Therapist-client psychological contact: This first condition states that the therapist and client must have a relationship for the client to achieve positive personal change. The following five factors are characteristics of the therapist-client relationship, and they may vary by degree.

2. Client incongruence or genuineness: A discrepancy between the client’s self-image and actual experience makes him/her vulnerable to fears and anxieties. The client is often unaware of the incongruence.

3. Therapist congruence or genuineness: The therapist should be self-aware, genuine and congruent. This does not imply that the therapist is perfect, but that he/she be true to themselves in the therapeutic relationship.

4. Therapist unconditional regard: The client’s experiences, positive and negative, should be accepted by the therapist without conditions or judgement. The client can thereby share experiences without fear of being judged.

5. Therapist empathy: The therapist demonstrates empathetic understanding of the client’s experiences and recognises emotional experiences without getting emotionally involved.

6. Client perception: To some degree, the client perceives the therapist’s unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding. This is communicated through the therapist’s words and behaviour. This research also shows that having the confidence to have difficult conversations is challenging but not impossible if a person’s self-worth and intrinsic dignity are integral to the process.
Safeguarding policies and procedures can only be fully introduced and applied when used in conjunction with the co-operation of bishops, priests, laity and professionals who are employed by statutory authorities.

In this scandal, we have to acknowledge that the Church is imperfect. The hierarchy failed to act transparently and consistently in handling the crisis. There is a need for respectful dialogue/conversations at all levels and for openness and transparency so the Church responds effectively to the greatest threat since the Reformation (Dowd, 2010).

5.4. Conclusion

One of the common themes amongst the participants was the “brotherhood of the priesthood”. This sense of brotherhood, without exception, was extended to fellow priests who were convicted offenders and who, in many cases, had admitted their guilt. Despite a sense of betrayal, each of the interviewees expressed concern for the welfare of their fellow convicted priests. This was echoed in Keenan’s (2012) research with priests in Ireland. During my interviews, the priests expressed their concern about how clergy perpetrators were treated by Church authorities. Some of the interviewees thought that the Church’s response was much worse than society’s as a whole. As part of my work as a Diocesan Safeguarding Co-Ordinator, I visited on six occasions convicted clergy sex offenders in prison. Significantly, each of them informed me of two things: life in prison was easier than their experience of seminary and they felt that they had been given more care in prison than they had by
their bishop or religious superior. As Keenan (2012) points out, despite the popular view that the Catholic Church is soft on clergy perpetrators, the reality is that for some the barely concealed anger that clergy perpetrators encounter from some of their bishops or religious superiors makes their lives almost intolerable.

It should be stated for the sake of balance that sometimes fellow priests’ perception of unfair and uncompassionate treatment is not always accurate. Given the particularly sensitive issues surrounding allegations of sexual abuse by clergy, information and full disclosure are not always possible. In my experience, all allegations were taken seriously and all parties were treated with the utmost respect and compassion. This was the reported experience of people whom I investigated, including those who were guilty and those who were imprisoned (before, during and after their incarceration). Despite this being the reported experience, there was still a perception by some clergy that Safeguarding Commissions sometimes conduct unnecessary witch-hunts and work on the premise that accused perpetrators are guilty until proven innocent. As mentioned above, the policies and procedures are a tool for ensuring good practice and the fair treatment of all parties concerned.

A group of priests exists which has very particular needs, both individually and as a body. They require that their plight to be recognised and that an appropriate response and/or intervention be put in place.
Chapter Six

Conclusions

The Roman Catholic Church globally and in England and Wales in particular has gone to great lengths to institute policies and practices to protect children from sexual abuse by the clergy and to begin to restore a good name which has been tarnished by this scandal. Its Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales has used its internal autonomy, within the policy guidance laid down by the Vatican for the Church in all countries, to reform its procedures related to safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults. As Sullivan noted at a 2009 Child Exploitation and Online Protection conference (CEOP), the Catholic Church in England and Wales has one of the highest standards of child protection policies and procedures in the country: its 2008 national safeguarding structures, the establishment of the Catholic Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults, child protection structures established in every diocese and arrangements for religious congregations to align with either regional religious commissions or with the local diocese. Its policies and procedures are now appropriately linked to new government arrangements for wider child protection.

It has joined with and, in some respects leads, initiatives by the British government and especially its Safeguarding Authority, other faith communities and agencies such as the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board in ensuring the protection of children and vulnerable adults. Ivereigh (2012) points out that the British
government now recommends the Catholic Church policies and procedures to other institutions as a model to follow. This is something I can attest to as both a priest and a counsellor of victims of clergy sexual abuse. This significant change in the Church’s response should not be overlooked.

While all six interviewees acknowledge that the bishops of England and Wales have made significant strides in responding to the clergy abuse crisis, some of their statements indicate the reforms are not totally understood by innocent priests. This may be because the reforms have been under-reported by both secular and religious media, and because the Church may need to do more to reach its priests. To the extent that it may be representative of the Catholic clergy generally, my research has found that this is far from the only area in which more needs to be done for innocent priests.

6.1. Summary of the findings

As I said in Chapter 3 – Methodology, I am convinced that the findings in this thesis demonstrate that adopting a qualitative methodology has produced results that may have been missed by other methodological tools. My focus was on conducting and analysing qualitative semi-structured interviews using IPA and hermeneutics. My position as an insider researcher, a priest with additional safeguarding experience interviewing brother priests, successfully complemented my chosen methodologies to enable this research to obtain what seem to be full and frank revelations from priests on a previously undiscussed taboo subject.
My interviews with the six non-offending priests produced near unanimity and cite superordinate themes which ran through their discussions with me: existential crisis, grief and loss, fear, betrayal, shame and isolation, impasse, lack of confidence in the institutional Church, and resilience and commitment. Only one of the six, the most recently ordained, did not feel a sense of existential crisis.

The feelings that they expressed ranged from being overwhelmed to losing their reference point, fear, betrayal, humiliation, tension and disillusionment. These were balanced by feelings of loyalty, tenacity, forgiveness and faith which were enabling them to maintain their roles as priests. But the research also found contradictions, ambiguities and confusion which likely indicate continuing difficulties in processing the effects of trauma from the Church’s child sex abuse scandal.

If the experiences of these six priests are representative of the broad Church, my research has revealed that innocent clergy have been seriously affected psychologically by this crisis and that the Church, globally and domestically, has yet to recognise and address these issues as well as radical issues related to their role in ministry and their relationship with their bishops.

There is strong evidence within this study of the stigma that non-offending priests still perceive that they have to endure. This is something that all my six interviewees expressed. During May/June 2015, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia contributed further to this by shining yet more light on the terrible abuse committed by Church leaders there. The public hearings are revealing some gut-wrenching personal accounts: stories of young
people (and their families) crippled by sexual abuse; stories of utter betrayal; stories
the Church would rather not hear but stories it must hear; stories that renew the
stigma for innocent priests.

For the six priests I interviewed, and it would seem for priests throughout the world,
the relationship between clergy and laity continues to be severely tested. They
reported a continuing lack of confidence in dealing with minors as well as a decline
in their reputation. It will perhaps be many years before priests feel confident to
associate with children and young people to the extent that they enjoyed prior to the
sex abuse scandal (Jenkins 1996).

One of my primary concerns is the reported poor or complete lack of
communication between the six interviewees and their bishop/superior. The six also
found it difficult to comprehend how Church authorities could allow abusing priests
to profess repentance only to continue their activities when re-assigned by their
trusting bishop or religious superior. One of the recurring superordinate themes
from the interviews pertained to the priests’ lack of confidence in the culture of the
institutional Church because of its response to the sexual abuse crisis.

The priests said how much they valued their research interview as it provided the
first forum to reflect on the crisis and to think about it in a meaningful way.

One of the themes that emerged was the deep bond of brotherhood that exists
between priests. All the priests I interviewed were in no doubt that priests who
sexually abuse children had betrayed a sacred trust. But this was balanced by a desire to offer treatment and support to the men who had behaved in this way.

All the six interviewees reported that the sexual abuse of children by some in the clergy caused them the most anxiety and was both spiritually and theologically disturbing. They also reported that their main challenge was trying to balance forgiveness for the perpetrators with their own strong sense of outrage, disgust and betrayal.

As to the research question “What is the impact on non-offending Catholic Priests in England and Wales of the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy?”, I believe the answer can be summarised very succinctly in the eight emerging superordinate themes. The priests whom I interviewed reported an *Existential Crisis* in their sense of priesthood, ministry and identity. They also experienced *Grief and Loss*. Also, there were feelings of *Fear, Betrayal, Shame and Isolation*. Five of the six interviewees felt that there was a disconnect between their experiences and views and the official stance of the Church. This led to a feeling of *Impasse* which, in turn, led to a lack of *Confidence* in the institutional Church as regards this issue. Despite these experiences, these priests demonstrated a personal *Resilience* and a continuing commitment to the Church. As the researcher, as well as an insider, for me the overwhelming impact of the abuse crisis and the way it was managed by the Church authorities was the reported feeling of betrayal of all six interviewees. I found it interesting to note that, whilst the feeling of having been shamed and let down and the anger against the perpetrators who were brother priests were manifestly evident, it was the feeling of betrayal by Church authorities, both national and international,
that caused the deepest wound. Thus, at one level a sense of betrayal, whilst a superordinate them in its own right, was a thread running through all the superordinate themes.

6.2. Recommendations

The proposals in this chapter could assist the Church and its clergy to deal with this aspect of the crisis if the experiences of the priests I interviewed are common to those whose group is subjected to this type of scandal. They could be useful for other faiths and for non-religious organizations such as those in education and childcare because the incidence of child sex abuse in the United Kingdom is alarmingly high and is by no means confined to the Roman Catholic Church. Recently, the Methodist Church in Britain made a public apology after an independent investigation unearthed nearly 2,000 cases of reported abuse dating back to the 1950s. Two hundred allegations involved Methodist ministers (*The Guardian*, 28th May 2015).

Rev. Dr Martyn Atkins, General Secretary of the Methodist Conference, said in a statement:

> On behalf of the Methodist Church in Britain I want to express an unreserved apology for the failure of its current and earlier processes fully to protect children, young people and adults from physical and sexual abuse inflicted by some ministers. (*The Guardian*, 28 May 2015)
His statement reflects my view and the view of the priests in this research that co-ordination, co-operation, openness and transparency are the most effective tools available to address and to respond to this crisis. The only responsible course of action is to forge strong links with all organisations responsible for addressing this particularly difficult subject. This has proved to be especially true for the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, whose original “in-house” response of avoiding publicity and the criminal courts system proved painfully inappropriate and inadequate.

6.2.1. Challenges for the Catholic Church

For any culture to survive in an institution, many in the institution have to support it, explicitly or implicitly, actively or passively. Even now it is, in my view as a long-serving priest, still very difficult for anyone in the Catholic Church to find the courage to accuse a priest of abuse. Bishops’ Conferences and civilian authorities did not respond well to the accusations that were made, as the Ryan (2009) and Murphy (2009) Reports found in Ireland. These reports were also known to my six interviewees who expressed concern about the Church’s response and its collusion with other Irish authorities.

All large institutions develop mechanisms of defensiveness. However, one unusual element in life in the Church makes its defensive mechanisms even more damaging: the Church controls the training of its leaders. In my experience, seminaries can produce dedicated, devout and wise men; but the system can have an intrinsic bias towards conformity and against challenging authority. The monastic proverb “Keep
the Rule and the Rule will keep you” is in my view often translated into “Keep the rules of this seminary and you will get ordained”.

This is a very dangerous pattern for a role in life. Unthinking obedience and loyalty can be a way to avoid pain and the tension of disagreement. This can be especially attractive if conformity means avoiding confronting those with arbitrary powers to appoint and promote. But it also involves compromise, stepping back from struggling with the Gospel-truth which is always greater than any institution.

But the damage may potentially be more extensive because being dominated in a system that requires or is perceived to require obedience can lead to a subservient and docile priest becoming domineering and uncompromising when placed in authority (Doyle, 2003).

The role of the bishop is critical. Many bishops could be appointed because of their ability as administrators or due to the fact that their orthodoxy makes them a “safe pair of hands” (Tindall, 2011, p.550). The reality seems to be that many bishops have found themselves out of their depth when dealing with child abuse. One of the significant superordinate themes to emerge from the six interviews was the lack of confidence in the competence of their bishop and the institutional Church to respond appropriately to the abuse crisis.

I also share Keenan’s (2002) concern for the lack of participation in decisions by those who ought to have been consulted. The lack of consultation between bishops
and priests in this scandal has been presented in this study as a very serious situation which should be corrected.

In the past, it seems that some bishops and religious superiors have sought to protect the institution of the Church by minimizing overwhelming evidence of abuse (Neuhaus, 2004). This approach was further compounded by the reaction of some bishops to all of their priests:

As one cardinal archbishop said after Dallas, it may be necessary for some priests to suffer injustice for the good of the Church. In the course of history, Caiaphas has not been without his defenders …. Another reaction claims to be realistic, which is to say hard-nosed: It’s too bad that some innocent priests may be hurt, but you can’t make an omelet without breaking eggs etc. Charming. But then, bishops have their own leadership credibility to worry about. (Neuhaus, 2004, p. 60)

The clerical abuse scandal wrought great damage on American churches and above all the Catholic Church. My six interviewees were all well aware of this fact. Where responsibility is denied for the behaviour of priests who molest children, the resulting feeling of demoralisation reported by non-offending priests is understandable and predictable (Lowden and Francis, 2003). Perhaps confidence of non-offending priests in the institutional Church and its bishops and religious superiors will only be restored when they are given assurances that this will never happen again.
The best policy for bishops may consist of humility, caution and a determination to listen and learn, and acknowledging that they made a terrible mistake in covering up sexual abuse by priests and then re-assigning the abusers (Greeley, 2004).

6.2.2. Changing attitudes

If a married couple use contraception, they’re complicit in evil. If a priest molests a child, he gets a new parish. Indeed, sex itself seems to be in the cardinals’ minds entirely an abstraction. It’s a sin or an act rather than a relationship. (Sullivan, The Sunday Times News Review, 28 April 2002, p. 4)

During my decade as a Safeguarding Co-ordinator, I witnessed a significant change in the Catholic Church’s mind-set from denial and a reluctance to acknowledge or engage with the scandal, to a willingness and ability to acknowledge, engage with and make significant contributions to the promotion of the welfare of the child as paramount.

For many years, members of my faith community, especially my brother priests, have held the mistaken view that child protection policies meant they could not perform their gospel imperative of ministering to children (Appendices 3 and 4) instead of being policies to ensure they could perform this duty with pride. The six priests I interviewed by and large found the safeguarding policies and procedures, the Safeguarding Co-ordinator in their diocese and the Safeguarding Commissions to be very valuable resources and a welcome proactive move away from handling the problem discreetly, avoiding contact with police, minimising contact with victims or their families, moving the priest, or sending him for
treatment and then reappointing him (if possible) to a new parish (Geary and Greer, 2011, p. 85).

As someone who has worked as a safeguarding priest, I can report that without exception each victim wanted recognition of what had happened to them and, if possible, an apology. Sometimes bishops were informed by their legal advisors to protect the institution and its assets by not admitting anything, not meeting victims, not accepting responsibility and never apologising. This unhelpful stance is now staunchly resisted by the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (the national advisory office for England and Wales) and by most key workers serving the Church in safeguarding.

However, the crisis is not over and the six priests interviewed for this thesis may only ever be confident once the bishops ensure that allegations are never again swept under the carpet. It seems evident that there is still a lot of healing and bridge-building to be done between bishops and their non-offending priests.

Weafer (2014), in his sociological study of the lived experience of Irish diocesan priests in modern Ireland from 1960 to 2010, echoed the data from this research that priests in England and Wales do not have a good relationship with their bishop. Weafer (2014) reports that everyone he interviewed acknowledged that the relationship they had with their bishop is an unequal one. He cites one priest who is convinced that mandatory celibacy existed to make it easier to control priests. He quotes another priest who said:
Even if you get a parish you don’t want, you could say to the bishop that you will be back in six or seven years for another parish. There is almost always a Plan B, which the bishop would be willing to consider if he asked.

(Weafer, 2014, p. 63)

Weafer’s observation is further evidence of the need for adult conversations between priests and their bishop.

As mentioned in Chapter 5 – Discussion, little acknowledgment or provision of therapeutic intervention was offered to any of the priests I interviewed. Their sense of betrayal (superordinate 4) was manifest: betrayal of their offending brother priest and betrayal by their Church in how it dealt with sexual abuse by clergy.

In contrast to the interviewees’ sense of betrayal, on 2 May 2015 The Tablet published an article by Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor, the retired Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, and former Chair of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. He pointed out that, at the time of his appointment to Westminster Diocese in February 2000, the abuse crisis had already inflicted terrible damage on the credibility of the Church. He admitted that when some victims and survivors had had the courage to come forward, they had not been listened to, or worse, believed. He added that in the forefront of his mind is the care of the priests of the diocese. He stated that he wanted any priest to feel able to come and talk to him. This is a desirable approach; but it is in stark contrast to the experiences reported by all six interviewees as regards their bishop or superior.
6.2.3. Beginning difficult conversations

The value in being able to talk about their issues expressed by the priests in my interviews raises the issue of the responsibility of those in authority to create opportunities for discussion, conversation and possibly counselling for priests affected by this crisis.

Priests, unlike other professionals, are not required to undertake continuing professional development, regular professional supervision or any performance assessment. Spiritual Directors and regular attendance at the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) are at the discretion of each priest. In my experience, many therefore live and work alone, often even without any effective peer support or with only superficial peer relationships which can neither affirm nor challenge their ministerial practice or their way of living as priests. Isolation can be profoundly detrimental to a person, and I have seen in my former role as a Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator from 2001 to 2012 that it has potential implications for inappropriate behaviour and helps to establish the environment in which abuse is perpetrated. In my view, this dynamic does not cause but might well contribute to offending behaviour; either way, this way of living and working must end.

My experience with my six interviewees has led to my concluding that Mearns and Thorne’s (1998 to 2013) five questions on “stuckness” in therapy, as outlined in Chapter 2 – Literature review themes, are integral when dealing with an underlying question of this thesis: “What gives people the confidence to have difficult conversations?” (Brown, 2008, Kaufman 1992). Feelings on the part of the six
priests of shame, isolation, humiliation and betrayal persist and need to be addressed by the Church and by them as individual priests.

Difficulties in addressing such problems can very often be rooted in the fact that somebody is stuck in the process, be it a therapist, a counsellor, a researcher or an interviewer. Sometimes people can get stuck because the initial insight has been too rapid and too profound. There was much evidence in my findings of the necessity to pause in order for the priests to process what has happened as they reported continuing shock, a loss of their core identities as priests, disillusionment and a loss of their reference point.

There were signs of another source of “stuckness” identified by Mearns and Thorne (1998 to 2013), the realization that there is no going back and they are heading towards considerable unalterable life changes. The interviewees reported feeling overwhelmed by the process. While there was no suggestion that they were resisting the changes in child protection and their role and position in the Church, they repeatedly expressed a realization that they were having trouble adapting and the Church was not providing help.

A willingness to question must include not just myths, taboos and uncomfortable topics, but also presumptions and ways of thinking about these issues and “taken for granted” certainties. It is necessary to begin the process of challenging areas where thinking has become somewhat lazy and confused. This must be part of a life-long strategy to constantly challenge and be open, especially about subjects that are most
uncomfortable. The responses of the six priests indicate this may be a problem among priests in general and one which the Church is not recognizing or addressing.

6.2.4. Treatment of offending priests

Priest abusers betrayed some of the most vulnerable members of the Church both criminally and immorally. The phenomenon and extent of clergy sexual abuse of minors may not yet be fully understood. Reid (1988) says child abusers commit about 60 offences for every case that surfaces. Fox (1992) estimates that the average abusing priest abuses 285 times. If these figures are even close to reality, for me as a researcher it raises the question of how much of the current crisis remains under the surface, despite the comparatively low number of officially recognized offending priests (Chapter 5 – Discussion).

The six priests who were interviewed were aware that their fellow priests broke the sacred bond of their calling. One referred to the fact that some of the abuse took place on Lindisfarne, “Holy Island”, and another referred to the abuse of the sacrament of Eucharist as part of the abuse. Despite these observations and the strong feelings they aroused in the interviews, there was a concern that they receive treatment. There was also a concern expressed by some of the interviewees that the Church’s response has moved from denial to a punitive stance towards those who have abused. My interviews revealed concern about what happens to priests who are removed from ministry (laicized).

According to canon law:
[The bishop] is to have a special concern for the priests, to whom he is to listen as his helpers and counsellors. He is to defend their rights and ensure that they fulfil the obligations proper to their state. He is to see that they have the means and the institutions needed for the development of their spiritual and intellectual life. He is to ensure that they are provided with adequate means of livelihood and social welfare, in accordance with the law. (Canon 384)

Even if a priest is found guilty of abuse, his bishop/religious superior therefore has responsibility for his welfare for life. This fact was something the six interviewees found reassuring, despite voicing their experience of being betrayed by priests who abuse children.

At the very least, the bishop is expected to ensure that priests have an adequate means of livelihood. There is anecdotal evidence that this is not always the case, particularly when priests have been laicized. Geary proposed that bishops and religious superiors should endeavour to help priests who have abused to create worthwhile lives. This is consistent with the humanistic approach that is intrinsic to the Good Lives model (Chu and Ward, 2015).

Geary promotes the idea of “Good Lives” for former clergy abusers. At the Boundary-breaking Colloquium on clergy sexual abuse held in January 2015 hosted by the University of Durham Centre for Catholic Studies, Geary referred to the Good Lives model of treatment for sex offenders proposed by Ward (2002) and since developed in various jurisdictions.
The Good Lives approach seeks to build therapy on the human strengths of the offender rather than focusing on deficits (Ward, 2002). It also begins from the premise that the offender has rights as a citizen and that helping the offender to have his needs met in a healthy, non-criminogenic way will be better for society while offering the offender the hope of a worthwhile life. While priests who have abused cannot return to pastoral ministry, there are other ways that they can serve the Church.

The Church, which is motivated by a theology of compassion and mercy, is well placed to create a supportive environment which, with proper regard for safeguards, risk assessment and covenants of care, can establish programmes of best practice in the rehabilitation of offending priests. If the six priests whom I interviewed are representative of the priests in England and Wales, then such a programme would go a long way to assure them that brother priests who had abused would be cared for and offered the opportunity to build a better life.

### 6.2.5. Care and support for non-offending priests

This study has identified feelings on the part of six innocent priests which could be shared by all in the Catholic clergy and other professions affected by similar scandals. These feelings could be dealt with in counselling, either within the Church or by outside therapists.

I think it is important for bishops/religious superiors therefore to offer opportunities for therapeutic intervention for non-offending clergy, to facilitate dialogue between
bishops, religious superiors and their priests, and to facilitate peer dialogue and support.

It is also possible to devise liturgies that address those caught up in such situations. The Archdiocese of Dublin, for example, held a service of lament in February 2011. As part of the Toward Healing and Renewal Symposium held at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in February 2012, there was a penitential liturgy at which Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Prefect for the Congregation for Bishops, presided. These liturgies demonstrate acceptance of the facts of abuse, show remorse, ask for forgiveness from victims and create a space for healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. They often involve significant and powerful symbolic gestures, such as presenting each participant with a small vial of healing oil.

Rituals can also enable others in the Church to process their feelings. One priest, for example, who had abused children said that Pope Benedict XVI's meeting with victims of clergy sexual abuse in Sydney, Australia, was a healing moment as he could now express sorrow to his own victims (personal sharing). Such events could help priests to process their feelings about their loss and the grief they experience.

The frank contributions of my six interviewees to knowledge about the effects of abuse, or similar trauma, could assist all therapists to devise appropriate counselling.

6.3. Limitations of this research
As a researcher, I am acutely aware of the limitations of this research. I acknowledge that this is research done by a single insider researcher with six other priests who knew I was both a priest and a safeguarding specialist. The tensions among my various roles are something I had to manage throughout the research process. This was also managed and challenged by regular and rigorous supervision. I am confident that the data I have unearthed has real depth and richness. My role as a priest and safeguarding specialist helped to facilitate what were difficult and sensitive conversations for this group. Data from other studies could be different; but I remain confident the basic themes would remain.

Gubi (2015) reminds us that much of the recent research on counselling and psychology is quantitative. The downside of this is that, far from being an encounter, therapeutic or otherwise, it can tend to be statistical in nature and can perhaps become cold and clinical. Gubi (2015) suggests that whilst research is designed to inform best practice, there is less in-depth research published about human experience that relates to issues that are “on the edge” (Gubi, 2015, p. 1).

As a researcher for this thesis, I believe I have discovered what Gubi (2015) describes as “the less-heard voices”. All of my six interviewees, to the best of my knowledge, belong to the vast majority of Catholic priests in England and Wales who are not accused nor convicted of any abuses against children. It is precisely because of this that I chose a qualitative methodology (IPA) in order to seek an insider’s perspective.
I realize the potential dangers of making generalizations from such a small sample. However, the sample was intentionally small as it was not intended to be generalised from but rather to illuminate in detail the experiences of non-offending Catholic priests who are still in ministry. However, from my experience and from the reactions of fellow priests with whom I have shared the rich responses in the interviews, the six interviewees did not present as atypical in any way and hence some tentative conclusions may perhaps be drawn.

My position as insider researcher, although bringing benefits, could be argued to have drawbacks. Particular dynamics shaped the interview. They were brother priests, they were interviewed in their place of work/home, and they knew my position as a brother priest, a researcher, a safeguarding co-ordinator and a member of several strategy bodies for investigating child abuse. This inevitably impacted on what was both said and not said within the interview, by both myself and the interviewees. The interviewees, for example, may have been likely to censor any responses that might appear critical of the Church’s safeguarding activities or apportion any blame to abuse victims themselves. As a researcher and a brother priest, I was anxious, for example, neither to encourage nor fuel the notion that there is a direct correlation between celibacy and the abuse of minors, any more than there is a correlation between sexual orientation and the abuse of minors. Generally, my insider status may have added to the ethical concerns that led me to decide against exploring or pursuing a number of areas of research. They include the following: whether any of the interviewees were themselves victims, whether they had any fantasies as regards the abuse of minors, their own experience of celibacy, any exploration into their spiritual life. I chose not to explore any of these avenues.
because as a researcher I deemed them to be unnecessarily intrusive and inappropriate. I had to assume they were non-offending priests and I had to assume they were not victims. In my estimation, it would have been unethical to pursue lines of questioning about such conduct, guided as I was by the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. The priests had agreed to be interviewed about the impact of abuse. I concluded that it would have lacked transparency in the research process to introduce more issues of a more personal nature.

On a further note, I think these areas of enquiry had the potential to fracture any possibility of a rich dialogue with these men which had the potential to produce the important data which did, in fact, emerge from the interviews. Also, if I had asked questions that invited priests to explore these areas, there would have been the risk of blurring the roles of researcher and therapist. My role at the time of the interviews was to be a researcher, and to avoid, as far as possible, any further potential blurring of roles.

6.4. Suggestions for further research and action

For me as the researcher, this thesis has unearthed several other possibilities for much needed research into the effects of the child sex abuse scandal on non-offending priests. The following areas perhaps warrant further exploration and research:
• ongoing human development training for priests especially around celibacy, loneliness, sexuality and intimacy;
• training in how to have difficult conversations about difficult subjects, and how to have conversations where there is an element of fear in the air;
• counselling to promote “adult” relationships between bishops and priests;
• therapy or consultancy support for priests and bishops to create space to discuss how they have been affected by the abuse crisis;
• meetings of priests, with an independent facilitator, to enable the priests to talk to each other, listen to each other and engage with their bishop around these issues.

Equally, I became increasingly aware that there was, to a greater or lesser extent, a degree of disillusionment between the priests and their bishop/religious superior. I believe the experience and perceptions of bishops/religious superiors also comprise an area that warrants serious research. The priests I interviewed expressed exasperation that their voices seemed unheard; I am not aware of any research which gives voice to the bishops/religious superiors.

6.5. **Personal and professional reflections**

Whilst conducting the interviews for this thesis, it became clear to me as a researcher that no other issue had such an impact on the six priests I interviewed. My research found that nothing has contributed more powerfully to the vastly
different way in which priests are now regarded both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church than the crisis of child sexual abuse by a few of the clergy.

It is hard being a Catholic today; it is hard being a Catholic priest today. The crisis is such that in some circles priest and paedophile are still interchangeable words. We seem to have gone from one unhealthy view – “a priest would never do that” – to another equally unhealthy one – “he is a priest, so he probably did do that”. The following question in a letter in The Weekend Australian epitomizes this collapse in trust: “Are there any parents with young children who still take them to church? If so, can they explain why?” (Fr Peter Day, The Tablet, 3 June 2015). Such feelings are hard to accept for me both as a priest and as a counsellor.

I expect that the tragedy’s full impact on both the institutional Church and how priests are regarded will only become clear in the years ahead. Some argue that there is nothing comparable to it in modern times (Cozzens, 2000a). Cozzens (2000a) states that story after story in the media generated waves of numbness and bewilderment amongst priests and Catholics in general; this was reflected by all six interviewees. This point is further illustrated in Cozzens (2000a) who cites a priest who states:

Mixed with feelings of shame and embarrassment there is great anger. I am angry at the priest-pederasts and abusers …. If they knew what they were doing but could not control a compulsion to act out, then they were clearly sick. At this point they had two choices: to get professional help or to get out of the priesthood. (Dreese, Commonweal, 1994, p. 12)
As a researcher, one of the most valuable discoveries for me was to both identify and detail the existence of a group of men, priests against whom accusations have not been made, whose needs have not previously, as far as I am able to ascertain, been identified or catered for. I was satisfied that my qualitative approach produced such a valuable result.

Like Weafer (2014), I was left with the impression that, on the whole, priests have a deep and personal commitment to the priesthood. It seemed that this deep commitment sustained my six interviewees in most challenging times both to their individual priesthood and the brotherhood of the priests to which they belong. Whilst all of the interviewees have been severely shaken by the abuse cases and the way that the bishops mishandled the situation, it seems that they remain priests because their commitment to the priesthood and to the Church is so integral to their ontology as priests.

As a researcher, I think it is appropriate to conclude this thesis with the following reflection:

The tension in being a researcher, a Roman Catholic priest and a counsellor was evident throughout the production of this thesis, so much so that it was a topic of both concern and much debate during the vast majority of my sessions with my supervisors. Whilst this tension was fraught with difficulties, I am convinced it led to a greater depth of analysis and leant greater weight to the integrity of the data. As a non-offending Roman Catholic priest myself, I was interested to explore the view
of other priests who were in my position but did not have the experience of being involved in this specialised field of work, nor the luxury of time to research the matter. Whilst I struggled at times to achieve the balance of being researcher, priest and counsellor, I am confident that the data presented is all the more valuable given the tension woven through the whole process.

6.6. Contribution to knowledge

It seems to me that this is the first piece of research that has invited non-offending priests to share their experience of the recent clerical sexual abuse crisis in England and Wales and beyond. This is an original contribution to knowledge in itself. I think that there is a danger that there is only one area of narrative in the area of child abuse – particularly clergy child abuse – at the moment and that is the perspective of the victim. This is perfectly understandable, given how their voices were systemically not listened to in the past, either by the Church or society. However, this is not the only narrative – albeit it is a powerful one – which must be heard and added to the overall picture of the effects of the clerical child abuse crisis. This thesis provides data from another perspective which is often overlooked or forgotten. I would even go as far as to say that it might not be “politically correct” at this moment in time as the non-offending priests might not even be allowed to be considered as victims in the current climate. For them to claim victimhood – even secondary victimhood – might be perceived by some as selfish, uncaring and another manifestation of clericalism.
When considering the original contribution of this research, it occurred to me that this thesis might contribute to reminding counsellors of the need to be constantly vigilant when listening to people who may not be perceived to be victims of abuse, or who do not present themselves as suffering individuals, but who, nonetheless, carry wounds and burdens as a result of the behaviour of others. There are many people who carry burden that often remain unrecognised and unheard. This thesis has uncovered a group of what has come to be called “secondary victims” whose lives are deeply affected by the behaviour of others. Their lives, identities, self-confidence and well-being can be affected in a negative way, and there is seldom any attempt to reach out to them to listen to their needs, understand how they have been affected and attempt to alleviate their suffering. In this case the group whose voices have been heard is a cohort of non-offending Roman Catholic priests who, to my knowledge have until now suffered and have continued to minister in silence.

When it comes to the majority of people who feel unheard and unrecognised, the term “elephant in the room” seems inadequate. In my research topic, at least, it seems that there is a whole herd of elephants. Perhaps this thesis could go some way to encouraging those in the field of counselling to be more proactive in reaching out to people in our communities who might well feel that they don’t have a right to be heard. This was my experience with the interviewees for this thesis. Far from being unworthy of being heard, I am grateful to them for the rich data they shared which helped me to attempt to articulate the experiences and voices of those on the margins. The number of those on the margins could be a useful exercise for anybody working in the field of counselling and psychotherapy.
In recent years the voices of victims of sexual abuse have come to be heard and they can have a powerful say in how society responds to abuse. There are also therapists and researchers who dedicate their efforts to working with perpetrators. It could be a useful exercise for someone working in the field of counselling to attempt to quantify or at least name the other groups whose lives can be detrimentally affected by abuse and other traumatic events.

6.7. Secondary victimhood

In the course of this research I am confident that I have identified the possibility that non-offending Catholic priests experience secondary victimhood with regards to the clerical child sexual abuse scandal. This is of course not only evident in the Catholic Church; other institutions and professions such as the BBC, education, social services and the health service will no doubt have their fair share of secondary victims.

As an insider researcher I can testify that this subject matter has already been identified as an important contribution to knowledge within the Church. In the last six months I have been invited to share the findings of this study at several conferences in the United Kingdom, a European Safeguarding Conference in Luxembourg and the annual National Conference of Catholic Head Teachers. Also, in terms of counselling, I think this research can offer an important contribution in a range of ways: for example, there did not seem to exist any dynamic within the Church which would facilitate independent counselling for priests who felt unheard,
somewhat disregarded and possibly discarded. For me, this whole process opened up
that question and the possibilities of building bridges between two worlds,
counselling and theology.
Bibliography


Appendices

Appendix 1

Participation information sheet

The sexual abuse of children by priests in the Roman Catholic Church – how has this affected the experience of other Catholic priests’ ministry with children?

You are invited to take part in a semi-structured interview as part of doctoral research on the thesis entitled “The sexual abuse of children by some Catholic priests – how has this affected the experience of other Catholic priests’ ministry with children?” Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Who will conduct the research?

Fr Barry O’Sullivan
The University of Manchester
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
Oxford Road   M13 9PL
Title of research

The sexual abuse of children by priests in the Roman Catholic Church – what is the impact on other Catholic priests’ ministry with children?

What is the aim of the research?

The principal aim of the research is to gain an understanding of the impact or otherwise of the recent scandal about sexual abuse of children by some Roman Catholic priests.

Why have I been chosen?

On 27 and 28 April 2011 you attended a national conference entitled “Safeguarding as Ministry” at Oscott College in Birmingham. As a facilitator at this conference, I played no part in the selection of the candidates. During the conference, participants were informed of the possibility that they might be approached to take part in further research. The names and contact details of each of the participants have been given to my supervisor who will, independently, approach the candidates and inform me of those who are willing to participate without any reference to negative replies.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

Participation will involve a one-hour, audio-taped interview. This interview will be transcribed by an independent third party, the name and contact details of whom I have obtained in consultation with my supervisor. All information received during the interviews and throughout the thesis will belong to me as the principal researcher and will come under the jurisdiction of the University of Manchester and its ethical guidelines.
What happens to the data collected?

As the researcher, I intend to employ a qualitative methodological method called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This particular methodology is especially useful for analysing and interpreting interviews with participants with particular reference to understanding the experience and meaning making of the interviewee.

The researcher will endeavour to make sure that the material used is not identifiable and, if applicable, will seek further permission to use any information that may specifically identify individuals. The protocol for a semi-structured interview is that the participant has the opportunity to have access to the transcribed data and the resulting themes that may emerge. In this way, the co-operative process enables greater involvement in the research and subsequent findings.

How is confidentiality maintained?

The researcher is a member of the BACP and subject to the requirements of the Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy. The researcher undertakes to comply with the organisation’s requirements for ethical practice in research.

The subject matter being researched is especially sensitive. During the interview, I am aware of the possibility of opening wounds of past abuse in the life of the interviewees, and also the possibility of any disclosure of current abuse. Should an interviewee disclose experience of abuse in childhood, it will be treated with the
sensitivity required. Any disclosure of current abusive behaviour or knowledge of current abuse by another will be reported to the statutory authorities.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. If you decide to withdraw, your data will be destroyed.

**What is the duration of the research and where will the research be conducted?**

Participants will be asked to take part in a one-two hour interview and will also then be asked to confirm that the written account of the interview is an accurate account. If you agree to participate in this research, I will travel to you at a time and place of your convenience.

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

At this point it is not my intention to publish the outcomes of this research. However, there is a possibility that the data might spark interest by third parties, not least within the Church. The research is part of a doctoral thesis and the results will be published and kept in the University library. It is also possible that the findings may be published in other publications or cited in training or conference presentations. All publication will be in a form that will preserve confidentiality and anonymity.
Contact for further information

Fr Barry O’Sullivan
St Chad’s
7 Stock Street
Cheetham Hill
Manchester  M8 8GG
Tel: 0161-8344104

What if something goes wrong?

If either during or after the interview a participant wants help or advice, please feel free to contact the following:

Dr Gerald Fieldhouse-Byrne
St Luke’s Centre
Danesfield
Whalley Road
Manchester  M16 8BT
Tel: 0161-2264563
www.stlukescentre.org.uk

If a participant wants to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research, they should contact:

Head of Research Office
Christie Building
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester  M13 9PL
The sexual abuse of children by priests in the Roman Catholic Church – what is the impact on other Catholic priests’ ministry with children?

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please initial box

1 I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2 I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service.

3 I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded.

4 I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5 I agree that any anonymous data collected may be passed to other researchers.

I hereby give my consent for the recording of this session and for the details of the session involving me to be used for research purposes. I understand that, without my further consent, the transcript and recording of the session will be used for the purpose of developing research in this area. The data generated from the interview will be used to develop or support the researcher’s submission of a research thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling at the University of Manchester.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant Date Signature

Name of person taking consent Date Signature
Appendix 2

Matthew’s interview: initial codings, findings and analysis

C – Conceptual    D – Descriptive    L – Linguistic

Question 1: Can you tell me about your journey to becoming a priest?

p. 1
Making sense of his world C
Stirring from Soul
Categorising Culture C
Tension between Collective and Individuals as regards Jesuits C
Compartmentalising without realizing C
Separating whilst trying to hold together e.g. earth/hell – “camp as hell”, l. 34 C

p. 2
Introduction of Hermeneutic circle, l. 2 C
Hesitant first “kind of”, l. 22 l. x 49
“A certain amount of restlessness within the last couple of years of university”, l. 32 D

p. 3
“Close friend decided he felt a call to be a vicar”, l. 5 D
Vicar/Toe-dipping (Insider researcher)
“This is not something on the horizon”, l. 25. Still a long way off. C/L

p. 4
Intellectual and cultural C
“The thing happened”, l. 15. Something an intelligent man can’t articulate C
Evasion C
No connection between vocation and practice
Contradiction guess/convincing
“Middle of the road”, l. 19, 21 x 2 C/L
Insider researcher re: Paul VI

**Question 2:** Can you tell me about the experience of being a priest in the shadow of the child abuse scandal?

Contradiction 1st hand/2nd hand, l. 3 C

CEOP training
Mining rather than travelling
Pinning down
Splitting x 2 C
“Just”, ll. 23/25. Minimising l. x 39

“This guy is my brother and so is this guy”, l. 11 L
Splitting, “Pilipino Jesuits”, l. 3 C
“Go to town” How?
“This guy” x 2, ll. 19, 20. Reinforces SPLIT
How did he make the link? C
Martyrdom/child abuse?? C
Rene Girard C

“Authentically Catholic”, l. 7. What is authentically Catholic? C
“It doesn’t blackball people”, l. 23 D/L
“Not splitting off”, l. 9 but continues to do so L
p. 10
“This guy”, l. 2 reunited? C
How are both brothers? l. 2
Patronising
Mother’s reaction not yours – hermeneutic circle C
Contradiction. Para 6 C

p. 11
“... the thing”, l. 20 L
Third person
Fast-tracked
Question has disappeared. Para 6

p. 12
Giving your life “That’s what this is about”, l. 28 L/D/C
Self-giving C

p. 13
One removed – displacement
Splitting C
Pre-judging c
Street speak – minimizing L
Point of reference but no answer C
“...that’s a dimension of what this life is about.”, l. 32 C
What are other dimensions?
Community C

p. 14
Inadequacies – based on what evidence? C
Minimises
Dismissive
Ignorant D
Exposing scandal was defiling rather than enlightening – defiled his innocence C
Oppression rather than liberty – which is contrary to why he became a Jesuit in the first place C

The truth will see you free! L/C

“Not cool”, l. 37. By whose reckoning? L

p. 15

Implies less able/less independent Jesuits more prone to abusive behaviour C

Displacement

“If they were to get top quality Jesuits”, l. 25 C/L/D

Order sending in “dregs” C/L/D

p. 16

Gold-digging

Distance

“Not much has come my way”, l. 9. Not So!! L/C

Cites two extreme cases – therefore contradiction

p. 17

“Feel absolutely drained by this”, l. 21 – Why? C/D

“Not over serious”, l. 35 splitting and categorizing C/D

p. 18

“It’s the worst thing that has happened to me as a Jesuit priest, l. 7 C/D/L

“I’ve been untouched” (p. 16, l. 9) Contradiction L/D

Betrayal C

Facing the truth (Insider stuff)

“It’s just messy”, l. 36. He has got to sit on information which is privileged – which disables him acting on “the truth will set you free” L/C

p. 19

p. 20

“Room for him”, l. 2. By Church? L
“Different levels”, l. 6. How does he differentiate dimensions? C
Co-ordinated response d
Challenged in the interview
“Not safeguarding issue”, l. 33. Says who? C

p. 21
Played with fire and survived
“Deviation from the norm and you’re out and you’re in”, l. 15 C/K
“In and out” Freudian?
Projecting own guilt onto perpetrator and survivors guilt
Patronising

p. 22
Free to be martyr C
Being unfaithful to himself C
Holier than thou c
Undeserving/unable to judge C
Why is your innocence not tainted?
Not neurotic/no complaints – no victims! l. 29 C/L
Can’t cast first stone C
By implication – is perpetrator a kind of victim? C
Splitting friendship/relationship/priesthood C

p. 23
Reasoning inconsistent C
Not judgmental about child abuse but critical of Jesuits in public schools C

p. 24
Global reaction inconsistent C
“Trans-Atlantic dimensions to this”, l. 1 C
“Hung out to dry”, l. 23. “Bad luck” C/L
Tension between victim/brother Jesuit C
Undermining C
Insider stuff
Lack of consistency

p. 25
“Plays out differently in different countries”, l. 2 C
Abuse Lottery!!
“Element of luck”, l. 7 C/L
Not in control
Luck
Power dynamics

p. 26
“Just immense sadness”, l. 32

**Question 3:** Can you tell me what resources are there to help you in this particular ministry?

p. 27
Limits on processing and coping C
Splitting emotionally, l. 24 C

p. 28
“One who seems to have rather excessive interest in these issues”, l. 9 C/D
Distances self
Is that why he did it?
Unsettling
Stunted emotional intelligence has contributed to dysfunctional/abusive behaviour, l. 20 C

p. 29
We need to talk about it x 2 – we need to talk about it in very explicit and practical terms, l. 13 C
Explicit
Academic rationalizing rather than emotional engagement
Faith/confidence
“Blowing up in Boston”, l. 27 L/C
“Entering the storm”, l. 34 L/C
Own faith
Contradictory
Differences in coping

p. 30
“How do these headlines help us?” l. 8 C
Help us to do what?
They are not running away from anything? l. 15 D/C
Training has changed me/wouldn’t have repeated past practice
Well balanced new guys can face it C
“No” to scandal, say “yes” despite everything, l. 21 C
Distinction
Internalises coping
Development/insight
Exploration
“Hadn’t realised until now”, l. 29 C
Indicates he hasn’t had an opportunity to process before interview

**Question 4:** How do you feel about the training/resources you have received in this area?

p. 31
Minimises
Contradiction, has already recognised that it is biggest crisis since the Reformation
Only visit it once a year, back to basics. How? D

p. 32
Minimises
Boundaries
New learning/wobbly
“It kind of switches them off”, l. 6 C/L
“Abuse crisis is a whole new world opening up for them”, l. 13 C/L

Embarrassment

“We are moving towards framing safeguarding in a more positive way”, l. 16 C

**Question 5:** How does your ministry to children compare to when you were first ordained?

p. 33

Freedom to be self
Can’t be self
Input-massive
Unprepared
Contradiction
Self-preservation

Emm…this guy…How the hell did that happen? l. 25 C

Impact

“How the hell has this happened?” l. 25 C

**Question 6/7:** Have you got a sense of how the policies and procedures adopted by the diocese have affected your ministry with children?

p. 34

“Where is my guardian angel? l. 9 C

Self-preservation
Self-deprecating

“Question of building trust” l. 16 Whose question? C

“It’s common sense that you pick the child up”, l. 37 C/D

Annoyance of lack of intellect in others C

p. 35

“Did that priest touch you?” l. 6 C

Inconsistent
Self-preservation
Abuse victim led?

p. 36
Vulnerable
Alcohol reduces judgment/boundaries para.4
“Without being paranoid about things”, l. 29 C/L

**Question 7:** How do you think the hierarchy has dealt with this issue?

p. 37
Less complicated
“No Impact”, l. 6. Contradiction
Disparity
Last paragraph – HUGE contradiction C/L

p. 38
Cerebral, l. 13

p. 39
“Evil to flourish”, l. 3 C
“There are two scandals, the abuse by priests and the cover up by the Church”, l. 14 C/D
“The second is worse because it’s more widespread and systematic, and that’s the really dispiriting thing.” ll. 14/21 C
Main question
Cerebral
Pattern repeated

p. 40
Music behind the words
Disclosure in Church
“The priest is the one who distributes the Eucharist, so in a very visible sense the priest is on the side of the people”, l. 24 C
Priests nourish/priests feed people with own hands
Vulnerable individuals – he is referring to the perpetrators who he thinks are “weak”

Mitigation

**Question 8:** Do you have a sense that being a Catholic priest singles you out as somehow different from other faith leaders as regards to this issue?

p. 41
“… but, the ecclesiology of it is that people who normally have no time for the Pope are asking questions.” l. 4 C

“Why isn’t the Vatican doing something about this?” l. 6 C

Healthy change C

Equates child abuse scandal with Churches’ teaching on sexuality Para.4 C

p. 42

“An issue around child abuse is also about the high profile of the Church’s sexual teaching”, l. 10

Child abuse is different

p. 43

“Where to begin”, l. 1 C

Just started

“It’s obviously my first time here, with this stuff.” l. 14

“Don’t know comment” Columbo C

Separating
Findings

Emergent themes

A total of 199 themes emerged in the following categories:
Conceptual – 94
Linguistic – 30
Descriptive - 15
Superordinate themes: Interview 1 – “Matthew”

Matthew’s understanding of the ‘“Brotherhood of the Priesthood”

Matthew’s formation as a priest

Interview 1: Matthew

Matthew’s depth of engagement with the interview

Matthew’s reaction to the scandal

Matthew’s grappling with contradictions
Matthew’s formation as a priest

“The Thing happened”
p. 4, ll. 16-20
“And so the thing happened in a way that’s still mysterious to me. This was something I was being called to do and I didn’t even know the basics about it.”

Splitting friendship/relationships/Priesthood
p. 22, ll. 2-5
“It might just be an easier thing to undertake if you don’t have a wife and family... there’s something there about my own sense of insecurity.”

Free to be self/can’t be self
p. 33, ll. 4-6
“I actually surprised myself in terms of how much I enjoyed being in a parish. I didn’t see myself as a pastor but I did reasonably well ... in particular I enjoyed relating with the kids.”

“Authentically Catholic”
p. 9, ll. 6-10
“...being authentically Catholic involves not splitting others off, not denying, not scapegoating.”

“Giving your life, that’s what this is all about”
p. 12, ll. 28-29
“That’s what this is all about...not that we’re all some great suicide cult or something.”
Matthew’s reaction to the scandal

“Kind of” p. 2, l. 22
M uses this term 49 times during the interview

“Just” p. 6, l. 23
M uses this word 39 times during the interview

Being exposed to the scandal has defiled his innocence p. 14

“This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me as a priest” p. 13, l. 7

Betrayal by perpetrators and the Church Authorities p. 18, l. 36
“It’s just messy”

M impressed by new guys coming through p. 29, ll. 31-34
“It’s just very, very impressive that their faith in the Church is such that they can really enter the eye of the storm.”

“How the hell did this happen. How are the parents surviving it?” p. 33, ll. 25, 26

The second scandal “Cover up by Church authorities is worst because it is systematic, and that’s the really dispiriting thing p. 39, ll. 14/21
Matthew’s grappling with contradictions

“Not much has come my way”
M cited two extreme cases which affected him directly
p. 16, l. 9

“Not ultra serious”
“I have been untouched”
“It had no impact”
p. 17, l. 35
p. 18, l. 9
p. 37, l. 6

Tension between care of abuse victim and care of fellow priest who is convicted offender
p. 24

Tension between individuals and collective as regards his religious community
p. 1

“Reasoning inconsistent”
M not judgmental about child abusers but critical of brother priests who “sell out” and teach in public schools.
p. 23

“There is an element of luck. It’s an abuse lottery”
M believes reaction to abuse depends on country you live in.
p. 25, l. 7
p. 37, ll. 34-35

“There is no denying... I think one of the reports speaks of this as almost like a holocaust.”
p. 37, ll. 34-35
Matthew’s depth of engagement with the interview

“The thing”  
p. 4, l. 15  
M initially has difficulty articulating his thoughts

“It’s obviously my first time here with this stuff”  
p. 43, l. 14

“I feel absolutely drained by this”  
p. 17, l. 21

“We need to talk about it in very explicit and practical terms”  
p. 29, ll. 13, 14  
M gives researcher green light to proceed further.

“It’s the worst thing that has ever happened to me as a priest”  
p. 18, l. 7  
M is opening up to researcher

“I hadn’t realised it until now”  
p. 30, l. 29  
Hermeneutic Circle fostering insight that wasn’t there before
Matthew’s understanding of the ‘Brotherhood of the Priesthood’

- Tension between individuals and collective as regards his Brother Priests p. 1
- “This guy is my brother, so is this guy” p. 8, l. 11
  M is referring to one priest who gave his life to save some children and another priest who was convicted of abuse
- “If the schools were to get top quality priests instead of dregs.” p. 15, l. 25
  M implies less able priests are more prone to abusive behaviour
- “The priest is the one who distributes the Eucharistic, so in a very visible sense the priest is on the side of the people” p. 40, l. 24
- “Vulnerable individuals” P40 L1
  M is referring to priest perpetrators who he thinks are just weak
- Betrayal of Church Authorities harder to bear than the initial scandal p. 39, ll. 14/21
- “The abuse crisis is a whole new world opening up for them” p. 32, l. 13
  M is referring to newly ordained priests. M goes on to say how much he admires them coming forward despite the scandal.
- “Stunted emotional intelligence has contributed to abusive behaviour” p. 28, l. 20
### Interview 1: Matthew

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<td>• Almost immediate formation of a therapeutic alliance</td>
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<td>• Matthew was willing to share his own struggles as a priest and the profound effect the scandal had on him</td>
<td>• Tension between ideals of lived out priesthood and its reality</td>
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<td>• Very early formation of a Hermeneutic Circle</td>
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<td>• “The thing” (M sometimes had difficulty articulating his thoughts)</td>
<td>• “This guy is my brother so is this guy” (M is referring to one priest who gave his life to save some children and another priest who was convicted of abuse)</td>
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<td>• “I feel absolutely drained by this”</td>
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<td>• “It’s the worst thing that’s ever happened to me as a priest”</td>
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<td>• “We need to talk about this in very explicit and practical terms”</td>
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<td>• “I hadn’t realised it until now”</td>
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<td>• “It’s my first time here with this stuff”</td>
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<td>• Awareness as regards his inconsistent thinking</td>
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<td>• “Not ultra-serious”</td>
<td>• “This guy is my brother so is this guy” (M is referring to one priest who gave his life to save some children and another priest who was convicted of abuse)</td>
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<td>• “I’ve been untouched”</td>
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<td>• “It had no impact”</td>
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<td>• “There is no denying... this is almost like a holocaust.”</td>
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<td>• “There is an element of luck, it’s an abuse lottery”</td>
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Analysis of Matthew’s responses: a sample

The data supplied by each of the six interviewees was immensely rich, so much so that as the researcher I am conscious that, due to constraints on the length of the thesis, I will not be able to report the depth of engagement with as much detail as the interviewees deserve. What follows is an excerpt from my in-depth analysis of the first interview, Matthew. The other five have each had their superordinate themes identified and recognised and each interviewee is represented in the overall findings and analysis.

Matthew’s reaction to the scandal

As a researcher I was acutely aware that for me this particular superordinate was where “the gold was buried” in terms of data for the main body of my thesis. I was conscious of the necessity to be aware of the possibility that I was in danger of

- “If the schools were to get top quality priests instead of dregs,”
- “Stunted emotional intelligence has contributed to abusive behaviour”
- “The abuse crisis is a whole new world opening up for us”
- “Vulnerable individuals” (M refers to priest perpetrators)
leading the interview instead of allowing Matthew to share his thoughts and experiences unimpeded by my desire for rich data. Matthew shared that he had never had a formal conversation about the child abuse scandal in the Church and its impact on him and on the Church as a whole. He described how his previous conversations, especially with brother priests, were usually about how vulnerable the priests are to false allegations and Matthew volunteered that he acknowledged that most of his contemporaries seemed ill-informed and that their opinions were the product of “urban myths”. As someone who has worked in the area of safeguarding for many years with particular service to brother priests, I was interested to note that priests, for the most part, tend to think of their own self-preservation when the issue of child protection is raised.

Matthew seemed somewhat relieved and appreciative of the opportunity to have an adult and informed conversation about very difficult issues. Once again Matthew invited me into his struggle to make sense of what has been a very painful time. During the entire interview, Matthew used the term “kind of” on 49 occasions and the word “just” 39 times. This told me that Matthew, whilst making a genuine effort to engage, was also genuinely struggling to come to terms with and articulate some of his thoughts and experiences as regards the scandal which we were discussing.

I was encouraged when Matthew shared with me that this was the worst thing that had ever happened to him as a priest; it meant that a level of trust had been established between us and that the hermeneutic circle was becoming increasingly evident. As someone who has responsibility within the context in which he works,
Matthew was aware that issues around safeguarding are often far from straightforward.

Me: And it’s the worst thing – that there is some truth in the allegation or the way that he’s handled or reacted to it. What is?

Matthew: Well, both of those [laughs]. The whole thing is just ….

Me: The whole issue.

Matthew: It’s just desperately sad. Have we handled it as best we could? I think that’s part of it. He doesn’t feel it has been handled well.

Me: Mmm.

Matthew: And I think there were mistakes made; but I don’t think they alter the situation, and I think in terms of the actual investigation and so on, I think we did a reasonable job.

Me: Right.

Matthew: But it’s …. The other thing that’s come out of this, and it’s the fact that he is being allowed back to the ministry; but there are limitations on that. That it looks as if he’s been rehabilitated, but he hasn’t [laughs]. So at least one other friend of mine who knows him has said to me: “Oh Thank God. I knew there was nothing in it.” And you can’t say: “Actually….” And it’s just the most awful feeling to be sitting on this information and not being able to set the record straight and all the rest of it. So, it’s just messy.
Matthew went on to share his concern about the betrayal of brother priests by perpetrators of child abuse; however his greater concern was about the betrayal by Church authorities, which he believed to be systemic. It was evident that whilst Matthew condemned the actions of his brother priests who perpetrated abuse, there was a degree of compassion since he considered their actions to be at least in part a product of what he described as weakness of character. He did not afford this same level of compassion to the institutional Church which he regarded as something which should have known better. He articulates his exasperation with the Church as an institution in the following comment:

… just to go back to resources and so on … is to find a level of discourse that says: “This is important. We need to talk about it. We need to talk about it in very explicit and practical terms. About risks and safeguarding.” But we don’t want to present this as the only thing that’s there for discussion. This kind of focal type point, you know, where, you know, you create the discourse that you’re actually trying to suppress.

It is important to note that this part of the interview was quite painful for Matthew who, despite his role, was relatively unfamiliar with the world of safeguarding. I noted and was impressed that he did not shirk any of the issues that were raised and that his vision of a Church which is radical seemed to be one of the ways he could rationalise what had gone on. This was evident by the fact that he articulated his admiration for men who put themselves forward to be priests even in the light of the scandal of child abuse. He stated:
Matthew: One guy in particular who joined the [Province of the Order] at the same time as the stuff was blowing up in Boston, that one.

Me: Yes. That was 2001, wasn’t it? Or 2002?

Matthew: Yes. These guys know what they are getting into. He certainly does, and it’s just very, very impressive that his faith in the Church and his faith in Christ is such that, em, he can really enter the eye of the storm there.

This was the first time that Matthew used such powerful terms as “blowing up in Boston” and “entering the eye of the storm”. I found it interesting to note that he used these two very descriptive negative terms in a juxtaposition to describe his admiration for men who put themselves forward as candidates for the priesthood despite the double scandal of individual perpetrator priests and systemic cover up by Church authorities.

I found it interesting to note that Matthew fluctuated between his condemnation of perpetrators of abuse and his compassion for their weakness. This willingness and ability to attempt to appreciate the different aspects of abusing priests contrasted with his unwillingness to make any excuses for an institution which he regarded as betraying all parties. In fact, he ended the interview with the profound question: “How the hell did this happen?”
Appendix 3

Questionnaire for the Salford clergy, 2006

The following graphs demonstrate the findings from the questionnaire conducted by Fr Barry O’Sullivan in 2006 with clergy from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford.

Age range of participants

Question 1

Have the policies and procedures adopted by the diocese affected your ministry with children and vulnerable adults?
**Question 2**

Do you think these changes are;

![Bar chart showing responses to the question](chart1.png)

**Question 3**

The Child Protection Commission has striven to be a resource to the bishop, priests and people of the diocese. How successful has it been in attempting to achieve this goal?

![Bar chart showing responses to the question](chart2.png)
**Question 4**

The parish child protection reps are in place to be a resource to the parish priest and the parishioners. Do you regard your parish rep as a valuable resource?

**Question 5**

Would you feel confident to approach the Child Protection Commission if you had any issues around children and vulnerable adults?
Question 6

If you found yourself the subject of an allegation are you confident that the Child Protection Commission would treat you fairly and with respect.

![Pie chart showing responses to Question 6]

Question 7

Has the adoption of child protection policies and procedures given you confidence to continue your ministry with children and vulnerable adults?

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 7]
Appendix 4

The perception of priests from a Roman Catholic diocese in northern England, October 2007

Research questionnaire with 200 priests

On 31 August 2007 the bishop of the diocese, wrote to the 14 deans of the diocese to invite them to a presentation and discussion about child protection policies and procedures. After consultation with the bishop and the Child Protection Commission it was decided that the deans of the diocese are more likely to respond to an invitation from the bishop especially given that the meeting would be hosted at the Bishop’s House. As the Child Protection Co-ordinator I would not be confident that, given the nature of the content of the presentation, the deans would respond positively to a direct invitation from me. It was agreed that the bishop should take responsibility for facilitating the meeting and as expected he got 100-per-cent attendance. The meeting was held on 12 October 2007. Individual anonymous questionnaires were sent to the 200 clergy of the diocese, the results of which are below.

In addition 230 anonymous questionnaires were sent out the Parish Child Protection Representatives (there are 200 parishes and some have more than one parish representative). It should be noted that each Child Protection Representative is appointed by and responsible to the Child Protection Co-ordinator. The Child Protection Commission is responsible for providing their induction training and ongoing training pertaining to policies and procedures as they apply and evolve.
Feedback from focus group with the deans at Bishop’s House

As the Child Protection Co-ordinator I explained that I was attempting to get feedback from clergy about their thoughts on how child protection policies and procedures had affected their ministry.

I then asked the attendees to look at the letter and questionnaire which had been sent to the clergy. The consultation process would involve consulting with the deans and obtaining feedback from the clergy. I then ran through the questionnaire briefly and asked for honest responses, emphasising that replies would be anonymous.

I stated that the Diocesan Financial Secretary had informed me that the said Diocese Child Protection Commission was the most expensive of the Child Protection Commissions in England and Wales. It was important to discover whether the commission was providing value for money.

Role of the Child Protection Commission

The Chair of the Diocesan Child Protection Commission then introduced himself as a solicitor working in family law and head of department. He asked the deans if they knew what the commission does and whether they thought that the commission can be trusted to do the right thing.

He explained that the commission, consisting of people with a range of professional expertise, meets approximately every two months. Cases that the Child Protection
Co-ordinator and the Child Protection Advisor are concerned about are brought to the meeting for consideration and advice on how to proceed. The Chair said he always reminds the commission that when considering a case the commission has a duty not only to the complainant or victim, but also the alleged perpetrator. It was therefore important that the evidence was weighed up properly, using the civil standard of proof, *i.e.* the more unlikely the event the more cogent the evidence needs to be.

The purpose of the commission meeting is therefore to deal with outstanding issues, take into account an assessment (either internal or by an outside expert) and make a recommendation to the bishop.

The Chair then spoke about the Commission Conference held on 22 September 2007 at which Donald Findlater, Director of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, was the speaker. Donald Findlater had focused his presentation on the forgiveness and rehabilitation of offenders. The Chair then asked how support can be provided to those who have committed offences.

As the Child Protection Co-ordinator, I then shared my experience over the last five years. Nolan had been a reaction to what had been happening, whereas the Cumberlege Review was an opportunity to be proactive.

I had attended a Child Protection Conference on Policies and Procedures in the early days, where the bishop had made the comment that his diocese would be “people-driven, not policy-driven”.
I then said that there had sometimes been a struggle with COPCA (Catholic Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults) especially when COPCA’s timetable seemed too hurried and cumbersome, particularly in regard to Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. The deans were reminded that, before the implementation of the CRB policy in his diocese, the bishop agreed to a pilot project in one of the deaneries. It was realised after this pilot project that the parish representatives were overwhelmed and the process had to be rethought. It was agreed that the Child Protection Co-ordinator and Child Protection Advisor, as counter-signatories with the CRB, would personally take the responsibility for the implementation of the policy deanery by deanery. Since it was decided that the Child Protection Commission would take responsibility for each deanery, a new revised timetable was drafted which would take four years to complete beginning January 2004 ending in the spring of 2008. During this period more than 8,500 CRB checks were completed, and astonishingly only six people refused to engage with the policy because they felt insulted that their integrity was being brought into question.

I brought to the deans’ attention recommendation 3 in the Cumberlege Report: “The term COPCA would be changed to CSAS (Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service)”. The Diocesan Child Protection Commission reported that COPCA has not always been the national resource for which we hoped and that the new advisory service would perhaps strive to be more advisory and less overseeing. Some of the comments made by the deans at the meeting were as follows:
In the current deanery where CRB is being implemented the people are very confident. It is giving them confidence for the future.

I have heard in other dioceses that priests are suspended for a long length of time – the clergy are very apprehensive.

There is a story going round the clergy that the diocese is going to request a copy of their passport, which they will send to all ports and airports if they ever get into trouble.

One priest admitted that he had been unaware of the commission’s existence.
Another complained that his parish child protection representative had not been properly trained because they could not answer the simplest of questions.

Some priests expressed concern that children had all the rights and they seemed to have none. In the light of this the Chair explained the paramountcy principle. He said the principle is not necessarily unequivocally accepted in all homes. In family law, the court is guided by the Children Act (1989) where the welfare of the child is the main consideration. There is a checklist. The child’s wishes and feelings should be taken into consideration with the age and understanding of the child taken into account. A child’s welfare should be of paramount consideration in the Church. It can cause difficulties – a balanced view is needed.
I explained that the paramountcy principle is necessary for the operation of the Church. The Chair added that it permits adults to take control: “The paramountcy principle refers primarily to the welfare not simply the rights of the child.”

I said it is mistakenly believed that the paramountcy principle means that the child should be believed and not the adult. The paramountcy principle allows for a child to be listened to and heard; there is no assumption of guilt or innocence during an initial disclosure.

At the end of the meeting, the deans were asked by the bishop to report the contents of the meeting back to their deanery conference on 16 October 2007. All 14 deans reported back and sent in written reports of comments made by the priests in their deaneries. Some of the comments are as follows:

The approach of the Child Protection Commission sometimes seems cold, clinical and remote from the practicalities of parish life .... It is time for us to move on to a system that is more proactive and encouraging, where priests and lay volunteers are supported in their ministry to young and vulnerable people .... It was agreed that CSAS (despite its name) would be more in tune with the realities of parish life and would give encouragement to all who see their work with children as part of the mission of the Church. We need to be able to move on with confidence whilst still being vigilant about the welfare of children.
We are greatly encouraged especially in the contrast to the aftermath of the Nolan Report .... The people in the parish are far more confident these days.

It was useful to discuss the difference between the child being “listened to” and the child being “believed”.

I am pleased to hear that no priest has been abandoned in this diocese; but that needs to be made clear to everyone with details in writing.

Child protection is having a negative effect on ourselves and our volunteers. Are we being treated as guilty until proven guilty? Everyone should feel that they are respected and treated fairly.

At one deanery:

There was much discussion of possible reaction of ecclesiastical authorities to anonymous accusations. There was anxiety about the perception that clergy might be seen as guilty until proved innocent. Instances were quoted (not from this diocese) where that had indeed been the case. It would seem that this is the only instance where presumption of guilt prevails – in other crimes the accused is presumed innocent until proved guilty.

At another:
Unfounded allegations: Concern was expressed as to how such allegations would be perceived – “no smoke without fire”. How might an individual cope facing such a situation? Some have left their parishes without any instruction to do so – but the feeling was that this was not the best course to take. It was reported that all allegations to date in this diocese have been handled sensitively and justly – but it was also recognised that the person would still feel “damaged”.

How would someone expect to be treated if an allegation were made? Those present felt strongly that the bishop and the Child Protection Co-ordinator would be supportive, although concern was expressed as to whether this would be the case from all members of the commission.

One deanery reported that after putting it to a vote it was unanimously agreed that some members of the commission come across as anti-clerical and therefore unapproachable.

Another deanery:

In light of the discussion about the various “balances” sought (balance of evidence, balance of probabilities, balance of justice for one making allegation and one against whom it is made, et cetera), it was considered important that we have a “balance of attitude” towards the issues.
1. Comments on COPCA over the past five years:

**Structures set up by COPCA:** though useful, seemed over-bureaucratic and had an over-critical approach, *e.g.* – principle that anyone accused should be treated as innocent until proved guilty was not honoured. The Catholic culture was not sufficiently appreciated.

**As put into practice by the diocesan Child Protection Commission:** there were several comments:

**Unease about some personnel’s approach:** seemed to be somewhat aggressive and condescending; lack of respect for priests, most of whom are long-serving in trustworthy positions of a high degree.

**Time for a personality change as with COPCA:** there was general appreciation of the diligence and support of the commission’s co-ordinator.

2. How might CSAS be integrated into the Church family in England and Wales?

a) As a more sensitive and respectful liaison with clergy.

b) As a Christocentric service, in line with everything else in the life of the Church.

(This would contrast with the “social service” type of approach of COPCA, lacking the inspiration of Christian love – which does not exclude clarity of procedure, a wholesome approach, efficiency or accountability.)
Consultation with the priests of the diocese regarding child protection policies and procedures: individual questionnaires for the clergy

200 questionnaires sent out, 85 returned – 42.50 per cent

Some replies came back with anonymous written comments which have been added next to the question to which they refer.

The results of the questionnaires are as follows;

Age range of participants;

It should be noted that the reason no one from the 20-30 age group replied is because there are no priests in this diocese under the age of 30, a fact that was not fully appreciated until this questionnaire was sent out. Also, as the researcher, I was very surprised to learn that the age group 70-80 (18 per cent) were unananimously supportive of the child protection policies. I had wrongly assument that this age group would be the most resistant. The age group 60-70 (22 per cent) expressed the most concern and reported the majority of negative comments.
**Question 1**

Have the policies and procedures adopted by the diocese affected your ministry with children and vulnerable adults?

![Question 1 Pie Chart]

**Question 2**

Do you think these changes are; positive, negative, a mixture or neutral?

![Question 2 Pie Chart]
Question 3

The Child Protection Commission has striven to be a resource to the bishop, priests and people of the diocese. How successful has it been in attempting to achieve this goal?

I think that some policies adopted, have in fact made work with young people more difficult. I know we must strive always for prevention and protection, but our priority must always be the Gospel. Have we asked: Are the policies we adopt helping promote the Gospel? I would also like clarification regarding canon law. Ignoring this issue won’t make it go away. Each priest must clearly know where they stand!!

1. The bureaucracy can be very burdensome, especially when people have to apply for multiple CRB checks.
2. The attitudes adopted by the (lay) staff of the commission can sometimes appear aggressive, insulting and bullying.

3. On the only occasion I was involved with someone asking advice from the commission on a protection matter, I was very impressed by the professionalism displayed.

The COPCA approach was very clinical. Correct structures appeared to be all that mattered. Rightly or wrongly, if left some priests fearful that unknowingly or unwittingly they could fall foul of the law. As the accused they would have no rights and little if any support – a life-long vocation would be thrown on the rubbish heap.

I feel that the COPCA approach was necessary but it is time to move on. We need to reclaim the mission of the Church to the young and vulnerable, and to re-establish our involvement as priests in that ministry.”

I’ve been very glad of the commission’s help on a number of occasions. It’s been invaluable.
Question 4
The parish child protection reps are in place to be a resource to the parish priest and the parishioners. Do you regard your parish rep as a valuable resource?

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<th>Always</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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Question 5
Would you feel confident to approach the Child Protection Commission if you had any issues around children and vulnerable adults?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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</table>
The legal presumption of innocence does not seem to be operative in cases of false allegations, and is a serious omission.

Because of the high profile child protection issues have in the Church, it affects ministry in that now you always have to think about ensuring EVERYONE is safe – children, volunteers, vulnerable people, and yourself as well.

Much good has been done with regard to procedures and guidelines but clergy fears over allegations (false or unproven) are still very real. Clergy are not sure of what provision is made in such circumstances but assume that the same agency that would investigate disclosures/allegations would also support them: is there a clash of interest here? Thanks for all your endeavours.

The introduction of the commission I am sure has been for the best. But it has been said that priests who have been accused have been treated rather badly. I am not sure if the commission could react to an allegation coolly and measured. It seems rather that (and this is the only case in British law) you are guilty until proven innocent. There have been many such cases around the country – including within our own diocese where priests have been treated almost with disdain when there is no case against them.
It has also been said that priests are very vulnerable insomuch as the diocese would react in the negative rather than the positive and would not pay for the cost of a barrister in such cases – sited as being too expensive.

All these issues have been discussed in the National Council of Priests, but I still have no evidence that anything has been done to alleviate the worry of priests across the board.

**Question 6**

If you found yourself the subject of an allegation are you confident that the Child Protection Commission would treat you fairly and with respect?

![Pie chart showing responses to Question 6](chart.png)

Once falsely accused, a priest could never prove his innocence.

I’m not sure I would have answered question 6 so positively if I was not aware of how the commission has dealt with someone I know. I would probably have opted for “not sure” or “don’t know” – so if these are the main
responses to that question it is probably because most people have not had any direct dealings with the commission.

All animals are equal. Some are more equal than others.

While the so called paramountcy principle is maintained, justice will never happen or be seen to happen. It conflicts with the human rights of clergy and defies canon law. It is also possibly illegal as it discriminates on the ground of age.

**Question 7**

Has the adoption of child protection policies and procedures given you confidence to continue your ministry with children and vulnerable adults?

Credence must rightly be given to children – no problem – but not at the expense of denying other persons respect of their rights.
Two wrongs do not make a right. Not to listen to a child is wrong – and we need to create the situation where a child can freely speak knowing he or she will be listened to. But to exaggerate that to exclude fairness and impartiality to others is wrong – and that is what seems to be happening. Justice has to be seen to happen even-handedly and fairly.