

Ex-Council Worker's 10 year sentence for rape of three women

Sonya McLean Reports

A former Waterford County Council worker has been sentenced to 10 years for the sexual abuse and rape of two sisters and a third woman over the course of 12 years. Stephanie Hickey (46) along with her sister, Deirdre Fahy (52), waived their right to anonymity at a sentence hearing last July so their abuser and brother-in-law Bartholomew Prendergast (66) can be named. Reading from her victim impact statement, Ms Hickey asked how the abuse could have continued when Prendergast was "supposedly fixed" after a priest directed him to get counselling. At the Central Criminal Court last July Garda Patricia Lonergan told Michael Delaney SC, prosecuting, that after "something was brought to the attention of Stephanie's parents", a local priest was consulted and Prendergast was sent for counselling, but continued to abuse Ms Hickey afterwards. All three women made statements to Gardaí in December 2015.



Garda Lonergan said "various disclosures" had been made to different members of the families involved over the years, but nothing was ever done apart from the meeting with the priest. Prendergast, of Cruachan, Dungarvan was arrested in April 2016 and interviewed three times. He denied ever raping Stephanie Hickey and said he was both "vehement and definite in those denials". He pleaded guilty at the Central Criminal Court to the offences following a day of legal argument after a jury had been sworn in for his trial. He has recently retired from Waterford County Council and is also a well known musician in the locality. He has since separated from his wife, has three adult children and has no previous convictions. He pleaded guilty to two counts of rape and 13 counts of indecent assault of his sister-in-law Stephanie Hickey at locations in Counties Waterford and Tipperary on dates between 1983 and 1987. Ms Hickey was aged between 12 and 15 years old at the time of the offences.

Prendergast also pleaded guilty to one count of indecent assault against Ms Fahy on a date between 1979 and 1981, while she was aged between 13 and 14 years old. He further pleaded guilty to two counts of indecent assault of a third woman, now 39 years old, on dates between 1988 and 1991, while she was aged between nine and 12 years old. This woman is aware that Prendergast will be named in reporting of the case but she does not wish to be identified. Yesterday (Monday) Ms Justice Eileen Creedon suspended the final 18 months of a 10-year prison sentence on strict conditions, including that Prendergast undergo a sex offenders treatment programme and be under the supervision of The Probation Service for 18 months.

She said it was clear that there was "a profound and negative impact on the victims" who were all left feeling "fear, guilt and shame". She said Prendergast's crime also impacted the women's family lives and their own relationships. "He was part of the inner family circle," Ms Justice Creedon said before she added that the women were entitled to feel safe in Prendergast's company and equally their parents should have been able to feel that their daughters would be safe with him. The judge said the offences were "a serious breach of trust" and the women found "difficult to escape" from the abuse. She also noted the evidence that the abuse continued despite a family discussion of it and an "intervention" from a local priest. Ms Justice Creedon gave Prendergast credit for his ultimate pleas of guilty, noting that it was "an important step in vindicating the victims".

She acknowledged a submission from his legal team that "given his profile in the community" the publication of his name will

represent “an additional burden” for both Prendergast and his family.

Garda Lonergan said at the previous hearing that Prendergast married Patricia Hickey, Stephanie’s and Deirdre’s sister in June 1981 and the couple moved into a three storey building in west Waterford.

Patricia set up a hairdressing salon on the ground floor and Stephanie visited most weekends to help out.

Ms Hickey later told Gardaí that Prendergast first started to abuse her when she was 12 years old, either in his family home or while he was driving her to and from her own family home, which was also in west Waterford.

Garda Lonergan confirmed that Stephanie was mainly made perform oral sex on Prendergast and masturbate him but said that he also raped the teenager on two occasions.

She said on the day of the rape she had asked him to stop because it hurt but he said it would get better. She recalled being about 15 years old at the time. She said he raped her on at least one other occasion but she was not sure what age she was. Deirdre Fahy told Gardaí that she was 13 or 14 years old when she accepted a lift to the local shop from Prendergast. He was not married to her sister at the time. On the way home, he pulled over the car, put his hand inside her blouse, fondled her breast and kissed her. She said she froze, he backed off and asked her if she had liked it. She said that was the only occasion Prendergast had touched her sexually. The third woman was first abused by Prendergast in June 1988 when she was nine years old. This woman said on one occasion Prendergast masturbated in front of her while sitting with her in his truck. When they returned home, her mother came out to greet them and Prendergast continued to masturbate while her mother stood below the cab driver’s door talking up to him. She described on another occasion that he sexually assaulted her in the kitchen of “a house full of people” after telling her she looked lovely.