

Catholic Priest Falls From Grace

by Barry Hendry

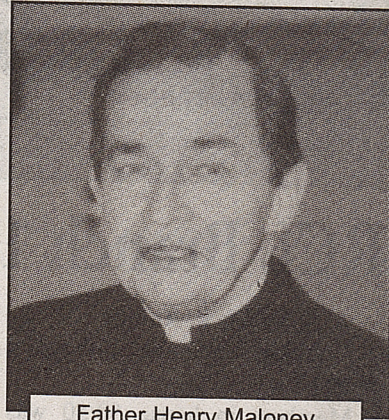
Part one ended with Mike Fitzgerald literally running away from the Our Lady of Mercy rectory and the abuse he had suffered there. Now Fitzgerald explains his state of mind then and his lawyer describes his client's struggle and his courage.

Fitzgerald explained why he spent three months hiding in a tent avoiding his friends and family with, "I couldn't go back to school because I couldn't answer my friends' questions and I couldn't go home for the same reason. I found out later my mother was looking for me. It was the loneliest I'd ever been and the worst year of my life." Eventually with borrowed money

he took a bus to Toronto and quickly became a security guard. In 1990 on his return to Bancroft he went back to church for the first time since 1974. He told The Times he tried to gain acceptance by directing the church and school choirs and being the organist. That lasted five years.

On September 2 of this year Fitzgerald's lawyer Rob Talach said, "Mike's life pattern is very similar to the 77-year-old's in the ongoing case against Maloney and the diocese.

"Mike called me in 2010 and, typically on first contact, I ask people to have a support system in place. Mike didn't have that so counselling was the next step. He



Father Henry Maloney

had a dark and rocky road for a number of months of that before we took him on as a client.

"The big event for Mike was the issuance of the statement of claim and filing it in 2012. Then came the examination for discovery in June 2013 and it became clear that he made absolutely legitimate claims. That's when the lawyer for the defense shifted it from a litigation to a settlement. The representative of the diocese, Father Peter Proulx, was never examined so all we got was Maloney's personnel file. We soon heard about this other case.

"Poor Mike, he thought he was on his own going against Maloney, until we heard about this other man.

"At first Mike had typical issues. He was down on himself, lacked confidence and he was removed from the real issues. Signs of the effects of abuse were even in the way he talked. His life pattern corroborates that he was a victim.

"Now, it's vindication and closure, but not complete on either side. Mike feels he's made a difference in how, internally, the church has made changes in dealing with these things."

In April of 2014 Pope Francis said, "I feel compelled to take personal responsibility for all the evil that some priests, many, many in number, although not in comparison with the totality, to assume personal responsibility for the damage caused by the sexual abuse of children. The church is aware of this damage. We don't want to take a step back in dealing with this problem and the sanctions that must be imposed."

Lawyer Talach continued, "I've