

## Special Report

# Church 'must tackle House

Former member demands investigation into the work of 'visionary'

Sarah Mac Donald

**S**ELF-STYLED visionary and multi-millionaire Christina Gallagher should be excommunicated by the Catholic Church, an ex-member of the House of Prayer has said.

Mick Power got involved with the House of Prayer with his wife Paula in 1998, when their only child Tommy died of meningitis.

But the former member of the cult-like movement has spoken out for the first time, demanding that the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith investigate Ms Gallagher along with her spiritual director, Fr Gerard McGinnity, for heresy and unproven claims of miracles.

He described Ms Gallagher's purported divine messages as "appalling" and "all about chastisements and the end of the world".

"She was always talking about the anti-Christ and the wrath of the beast," he told the *Irish Independent*.

The final straw for the 39-year-old came in 2006, when Fr McGinnity read out a message in which Ms Gallagher was allegedly told by Jesus that if pilgrims did not provide money for a new House of Prayer in Texas, he would destroy the whole state.

## Rubbish

"I was present when he said that and I said that is the end for me - how could anybody of any intelligence listen to that kind of rubbish?" asked Mr Power.

"It is true heresy. She has told them that the only thing that will save them during the great chastisement is a €250 picture available in the House of Prayer shop. That's simony."

Mr Power believes the Irish hierarchy needs to make a more concerted effort to examine the improper nature of Ms Gallagher's visions and the funding mechanisms employed on behalf of House of Prayer.

A group of concerned relatives of devotees and ex-members is also campaigning for the Archdiocese of Armagh to take a more pro-active stance on the House of Prayer's spiritual director, Fr McGinnity.

They have called on Cardinal Sean Brady to stand over his agreement to meet their representative to answer questions about the priest, who works in the Archdiocese of Armagh, and who they claim is key to the religious group's operations.

## CHRISTINA GALLAGHER'S VISION RAISED €1.6M PROFITS FOR MAYO RETREAT CENTRE

**T**HE controversial House of Prayer at Achill Island, in Co Mayo, was founded by self-proclaimed visionary Christina Gallagher in 1993.

Accounts filed for the religious retreat centre show it recorded a profit of €13,192 in 2012 following a loss of €45,453 in 2011.

At the end of 2012, the centre was sitting on accumulated profits of €1.66m.

Relatives of members and ex-devotees of the House of Prayer claim its messages are apocalyptic, predicting violent chastisements for the world.

They claim the House of Prayer copies Catholic practices such as prayer, fasting and almsgiving to give the impression of an allegiance with the Catholic Church.

The House of Prayer is located within the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Tuam.

Archbishop Michael Neary, in February 2008, stated it "has no Church approval and the work does not enjoy the confidence of the diocesan authorities".

Spokesman for Dr Neary, Fr Fintan Monaghan told the *Irish Independent*: "The archbishop's stance remains the same."

Fr Monaghan added: "We have been alerting people to this stance from 1997 onwards."

## Supervision

Critics also accuse Ms Gallagher of not operating the House of Prayer under the terms originally agreed with Archbishop Joseph Cassidy of Tuam, when it first opened in 1993 and resisting all attempts by the Archdiocese of Tuam to place it under its supervision.

A Committee of Inquiry was set up by Dr Neary in 1996 to investigate the House of Prayer.

In a public statement in December 1997, Dr Neary said: "No evidence has been presented which might prove

Last August, Cardinal Brady, who was then the head of the Church in Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, agreed to meet in a monastery with cult expert and the director of Dialogue Ireland, Mike Garde.

The meeting was to discuss the role of Fr McGinnity, who is parish priest in Knockbridge in Co Louth.

But Cardinal Brady is accused of doing nothing to address Fr McGinnity's involvement.

Having agreed on August 15 to meet Mr Garde, Cardinal Brady notified him three weeks ago that he would not meet him.

Cardinal Brady told him that he is no longer Archbishop of Armagh, following the acceptance of his resignation by Pope Francis on September 8.



beyond reasonable doubt the occurrence of supernatural phenomena". In 1998, Dr Neary requested "detailed accounts" concerning any monies willed or otherwise donated since the House of Prayer opened.

The Revenue Commissioners removed the House of Prayer's charitable status in 2006.

In 2008, Dr Neary announced that the celebration of the sacraments and reservation of the Blessed Sacrament at the House of Prayer would no longer be permitted.

He also said at this time that the House of Prayer did not enjoy the confidence of the Diocesan authorities.

"I do not believe that a meeting between us would contribute to the resolution of the difficulties which you wish to discuss," he said.

Mr Power said he was "disgusted and very disappointed" by the Cardinal's response but not surprised by it.

"Over the years, the Cardinal has used all sorts of excuses so as not to actually deal with this issue directly" he said.

**'Christina Gallagher said the only thing that could save us was a €250 picture from the House of Prayer shop'**

**In 1998, Archbishop Neary requested "detailed accounts" concerning any monies willed or otherwise donated since the House of Prayer opened. The Revenue Commissioners removed the House of Prayer's charitable status in 2006.**

In correspondence seen by the *Irish Independent* in August, the Cardinal defended his reluctance to tackle Fr McGinnity to Mr Garde, saying: "I am not in possession of evidence that Fr McGinnity is breaking the law - either civil or canonical."

"We do live in a country where citizens enjoy the right to freedom of movement and in a Church where there are many different ministries."

In the same letter dated August 1, 2014, Cardinal Brady stated that he had discussed the issue of fundraising with Fr McGinnity, who had assured him that he was not involved in fundraising for the House of Prayer and that his activity was confined to spiritually

It has been suggested that the numbers attending the House of Prayer have dropped significantly in recent years, since media reports revealed details of Christina Gallagher's properties.

This has included a portfolio of luxurious houses in places like Malahide, City West, Newport, Ballina, Knockmore and on the Sligo Road to Enniscrone, as well as houses in the US, totalling millions of euro.

Ms Gallagher was approached by the *Irish Independent* this week, but she refused to comment.

Sarah Mac Donald

directing Ms Gallagher. However, Mr Garde and a number of people associated with the House of Prayer say they have presented the cardinal with documents which suggest Fr McGinnity was sent cheques intended for the House of Prayer, including one for €40,000 made out to Fr McGinnity.

A spokesman for the Archdiocese of Armagh told the *Irish Independent* that because Cardinal Brady is now retired, all his leadership responsibilities have transferred to his successor, Archbishop Eamon Martin.

"Archbishop Eamon is currently familiarising himself and examining all of the issues involved," spokesman Martin Long said.