

Town's innocent suffered of Death' failed to turn

IT HAS been one of the most earth shattering weeks in the history of Dungarvan. Decent people's names have been irretrievably blackened and a well liked priest's credibility lies in shreds.

This morning the 7,000 inhabitants of this picturesque Waterford town are trying to shake off the effects of a nightmare binge of shock and horror revelations of the killer disease.

The sleepy resort was cast into a blazing furnace of the most unwelcome publicity imaginable eight days ago after dashing town curate Fr. Michael Kennedy maintained its people had been targeted by a seductive female AIDS carrier.

The first ripples of his startling claims emerged at evening Mass yesterday week.

The upwardly mobile handsome priest brought the stunned gasps of shock to his devoted congregation when they gathered for prayers at the town's St. Mary's Church after he announced there had been a hidden killer in their midst.

He claimed an attractive young woman, who contracted AIDS in England, had returned to Ireland with the sole purpose of spreading the deadly virus to as many men as possible.

He said she had lived in the tiny town from November 1994 to March 1995. In that time she had sex with up to 80 young men in the town and the surrounding areas.

"It is a very frightening story and I am afraid it is only the tip of the iceberg," he declared. "It is one of those horror stories you would hate to even dream of happening."



From CATHAL O'SHEA and MIKE McNIFF in Dungarvan

At the following morning's 10.30 Mass he expanded on his sensational allegations to his startled flock. From the pulpit he said one woman had infected five young men from the region with the HIV virus.

Results

Dozens of her other one-night stands were anxiously awaiting the results of tests. Her unwitting lovers were to be found in Youghal, Cork, Waterford, Dungarvan, Clonmel, Kilkenny and Thurles.

Within hours Dungarvan's Lalor's Hotel was putting the "house full" sign up as the world's media descended for the "story of the decade." It was the story with every-

thing it had sex and scandal. It was cracking tale of a town infected by fear and a woman's revenge.

It also had a Kennedy. The 41-year-old priest is a cousin and full fledged member of the famous Irish-American dynasty.

Fr. Kennedy seemed to be in his element last Monday as he made himself available for interviews and TV networks, radio stations, newspapers and continental magazines.

He claimed he had been approached by an HIV victim's mother who had wanted to speak from the pulpit about her son and the dangers to other young men in the area the deadly seductress countless victims.

Fr. Kennedy maintained that he had personally spoken to the so called Angel of Death on several occasions and she had confessed all.

She was now being treated in a London clinic and only had weeks to live.

But by last Tuesday Fr. Kennedy was beginning to show the strain. His story kept on changing. He admitted he could not prove one woman was responsible for the scare.

Most of his shock sermon was based on hearsay. He would not name the woman or any of her alleged victims. He was not certain of precise numbers.

Amazingly

Everyone he believed who had contracted the deadly virus had amazingly travelled to London for tests.

His Bishop, the South Eastern Health Board, local doctors and the gardai had absolutely no evidence to back up his astonishing claims.

Rumours spread like wildfire as panic gripped the area. Lives were turned upside down as innocent women were pinpointed as being possible "Angels of Death".

Young men found themselves being door stepped by newsmen and photographers demanding to know if they were victims.

Gossip resulted in several people having to leave their homes.

One Dungarvan woman is in hiding this weekend after she found she could no longer cope with the pressure.

A cancer sufferer who recently returned from hospital in England where she was receiving medical treatment found to her outrage that she was being labelled an Aids carrier.

Over the past few days a number of women in the area



TALK OF THE STREET: Stunned locals have little else to discuss in Dungarvan.

have contacted solicitors with a view to suing for slander.

Six days of investigation by the Sunday World has failed to turn up the woman at the centre of the scare or even one of her so called victims.

The Sunday World has discovered that while there may have been one unfortunate

woman in the area suffering from Aids there is no evidence that she can be directly linked to other possible HIV carriers.

Meanwhile medical experts continued to pour cold water on Fr. Kennedy's claims and some are openly laughing at him.

The once easily available priest is keeping a low profile in

Dungarvan. His mobile phone was switched off yesterday. He was refusing to talk to reporters.

Fr. Kennedy says the infected men will make themselves known to the South Eastern Health Board when the fuss dies down.

The Sunday World, for one, is not holding its breath.

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AIDS STORY THAT KEEPS TURNING UP

THIS was not the first Aids scare to have rocked Ireland. Seven years ago, in December 1988, hysteria gripped the quiet Kildare town of Castledermot when it was claimed that a local girl had passed the HIV infection on to "numerous" boyfriends.

Several callers phoned the Sunday World claiming that the girl had been interviewed on Marian Finucane's Live-line programme on RTE.

The girl was supposedly seriously ill in Neas Hospital.

But the interview that sent the sleepy town into a tailspin of terror never took place, and health officers confirmed that the scare was nothing more than another urban legend.

Earlier this year a large number of people in Kiltimagh Co Mayo were warned through letters that they had become in danger of contracting the HIV infection.

Scare

The news was made public through a local radio station reported that a number of young people had received the letters from England suggesting that they and their friends go for the tests.

Despite the scare, there were no reports of either increased tests or infections. The letters were sent on April 1 and were later described by local doctor Kenneth Keane as a "practical and very nasty joke."

And in March, 1983, health officers had to issue a denial after a series of hoax letters in Fermans, Co Offaly, sparked off another Aids scare.

That story, which alleged that named men from all corners of the county had become infected by the

'virus, was reported to have caused immense distress to a respected woman who was married with children and who lived a quiet normal family life.

Folklore experts say that stories featuring a female "Aids Avenger" have been documented all over the world.

The common theme is a young woman who returns to her quiet hometown after contracting the disease in a big city and wreaks revenge on the male population.

Modern folklorists classify them as the "Aids Mary" stories. In previous generations they were told about women suffering from syphilis and herpes.