

English cardinal heard range of voices in Northern Ireland visitation

DUBLIN - One of the church officials charged with an inquiry into church life in Ireland in the wake of clerical sexual abuse scandals said he has heard voices of integrity as well as discouragement.

"During these past two weeks, I have heard many voices: the voices of great pain and suffering of the survivors of abuse; their shame; their anger. I have also heard voices of discouragement, voices of honesty and the integrity of the people and good priests," said English Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, retired archbishop of Westminster.

"I have also heard voices of faith and a determination to persevere in the building up of the church in this diocese by prayer and the holy Eucharist and the word of God and the service of others," he said at a Jan. 23 "Service of Penitence and Healing" in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh, Northern Ireland.

"Above all, I have listened to the voices of hope. First of all, the voice of hope that the past will not be forgotten and that there will be openness and transparency in facing the issues of abuse. There is, too, the hope that there will be renewal in this diocese and an assurance of the presence of the Lord as we walk along this road," he said.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, is one of five senior clerics responsible for investigating the four archdioceses and the seminaries in Ireland and Northern Ireland after the church was shaken by revelations of clerical abuse and mishandling and cover-up by church leaders.

At the healing service, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor was joined by Armagh's Cardinal Sean Brady for a reenactment of Jesus washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper. Cardinal Brady said the ritual was "a sign of humility and the service of others."

Meanwhile, a delegation of senior U.S. prelates led by New York Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan was due in Ireland to begin the inquiry, or apostolic visitation, of the national seminary, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Jan. 31.

Archbishop Dolan was to be accompanied by Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien of Baltimore; Bishop Edward J. Burns of Juneau, Alaska; Bishop William P. Callahan of La Crosse, Wis.; Bishop Bernard A. Hebda of Gaylord, Mich.; and Monsignor Francis Kelly, rector of Casa Santa Maria, the residence for U.S. priests studying in Rome. They also will visit some smaller houses of formation.

The men completed their weeklong visitation to the Pontifical Irish College in Rome in mid-January.

Monsignor Hugh Connolly, president of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, said he welcomed the visitation.

"This will be a privileged time when the seminary community will have the opportunity to share its daily life with the Holy Father's personally appointed representative, so that together all might discern how best, in Pope Benedict's own words, to strive toward a 'renewed strength and deeper sense of mission,'" he said.

Monsignor Connolly said the Irish church would benefit from Archbishop Dolan's experience as a seminary rector, priest and bishop, and he noted the other delegation members' experience in priestly formation.

Pope Benedict announced the apostolic visitation last March when he wrote a pastoral letter to Irish Catholics expressing deep sorrow and regret at the abuse children suffered and the mishandling of the abuse by church leaders. Two state inquiries had revealed abuse in church-run institutions and parishes and found that church authorities had put the avoidance of scandal and the protection of the church's reputation ahead of the protection of children.

Boston's Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, who is leading the apostolic visitation in the Dublin Archdiocese, has already been in Ireland twice meeting victims, priests and parishioners. Archbishop Thomas Collins of Toronto is conducting the visitation of the Archdiocese of Cashel, and Archbishop Terrence Prendergast of Ottawa,

Ontario, is leading the visitation of the Archdiocese of Tuam.

Two nuns and two priests are conducting the visitation into religious congregations in Ireland.

In a mid-November statement, the Vatican said it would issue a comprehensive summary of the investigations' findings when they are completed.

The first phase of the visitation should be completed by Easter, April 24, and it is likely the visitors will meet with senior officials of the Roman Curia in the spring to discuss what the Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, described as the next phase of the "path to renewal."

Four Irish bishops tendered their resignation in the wake of the abuse reports. Bishop Donal Murray of Limerick and Bishop James Moriarty of Kildare and Leighlin had their resignations accepted, while Pope Benedict did not accept the resignations of Dublin Auxiliary Bishops Eamonn Walsh and Raymond Field.