

Irish bishop resigns over his handling of clerical sexual abuse

DUBLIN, Ireland – Bishop Donal Murray of Limerick has resigned after weeks of pressure over his handling of clerical sexual abuse when he served in the Dublin Archdiocese.

Speaking Dec. 17 after the Vatican announced that Pope Benedict XVI had accepted his resignation, Bishop Murray told a large congregation in St. John's Cathedral in Limerick, "I humbly apologize once again to all who were abused as little children."

"I know full well that my resignation cannot undo the pain that survivors of abuse have suffered in the past and continue to suffer each day," he told the congregation which included many priests of the diocese.

A government investigation found that Bishop Murray, who served as auxiliary bishop of the Dublin Archdiocese from 1982 to 1996, failed to investigate allegations of abuse against a priest and called his action "inexcusable." The findings from the investigation, published Nov. 26 in the so-called Murphy Report, looked at the handling of some 325 abuse claims in the archdiocese in the years 1975-2004.

The commission in charge of the investigation also found that church leaders had put the avoidance of scandal and the reputation of the institution before the rights of victims.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin welcomed Bishop Murray's resignation, saying in a statement, "I appreciate the personal difficulty and pressure he has been under."

"Responsibility must be taken by all who hold a position of authority and collective responsibility," the statement said.

The archbishop also acknowledged that "serious difficulties of structure and communication at the management level" of the archdiocese existed and promised that "radical reform" across the archdiocese, including the area of child protection,

would be undertaken.

Immediately after the report's publication Bishop Murray rejected calls for his resignation. However, Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, president of the Irish bishops' conference, publicly called on the embattled bishop Dec. 5 to "do the right thing" and resign. The following day Bishop Murray traveled to Rome and met with officials from the Vatican's Congregation to the Doctrine of the Faith to tender his resignation to Pope Benedict XVI.

Speaking in Rome, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, said Bishop Murray "presented his resignation on his own initiative."

In his remarks, Bishop Murray said he had heard from numerous abuse survivors and some asked him to resign while others urged him to stay on.

"A bishop is meant to be a person who seeks to lead and inspire all the people of the diocese in living as a community united in the truth and love of Christ. I asked the Holy Father to allow me to resign and to appoint a new bishop to the diocese because I believe that my presence will create difficulties for some of the survivors who must have first place in our thoughts and prayers," he said.

"To all survivors of abuse I repeat that my primary concern is to assist in every way that I can, on their journey towards finding closure and serenity," Bishop Murray said.

His announcement was followed by a holy hour of guided prayer for abuse victims.

Bishop Murphy's decision to step down is expected to put further pressure on four other Irish bishops who also are mentioned in the report. Auxiliary Bishops Eamonn Walsh and Raymond Field, both of Dublin, Bishop James Moriarity of Kildare and Leighlin and Bishop Martin Drennan of Galway and Kilmacduagh have resisted calls for their resignation, insisting that they have done nothing wrong.

The Irish Catholic newspaper reported Dec. 17 that Bishop Moriarity, an auxiliary bishop in Dublin between 1991 and 2002, has indicated he may be ready to step down.

“My position is simple,” Bishop Moriarity said in a statement. “I am 73 years of age and am obliged to tender my resignation when I turn 75. If it will serve the church and the victims for me to go sooner I will do that.”

Bishop Moriarity was criticized in the Murphy Report for an incident involving a priest who abused children who were patients at Our Lady’s Hospital for Sick Children.

Archbishop Martin said he would be meeting with the four bishops in January.

Bishop Murray’s resignation comes as Irish Catholics are awaiting a pastoral letter from Pope Benedict XVI on the issue. The pope promised such a letter after a Dec. 4 summit with leaders from the Irish Catholic Church at the Vatican. The letter will herald a “significant structural reform” of the church in Ireland, Archbishop Martin said.