

Pope Benedict accepts resignation of Ireland's Bishop Magee

DUBLIN, Ireland - Pope Benedict XVI accepted the resignation of Bishop John Magee of Cloyne, more than a year after the bishop requested that an apostolic administrator be appointed to run the diocese.

As he stepped down March 24, Bishop Magee, 73, offered an apology to victims of abuse by clergy in his diocese.

"To those of whom I have failed in any way, or through any omission of mine have made to suffer, I beg forgiveness and pardon," he said in a statement.

The Vatican gave no reason for the pope's acceptance of Bishop Magee's resignation, but cited Canon 401.2 of the Code of Canon Law, which states that "a diocesan bishop who has become less able to fulfill his office because of ill health or some other grave cause is earnestly requested to present his resignation from office."

In February 2009 Bishop Magee asked for an apostolic administrator to be appointed to oversee Cloyne so he could so that he could devote more time to a government inquiry led by Justice Yvonne Murphy into how his diocese carried out child protection policies and practices.

The Vatican responded by naming Archbishop Dermott Clifford of Cashel as administrator. At the time, it was thought the move was temporary.

Murphy's original inquiry concerned abuse within the Archdiocese of Dublin, and the results of that inquiry were released in late November. Her inquiry was expanded to include the Cloyne Diocese.

In December 2008 Bishop Magee, the former personal secretary to three popes - Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II - was criticized by an internal, but independent, church body. The National Board for Safeguarding Children found that the Cloyne Diocese failed to follow church guidelines governing the reporting of abuse and

placed the welfare of accused priests ahead of the welfare of victims. The board's report found that the diocese's practices further endangered children.

That finding was echoed in a separate report by the Health and Safety Executive, the statutory body that manages Irish health and social services. That body recommended Murphy's inquiry be extended to include the Cloyne Diocese.

Bishop Magee said he will continue to assist any government investigation if called upon.

In response to the Vatican's announcement, Archbishop Clifford thanked Bishop Magee and wished him "all God's blessings in his retirement. I ask for the continued prayers and support of the lay faithful, priests and religious of the Diocese of Cloyne for all those who have suffered abuse."

Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, chairman of the Irish bishops' conference, acknowledged Bishop Magee's "long and varied ministry" in the church.

"I thank him for his contribution to the work of the Irish bishops' conference over the past 20 years, particularly in the area of liturgy. I assure him my prayers at this time and wish him good health in his retirement. However, foremost in my thoughts in these days are those who have suffered abuse by clergy and those who feel angry and let down by the often inadequate response of leaders in the church," Cardinal Brady said.