

# Pope names officials to conduct visitation of Irish church

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI has named nine church leaders to begin an apostolic visitation of the Catholic Church in Ireland aimed at helping the church address the sexual abuse scandal, improve assistance to victims and perfect preventative measures.

The Vatican announced May 31 that the visitation would begin in the fall and that no deadline has been set for its conclusion.

“Through this visitation, the Holy See intends to offer assistance to the bishops, clergy, religious and lay faithful as they seek to respond adequately to the situation caused by the tragic cases of abuse perpetrated by priests and religious upon minors,” the Vatican said.

“It is also intended to contribute to the desired spiritual and moral renewed that is already being vigorously pursued by the church in Ireland,” it added.

In his March letter to Catholics in Ireland, Pope Benedict had announced plans for a visitation, saying it was “intended to assist the local church on her path of renewal.”

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said the apostolic visitors are not taking over the responsibilities of the bishops, seminary rectors or religious superiors in Ireland; the Vatican is not “substituting the authorities in place, but adding a presence that, by coming in from the outside, could be in a better position to objectively gather information and make useful evaluations.”

The visitation will begin with Ireland’s four archdioceses: British Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, retired archbishop of Westminster, will conduct the visitation of the Archdiocese of Armagh, Northern Ireland; Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston will visit the Archdiocese of Dublin; Archbishop Thomas Collins of Toronto will conduct the visitation of the Archdiocese of Cashel; Archbishop Terrence Prendergast of Ottawa, Ontario, will visit the Archdiocese of Tuam.

Pope Benedict also named Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York, former rector of the U.S. seminary in Rome, to lead the visitation of the Irish seminaries, including the Pontifical Irish College in Rome, the Vatican said.

Archbishop Dolan was at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, an Irish seminary, May 27 to give a lecture for the Year for Priests.

"I stand before you no guru or expert, no acclaimed theologian or renowned mystic; I am hardly some 'know-it-all Yankee' here to lecture you on how you got into or how to get out of the current crisis you are in, 'cause I don't know," he said.

Archbishop Dolan said he believes the church is being called back to the basics of prayer and humility.

"We're not priests for what we can get, but for what we can give, and anyone who's in it for power, authority, privilege or entitlement should not be. That's clericalism and it is a vice, a sin," he said.

In a statement released by his office May 31, Archbishop Dolan said, "My love for the faith of Ireland, and my own background in priestly formation, make me grateful for this assignment, and I look forward to close cooperation with my brother bishops, priests, religious and the faithful of Ireland."

Pope Benedict also named two priests and two religious women to lead the visitation of Irish religious orders. U.S. Redemptorist Father Joseph W. Tobin, former superior of the Redemptorist order, and Jesuit Father Gero McLoughlin, promoter of Ignatian spirituality for the Jesuits' British province, will visit men's religious orders. U.S. Sister Sharon Holland, as member of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and former Vatican official, and Irish Sister Mairin McDonagh, a member of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, will conduct the visitation of the women's communities.

The Vatican said that before the four begin visiting religious orders, a questionnaire would be sent to the superiors of orders in Ireland to get "an accurate picture of the current situation," including their opinion of how to improve the church's norms for child protection.

The bishops visiting dioceses will report their findings to the Congregation for

Bishops. Archbishop Dolan will report to the Congregation for Catholic Education, which oversees seminaries. The religious will report to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Father Lombardi said, "On the basis of the reports, the Holy See will give the institutions visited indications for overcoming difficulties or will make decisions if that appears necessary."

He also said that while diocesan visitation initially will involve only the four archdioceses, other dioceses would be visited at a later stage.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin called the visitation "an important element in the broad process being set in place by Pope Benedict to assist the Catholic Church in Ireland in its renewal."

He also said because of Cardinal O'Malley's experience taking over the Archdiocese of Boston in 2003 after its sex abuse crisis, he can help Catholics in Dublin address "the truth of a dark moment in its history" as it "undertakes a period of conversion, purification and renewal."

The standing committee of the Irish bishops' conference said in a statement that the visitation is "an expression of the personal closeness of Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland" and "represents one more important step on the path to healing, reparation and renewal."