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Irish bishops: Abuse was prevalent in church culture

Cian Molloy Catholic News Service | Jun. 11, 2009

Boys eat in a massive dining hall capable of holding more than 800 students at the Artane Industrial School in Dublin, Ireland, in this undated photo. (CNS)

DUBLIN, Ireland

The abuse of children in institutions run by Catholic priests and nuns was part of a culture that was prevalent in the Catholic Church in Ireland, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference said at the conclusion of its summer meeting.

The bishops spent a major portion of their June 8-10 meeting discussing a report from the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, published May 20 under chairman Sean Ryan. The commission found that church institutions failed to prevent an extensive level of sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect.

"The Ryan report represents the most recent disturbing indictment of a culture that was prevalent in the Catholic Church in Ireland for far too long," the bishops said. "Heinous crimes were perpetrated against the most innocent and vulnerable, and vile acts with life-lasting effects were carried out under the guise of the mission of Jesus Christ.

t"This abuse represents a serious betrayal of the trust which was placed in the church. For this we ask forgiveness. We are ashamed, humbled and repentant that our people strayed so far from their Christian ideals," the bishops said.

tThe bishops offered four immediate responses to the report:
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- Sadness over the "suffering of so many for so long."
- An invitation to survivors to "engage with us" in an effort to understand how to assist the victims of abuse.
- The intention to respond as pastors "despite the inadequacies at times of our previous pastoral responses."
- Praying for the "well being and peace of mind for all who suffered" and urging all Catholics to join them in prayer.

tDuring their meeting, the Irish bishops reflected on the early June visit to Rome by Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin and their June 8 meeting with Pope Benedict XVI. In addition to briefing the Holy Father on the Ryan report, the two men discussed the findings with several pontifical congregations.

Reportedly, Pope Benedict was "visibly upset" [1] when he heard details contained in the Ryan report on abuse in State institutions run by religious orders during the meeting with Brady and Martin.

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[1] http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2009/0608/breaking33.htm