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Irish bishops called to Vatican about abuse report

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Dec. 8, 2009

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI has asked the president of the Irish bishops' conference and the archbishop of Dublin to come to the Vatican to discuss "the painful situation of the church in Ireland" following a report detailing the church's failures in addressing clerical sexual abuse.

Irish press reports said Bishop Donal Murray of Limerick was expected to resign in the wake of the Dublin report's criticism of his "inexcusable" handling of an investigation of a pedophile priest.

Bishop Murray the only still-active bishop listed in the Murphy Report, was said by several sources to be already in Rome to meet with Vatican officials.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said the pope's meeting with Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, president of the Irish bishops' conference, and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin would take place Dec. 11.

The spokesman said the meeting would include the nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Giuseppe Leanza, and the heads of several Vatican offices dealing with sex abuse and related issues.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, led by U.S. Cardinal William J. Levada, has a special section that deals with priests accused of sexual abuse. The promoter of justice in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Msgr. Charles Scicluna, handles the cases brought against allegedly abusive priests. Officials of the congregations for Bishops and for Clergy also were expected to participate.

Father Lombardi said the pope wanted to discuss and have Vatican officials evaluate the findings of the so-called Murphy Report, which was released Nov. 26.

The report by the independent Commission of Investigation, headed by Judge Yvonne Murphy, looked specifically at the handling of some 325 abuse claims in the Archdiocese of Dublin during the period from January 1975 to May 2004.

"The Dublin Archdiocese's preoccupations in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse, at least until the mid-1990s, were the maintenance of secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of the reputation of the church and the preservation of its assets," said the report. "All other considerations, including the welfare of children and justice for victims, were subordinated to these priorities. The archdiocese did not implement its own canon law rules and did its best to avoid any application of the law of the state."

The report said church officials and police colluded in covering up instances of child sexual abuse by clergy.

The release of the report resulted in calls for the resignations of bishops who were serving during the period covered by the report and for further investigations and prosecution.

On Dec. 8, Archbishop Leanza met with Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheal Martin and described the

45-minute meeting as serious and meaningful.

RTE News reported that Martin requested the meeting in the wake of the Murphy Report. Speaking after the meeting, Martin said he expected a "substantive response" from the church as inquiries into the abuse continue.

Archbishop Leanza acknowledged that mistakes were made, but said the church has condemned clerical child abuse and the Vatican had already apologized to victims and their families.

The nuncio said he expected a response from the Vatican following Pope Benedict's upcoming meeting with Cardinal Brady and Archbishop Martin.

In a related action, Bishop Dermot O'Mahony, a retired auxiliary bishop of Dublin, resigned as president of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust -- which takes sick children to Lourdes, France, and runs a respite care center in Galway, Ireland -- as a result of findings in the Murphy Report.

The report found that the bishop "dealt particularly badly with complaints" while serving as an auxiliary between 1975 and 1996 and that he failed to properly alert Archbishop Dermot Ryan, now deceased, and then-Archbishop Desmond Connell as well as other church authorities.

In a case involving a priest given the pseudonym "Father Vidal," Bishop O'Mahony provided the priest with a reference in 1985 for a post in the Diocese of Sacramento, Calif., without alerting the bishop there that the priest had previously had a sexual relationship with a 13-year-old girl, the report said. In 2001, Bishop O'Mahony destroyed documents relating to accusations against the priest, according to the report.

It said Bishop O'Mahony knew of abuse complaints or suspicions against 13 priests, but reported none of them to civil authorities. In the case of Father Ivan Payne, he allowed Archbishops Ryan and Connell to be misled by a psychiatric report based on information that the auxiliary knew to be false, the report said.
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Contributing to this story was Cian Molloy in Dublin, Ireland.

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