NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Irish bishops apologize for 'depravity of abuse'

Cian Molloy Catholic News Service | Dec. 10, 2009

DUBLIN, Ireland -- The Irish bishops have apologized as a group for clerical abuse of children and agreed to work with the government to set up a mechanism to ensure that abuse allegations are properly handled.

The bishops suspended normal business at their winter general meeting in Maynooth to consider the findings of a special commission investigating the handling of clerical abuse in the Archdiocese of Dublin. That report, published Nov. 26, described a "scale and depravity of abuse" that "deeply shocked" the bishops, they said in their statement, issued Dec. 9.

"The avoidance of scandal, the preservation of the reputations of individuals and of the church, took precedence over the safety and welfare of children," the bishops said. "This should never have happened and must never be allowed to happen again. We humbly ask for forgiveness."

The bishops acknowledged that the culture of abuse and cover-up was "a culture that was widespread in the church" and that people felt "rightly outraged and let down by the failure of moral leadership and accountability that emerges from the report."

The bishops also said the report raises important issues for the Catholic Church in Ireland, including how the bishops' conference functions and how lay people can be more effectively involved in the life of the church.

"We will give further detailed consideration to these issues," they said.

The investigating commission's report highlighted the use of "mental reservations [1]" to deliberately hide the truth from those looking for information. In their statement, the bishops said: "In response to the many concerns raised about the use of 'mental reservation,' we wish to categorically state that it has no place in covering up evil. Charity, truthfulness, integrity and transparency must be the hallmark of all our communications."

Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, and Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin were scheduled to travel to Rome Dec. 11 to meet with Pope Benedict XVI and brief him on the current situation in Ireland.

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Editor's note: The entire text of the apology can be found on the CNS blog, http://cnsblog.wordpress.com/2009/12/10/irish-bishops-issue-statement-on-sex-abuse-scandal.

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