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Irish cardinal asks pope for help to deal with abuse

Michael Kelly Catholic News Service | May. 18, 2010

DUBLIN -- The head of the Catholic Church in Ireland has asked Pope Benedict XVI to appoint a bishop to assist him in dealing with the fallout of clerical sexual abuse allegations.

Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, said in a statement May 17 that he had asked the pope "for additional support for my work at (the) episcopal level."

The 70-year-old cardinal has been under pressure since it emerged in March that he was aware of allegations of sexual abuse against Father Brendan Smyth as far back as the 1970s and did not report the matter to government authorities. Father Smyth continued to abuse in several countries and was eventually imprisoned in 1994 for serial abuse.

Church officials in Ireland expect the Vatican to name a coadjutor archbishop to assist Cardinal Brady in running his Armagh Archdiocese. However, the cardinal would continue as president of the Irish bishops' conference and primate of all Ireland.

"To assist me in addressing the vital work of healing, repentance and renewal, including engagement with survivors of abuse, as well as the many other challenges and opportunities which confront the (arch)diocese of Armagh and the church in Ireland at this time, I have asked Pope Benedict XVI" for help, he said.

Cardinal Brady also said he was asking the Vatican to include his archdiocese, which straddles the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, in a proposed apostolic visitation to the church in Ireland, which Pope Benedict announced in March.

Signaling that he was not going to step aside under pressure from victims of sexual abuse, Cardinal Brady said: "In the years that remain to me as archbishop of Armagh, I am fully committed to building on the substantial progress made in child safeguarding in recent years and to working to bring about the healing, repentance and renewal set out for the church in Ireland by Pope Benedict XVI.

"I am fully committed to the path that as a church we must take to the truth that will set us free," Cardinal Brady said.

The cardinal thanked "all those whom I have met over recent weeks as part of my own reflection on the next steps we might take."

Several cases against Cardinal Brady alleging a failure in duty of care are to be heard in the High Court in Dublin in the coming weeks. The cases refer to while then-Father Brady served as a canonist in the 1970s and was involved in interviewing and swearing to secrecy a number of minors who alleged that they were sexually abused by Father Smyth.

Cardinal Brady said he remained committed, "with all my human weaknesses, to walk humbly with all in the

church in Ireland as a fellow pilgrim on this journey of renewal and to discern God's will for the church at this time."

"I will seek, as Pope Benedict XVI has asked us, to work 'with courage and determination' -- and with humility, sincere repentance and careful listening -- to address the many challenges which confront us. As a fellow pilgrim, searching with the whole community of faith for a clear way forward, I will do all I can to help sow the seeds for a genuine healing and renewal in the church which, for so many of us, is our family and our home," he said.

Earlier in the day, a report from a church-funded body set up to improve child protection procedures and policies in all of Ireland reported nearly 200 new allegations of church-related child abuse between April 1, 2009, and March 31.

All allegations reported to the National Board for the Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church also were reported to the civil authorities. In each case, the complainants were adults who said they had been abused as children.

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