

New papal representative to Ireland promises to strengthen relations

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DUBLIN -- Pope Benedict XVI's new representative to Ireland has promised to strengthen relations between the country and the Holy See.

Archbishop Charles Brown, a native of New York, spoke while presenting his credentials as apostolic nuncio to Ireland and dean of the country's diplomatic corps to President Michael Higgins.

In brief remarks to Higgins, Archbishop Brown said that Pope Benedict XVI had asked him to "solidify and strengthen" the relations between Ireland and the Holy See.

The meeting came three months after the Irish government provoked controversy by closing its embassy to the Vatican. While ministers blamed the closure on economic concerns, the move was widely interpreted as representing a chill in relations: The government had been highly critical of the Vatican's approach to child abuse scandals in the country.

The new nuncio replaces Archbishop Giuseppe Leanza, who was recalled in July after Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny delivered a speech accusing the Vatican of adopting a "calculated, withering position" on clerical sex abuse. Kenny's speech followed a judicial report that accused the Holy See of being "entirely unhelpful" to Irish bishops trying to deal with abuse.

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