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Irish cardinal promises full cooperation with abuse investigation

by Michael Kelly by Catholic News Service

DUBLIN -- Cardinal Sean Brady said the Catholic church will cooperate fully with a government-led investigation into institutional abuse being launched in Northern Ireland.

A similar inquiry in Ireland -- the Ryan Commission -- reported in 2009 and found that physical abuse was widespread and sexual abuse was endemic in many institutions for boys run by members of religious congregations.

Brady, whose Armagh Archdiocese straddles the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, spoke after a meeting Monday with the group Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse in Northern Ireland. He was accompanied by representatives of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of St. Louis, Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Nazareth, all of whom managed institutions for children and vulnerable adults in the region.

"I wish to confirm that we believe the experiences the group shared with us and acknowledge its ongoing impact on their lives," Brady said after the meeting. "We apologize wholeheartedly and without reserve for the abuse that they suffered as children. We remain committed to fully cooperating with the inquiry."

Victims' representative Jon McCourt said he was pleased with the discussion, which he described as positive and "challenging."

"In the cardinal's own words, this was the most profound meeting he has ever held on this issue," McCourt said. "It was long but wasn't as difficult as we thought it would be, but we covered a lot of ground and it was very emotional."

"Each of the orders acknowledged the truth of the stories they heard today. The cardinal has guaranteed his full and total cooperation," McCourt added.

In a statement, the cardinal said he welcomed "the generous acknowledgement by SAVIA (the victims' group) of the good people who were also part of their childhood in institutions."

Former residents of church-run institutions have campaigned since the publication of the Ryan Report for a similar inquiry in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland government is preparing to open its investigation within several months. Former residents of the institutions will be given the opportunity to describe what happened to them in private sessions.

The inquiry will include religious orders, government officials and voluntary groups and will consider allegations dating to 1945.

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