Vatican



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The member of Pope Francis' commission on clergy sexual abuse who was suspended nearly two years ago after publicly critiquing the pope says he will now resign his post in advance of the expiration of his term of office Dec. 17.

Englishman Peter Saunders told NCR Dec. 13 he is planning to send a formal letter of resignation Dec. 15 to Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, the president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

"It's just a kind of closure for me that I feel I've done my best for the church and the institutional church has kind of rejected me," Saunders said in a brief interview. "And so I will resign."

Saunders, a sexual abuse survivor who founded the UK's National Association for People Abused in Childhood, was placed on leave from the papal commission in February 2016. His expected resignation was first reported by The Tablet.

While the commission did not elaborate on the reasons for Saunders' 2016 suspension, the survivor had been publicly critical of Francis' record on clergy abuse. He particularly criticized Francis' appointment of Chilean Bishop Juan Barros, who has been accused of covering up abuse by Fr. Fernando Karadima.

The Vatican office for the papal commission declined to comment on Saunders' decision to resign. While Saunders will be the second of the two abuse survivors originally appointed to the commission to resign, his expected resignation comes days before his term's expiration.

The other abuse survivor on the commission, Irishwoman Marie Collins, resigned March 1, citing frustration with Vatican officials' reluctance to cooperate with its work to protect children.

Francis created the papal commission on March 22, 2014, appointing eight members to the new entity. He added an additional nine members, including Saunders, on Dec. 17, 2014. While the members were not initially appointed with a term limit, the commission's statutes, approved by the Vatican in April 2015, grant members renewable three-year term limits.

Responding to a question about the matter Dec. 13 during a briefing about the recent meeting of the Council of Cardinals, Vatican spokesman Greg Burke said that Francis is currently considering the renewal of the terms of the current commission members.

One commission member told NCR in August that the group was considering whether to restructure itself so it no longer includes the direct participation of abuse survivors but instead has a separate advisory panel of individuals who have been abused by clergy.

Collins has expressed concern about that possibility, saying in an October NCR interview that "the importance of a survivor voice in the commission was recognized when it was set up."

"It is still just as important that this perspective is included in their deliberations," she said.

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