News



by Maria Benevento

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The Vatican delegate taking testimony in Chile from survivors of clergy sex abuse has been sidelined by health issues, but a second Vatican official is temporarily taking on the task.

Spanish Fr. Jordi Bertomeu of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will temporarily take the place of Malta Archbishop Charles Scicluna. The archbishop was hospitalized while in Chile investigating Bishop Juan Barros of Osorno, who has been accused of covering up abuse by Fr. Fernando Karadima.

According to a report from BioBioChile, Scicluna entered the hospital late Feb. 20 and underwent surgery to have his gall bladder removed Feb. 21.

"A heartfelt 'Thank you' to all those who have kindly expressed their support and generously offered their prayers as I continue in my recovery. God bless!" Scicluna said on Twitter Feb. 22. He is expected to remain hospitalized for 72 hours, but Bertomeu, who was already serving as part of Scicluna's team, will continue interviews with victims and others as scheduled.

After meeting with Bertomeu Feb. 21, Juan Carlos Claret and other members of a group of laypeople from Osorno who have vocally opposed Barros expressed satisfaction at being heard. They submitted 1,500 pages of evidence to Bertomeu and encouraged others who might have testimony to share to come forward.

Scicluna had already met with Juan Carlos Cruz, one of Barros' main accusers, in a parish in New York, and with James Hamilton and José Andrés Murillo, the other two most vocal accusers, at the apostolic nunciature in Chile.

Speaking to the press after their meetings, both Cruz and Hamilton praised Scicluna. Cruz said he finally "felt someone was listening" and was "very hopeful" that the case was being taken seriously. He also reported that Scicluna was visibly moved by his testimony, and even cried during their meeting.

Meanwhile, Hamilton, who had harsh words about Chilean Cardinals Ricardo Ezzati, archbishop of Santiago, and Francisco Javier Errázuriz, archbishop emeritus, for their handling of sex abuse cases, expressed confidence in Scicluna, La Tercera reported Feb. 20.

"I'm very sure that the reports that come out of Chile are going to be true and sincere," he said. "I don't have any doubts that Archbishop Scicluna is going to communicate what is really going on in Chile."

Claret had also expressed confidence in Scicluna prior to his group's Feb. 21 meeting.

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According to Emol, Claret said he appreciated Scicluna's "concrete gestures and actions that make us trust him," including making a separate trip to the United States to meet with Cruz in person and agreeing to change the location of their meeting after the group objected to its being held at the nunciature.

The Osorno laypeople's group mistrusts Archbishop Ivo Scapolo, apostolic nuncio to Chile, because of his prior handling of the case and because he has connections with Barros' family, Claret told Emol TV in an interview Feb. 21, before his meeting with Bertomeu. The group had rejected Scapolo's request that they submit testimony to

him before sharing it with Scicluna.

However, in the same interview, Claret expressed hope about the results of his upcoming meeting, even though Scicluna would not be present. He noted that Bertomeu has been a part of Scicluna's team and will have the additional advantage of being able to communicate directly with the group, without using a translator, since he speaks Spanish.

Although the group has "more reasons to mistrust than to trust," said Claret, they also have more to gain than to lose. "We're going to trust in the process, not blindly but lucidly," he said.

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