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An Irish bishop resigned March 1 after increased criticism over how he dealt with revelations of an abusive priest.

Bishop John McAreavey of Dromore was criticized in a program on BBC Northern Ireland Feb. 28, after it emerged that he concelebrated an anniversary Mass with a priest he knew had stepped down after being sent for treatment following complaints of abuse.

In a statement from his lawyer released to journalists on March 1, McAreavey, 69, said: "Following media reports which have disturbed and upset many people in the diocese and further afield, I have decided to resign with immediate effect."

Twelve people accused the late Fr. Malachy Finnegan of sexual abuse. The priest, who taught at St. Colman's College in Newry, Northern Ireland, from 1967 to 1976, is also accused of physical and emotional abuse against students.

While Finnegan was disciplined under his predecessor, McAreavey had been criticized in recent weeks for not making the cleric's abuse public.

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Finnegan died in 2002, and McAreavey previously apologized for conducting his funeral Mass.

At parish meetings, some parents have said they would not want McAreavey to preside at their child's confirmation ceremony.

The church in Ireland has been rocked by a series of allegations of abuse and subsequent mishandling of abuse claims by those in authority. McAreavey is the fourth member of the hierarchy to resign in recent years following public criticism of their response to allegations of abuse.