News



Pope Francis talks with Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington during a meeting with U.S. bishops in the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington Sept. 23, 2015. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Editor's note: On Wednesday afternoon (Sept. 12), various news outlets that had reported on Cardinal Donald Wuerl's letter to Washington archdiocesan priests began to update those reports, at the prompting of the archdiocese, to clarify that Wuerl would be asking Pope Francis to accept his resignation. Following is from Catholic News Service:

> WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington has told the priests of the archdiocese that he will meet soon with Pope Francis to request that he accept the resignation the cardinal submitted three years ago when he turned 75.
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> The cardinal said this meeting is one part of a two-fold response he has concluded is the best way to serve the church as it moves into the future. The second is to participate in a process of healing for all those who have suffered abuse.
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> The cardinal made the comments in a letter sent the evening of Sept. 11 to the priests of the archdiocese. He recently met and prayed with the clergy to discuss and discern his leadership.
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> Cardinal Wuerl said he would meet with the pope in Rome "so that this archdiocesan church we all love can move forward." He cited a need to "bring healing and a new beginning at the service of this church."
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> The cardinal submitted his letter of resignation to Pope Francis Nov. 12, 2015, when he turned 75, as required by canon law, but the pope has not yet accepted it. The cardinal turns 78 this year.

The original story follows.

The archbishop of Washington, D.C., Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who has faced calls to step down over his handling of sexual abuse cases while serving as bishop of Pittsburgh, said in letter to priests that he will soon go to Rome to meet with Pope Francis to discuss his possible resignation.

The letter comes after an extraordinary meeting held Labor Day weekend at which the cardinal talked with archdiocesan priests about the best way to address the mounting criticism, spurred by the release in August of a bombshell grand jury report outlining clergy abuse in Pennsylvania.

The report alleges that even though Wuerl argued that parishioners have a right to know if a priest accused of child sex abuse had been reassigned to another parish, he also reassigned priests with histories of abuse, effectively shielding them from accountability.

Since the report was unveiled, a prominent deacon at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington said he would refuse to participate in the Mass alongside the cardinal. At the Labor Day meeting, some priests suggested that Wuerl should resign.

In the letter sent to the Washington priests on Sept. 11, Wuerl noted that he had prayed with clergy the week before "to discern the best course of action for me to pursue as we face new revelations of the extent of the horror of the clergy abuse of children and the failures of episcopal oversight."

"At issue," the cardinal wrote, "is how to begin effectively to bring a new level of healing to survivors" of abuse. He said that "sooner rather than later" he would need to make a decision about his possible resignation.

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"As a fruit of our discernment I intend, in the very near future, to go to Rome to meet with our Holy Father," Wuerl said. The cardinal, who is 77, handed the pope his resignation when he turned 75, as is standard practice. He did not say whether he expected Francis to accept his resignation.

The Washington archdiocese briefly published a website following the publication of the report defending Wuerl and refuting some of the claims, but that website was promptly taken down.

Wuerl has announced plans to launch a six-week-long "Season of Healing" beginning Friday.