News
Vatican
German Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising gives a statement on the Munich abus

German Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising gives a statement on the Munich abuse report to the media Jan. 27, 2022. (CNS photo/Sven Hoppe, pool via Reuters)

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BERLIN — The archbishop of Munich said Thursday that the Catholic church needs deep reform to overcome the "disaster" of sexual abuse and made clear that he intends to stay in his job, after a report faulted him and predecessors including retired Pope Benedict XVI for their handling of abuse allegations and cases in Germany.

Cardinal Reinhard Marx last year offered to resign over the church's abuse scandal, an extraordinary gesture at the time which was rejected swiftly by Pope Francis.

Marx, a prominent reformist ally of the pontiff, was faulted over his handling of two cases in the report commissioned by his archdiocese from a Munich law firm. He told a news conference a week after the report's release that he will look over those cases "to learn from them."

Marx said he hadn't renewed his resignation offer. "In the current situation, that struck me as just disappearing," he said. He renewed apologies to victims, the faithful and parishes where perpetrators were sent.

"I am ready to continue serving if that is helpful for the further steps that have to be taken for a more reliable reappraisal, even more attention to those affected and for reform of the church," he told a news conference.

But he said that, if he gets the impression that he is "more a hindrance than a help," he would discuss that with church officials in Munich and then perhaps the Vatican. He added that a lower-ranking prelate who was criticized in the report has decided to take a leave of absence.

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The lengthy report, which wasn't shown to church officials before its release last week, looked into abuse in the Munich and Freising diocese between 1945 and 2019 and whether church officials handled allegations correctly. The law firm examined church files and spoke to witnesses.

It points to at least 497 abuse victims over the decades and at least 235 suspected perpetrators, though the authors said that in reality there were probably many more.

"We see a disaster," Marx said.

"Anyone who still denies systemic causes and opposes a necessary reform of the church in its stances and structures hasn't understood the challenge," he insisted.

Marx said the church still needs to do more to reach out to victims, and acknowledged that he himself had "overlooked the people affected." He added that "that is inexcusable."

Now, he said, it is important to push forward reforms such as those being discussed in a controversial German process that was launched in response to the abuse crisis. The "Synodal Path" has sparked fierce resistance inside the church, primarily from conservatives opposed to opening any debate on issues such as priestly celibacy, women's role in the church and homosexuality.

The church won't be able to work through the abuse crisis successfully "without really deep renewal," Marx asserted. He said he can't promise that reform will be fast, but pointed to issues such as putting more women in prominent positions of responsibility.

The report's criticism of Benedict, who was faulted over his handling of four cases when, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he was archbishop from 1977 to 1982, garnered most attention when it was released.

The authors said Benedict, who has since corrected what he said was an editorial error in his response regarding one case, strongly denied any wrongdoing.

Marx was tightlipped in his response to repeated questions about the former pope, noting that Benedict has said he will issue a full response. He said he couldn't deliver a verdict of his own — "that's not covering up, it's just a recognition of what I know and don't know."