News



New Zealand Cardinal John Dew, retired archbishop of Wellington, is pictured in a 2018 photo. Following "Vox Estis Lux Mundi" protocol, the Wellington Archdiocese said March 7, 2024, it has opened a church inquiry into a claim of abuse against the

cardinal dating to the 1970s after the police closed its investigation of the claim with no charges filed. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Wellington, New Zealand — March 8, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The church has opened an inquiry into a "distressing" allegation of an historical offense against New Zealand's Cardinal John Dew, retired archbishop of Wellington, after a police investigation closed without any charges filed.

Dew, 75, has strenuously denied the allegation and will remain suspended from ministry during the "Vox Estis Lux Mundi" investigation.

He is accused of an instance of sexual abuse against a minor during his time as an assistant priest during the 1970s.

New Zealand police concluded their 10-month inquiry after determining the allegation is unsubstantiated.

The papal document "Vos Estis" on the responsibilities and accountability of bishops and superiors of religious orders with regard to clergy sex abuse was first issued in 2019. Pope Francis in 2023 promulgated an updated version of the church's norms to prevent and counter sexual abuse against minors and vulnerable adults, and extending the norms to cover lay leaders of international associations of the faithful recognized by the Holy See. "Vos Estis" allows for the removal of bishops and superiors for serious negligence or "lack of diligence" in the exercise of their office, in particular with regard to the sexual abuse of minors.

In a March 7 statement, Dew said he was informed of the allegation on May 6, 2023, and he immediately stepped aside from ministry. The claim came the day after he turned 75 and, as required by canon law, had submitted his resignation to the pope.

"I stated immediately, and state again now, that there have never been any instances of improper or abusive behavior in my 48 years of priesthood," Dew wrote.

The complaint was lodged with the church's National Office for Professional Standards and the country's Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

"This has now been thoroughly investigated by the New Zealand police, others have been interviewed, and sworn affidavits provided to the police prove that these allegations could never have happened," Dew said.

"The police have informed me that this investigation has now been concluded, their file has been closed and no charges will be laid against me," he said. "From the time that I became a bishop, I have lived by my Episcopal motto, 'Peace through integrity.' Integrity has always meant a great deal to me and the words of that motto have guided my life."

According to New Zealand media, the cardinal had sought to prevent Newshub, a New Zealand television news service, from airing a report on the allegation.

The appeal went to the Supreme Court of New Zealand, where it was dismissed March 5.

Advertisement

"Cardinal John retired as Archbishop of Wellington last year on reaching age 75, the normal retirement age for Catholic bishops," Archbishop Paul Martin wrote in an open letter to the archdiocese March 7.

"In accord with our protocols, Cardinal John stood aside from all public church activities when the allegation was brought to the attention of the church. Cardinal John has asserted his innocence throughout," said Wellington's current archbishop, who as coadjutor immediately succeeded Dew upon his retirement last year.

"Inquiries by the church are not run concurrently to those being undertaken by the police. Now that the police investigation has concluded, Cardinal John continues to stand aside while the church inquiries proceed," Martin continued. "This has been a distressing situation for all involved. I would ask that we pray for all those affected and offer support where we can."

Dew said he did not know the person making the allegations and never met him.

"The allegation against me is false, it may come from a well of anguish and grief arising from other reasons," he wrote. "I am acutely aware of how distressing this is for many: survivors who have put their trust in me, our church community, and my family and friends. I state once again that all incidents of abuse are wrong.

"I hope and pray that all abuse victims will find peace and healing," he said.

Dew was president of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference 2009-2016 and 2020-2023 and the archbishop of Wellington for nearly 20 years.