News



Bishop Eamonn Casey stands outside his family home in Firies, near Killarney, Ireland, in 1969. Casey resigned as bishop of Galway in 1992 and was removed from ministry in 2007. He died in 2017 at age 89. (Donal MacMonagle/Courtesy of Irish Independent)



by Sarah Mac Donald

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The Galway Diocese has not yet decided if the remains of disgraced Irish Bishop Eamonn Casey will be removed from the crypt of Galway Cathedral, where he was laid to rest in 2017. Casey resigned as bishop of Galway in 1992 when it became public that he had fathered a child; he was removed from public ministry in 2007 after he was accused of sexual abuse.

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Many Catholics in Ireland have called for Casey's body to be disinterred from the cathedral crypt following the July 2024 broadcast of the RTÉ/Irish Mail documentary, "Bishop Casey's Buried Secrets." The film alleged that the Vatican had earlier investigated Casey over child abuse allegations concerning multiple  people, including his niece, Patricia Donovan. At least two of the alleged victims were minors. Those allegations, nor the reason Casey was removed from public ministry, were not made public at the time.

Fr. Diarmuid Hogan, a spokesperson for the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, said discussions are underway about the appropriate place for Casey's remains. "The process of consultation and consideration is continuing," he said.



Bishop Eamonn Casey in an undated photo (Courtesy of Irish Independent)

Casey died March 13, 2017, at age 89. He had served as bishop of Galway 1976-1992, and as bishop of Kerry 1969-1976. He moved to the United States after resigning as Galway bishop and worked as a missionary in Ecuador for six years. He then moved to Britain, where he lived in the diocese of Arundel and Brighton. There he worked as a hospital chaplain, according to The Irish Times.

In 2006, Casey returned to Ireland with permission from then Galway Bishop Martin Drennan. He lived in the rural parish of Shanaglish at Beagh in County Galway, but he was banned from exercising any public ministry.

Donovan, speaking on camera for the first time in the documentary, said her uncle raped her when she was 5. "Some of the things he did to me, and where he did them. The horror of being raped by him when I was 5, the violence," she said.

Following the backlash over the new revelations, Ireland's then prime minister, Simon Harris, appealed to the Diocese of Galway to focus on victims as they made their decision.

"Let's remember, Irish people believed Eamonn Casey had been stripped of his ministry for a very different reason to what has now emerged," Harris said. Many people believed the disgraced bishop was removed from ministry because he fathered a son, Peter, with Annie Murphy, a relative from Connecticut. She was 26 at the time; he was 47.

"The fact that those facts were concealed, that people were misled and betrayed, has caused a lot of hurt," Harris told the Sunday Independent.

Anne Sheridan, a journalist and Sunday Independent news editor, broke the story about Casey's abuse allegations when she was working for The Irish Daily Mail. She also presented the RTE documentary.

She said since the documentary aired, the Vatican has declined to comment on whether they believe Casey's remains should remain in Galway Cathedral's crypt.

"The position of Galway Diocese has been that they are examining his life and legacy and the question of his continued interment in the crypt," Sheridan said. "Unfortunately, months on, despite multiple statements in a similar vein from the Galway Diocese, the public is none the wiser as to what that really means, or if indeed they intend to take any action on this."




Annie Murphy of Ridgefield, Connecticut, holds up her son's birth certificate following a news conference in New York on May 12, 1992. Bishop Eamonn Casey of Galway, Ireland, acknowledged that he was the father of her then 17-year-old son, Peter, and resigned that year. (AP/Ed Bailey)

Sheridan said the delay is disappointing to parishioners and Casey's alleged victims.

"Pope Francis should issue a statement on the church's view of Bishop Casey and detail the breadth of allegations against him and what tangible support they can offer his victims," she said.

Mary McAleese, former president of Ireland, worked with Casey on behalf of Irish emigrants in the 1980s. She said the matter should be put to the people of the Galway Diocese.

"At the end of the day, what does this burial in the crypt represent? Doesn't it represent a kind of an honor afforded to a cleric who served the diocese well? That is an honor that he doesn't deserve — it is as simple as that," McAleese told NCR.

The papal nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Charles Brown, was coming to the end of his term in March 2017. He did not attend Casey's funeral.

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Speaking to the Irish Independent, Passionist Fr. Brian D'Arcy, a popular BBC broadcaster, expressed anger over the church's treatment of Casey's alleged victims and President Michael Higgins, who attended the funeral in Galway Cathedral.

D'Arcy said the Irish bishops and the Vatican must explain why Casey was allowed to "masquerade as a cleric" after he was removed from ministry.

The Vatican told RTÉ that Casey was never reinstated to public ministry despite pressure from Casey himself. According to the Irish Independent, Casey wore clerical garb to officiate at a family funeral in 2007. He was reprimanded by then-Bishop Martin Drennan of Galway, the paper reported.

In 2006, the Irish bishops announced that Casey was retiring to Ireland from Britain. According to the documentary, the Vatican had by then received at least two allegations of child sexual abuse against Casey and said that he was returning from the English Diocese of Arundel and Brighton over concerns about those allegations.

Eleven bishops and 61 priests attended Casey's funeral and, according to D'Arcy, many did not know about the child abuse allegations against the former bishop. The Diocese of Limerick made a €100,000 settlement (est. US$110,000) to one victim in 2017.

The Diocese of Limerick, where Casey was ordained in 1951, said it received the first complaint against Casey in 2001. The diocese received two more complaints in 2005 and 2014. The complaints referred to the incidents that allegedly took place in the 1950s and 1960s.

Cathedral steeple seen among trees.

Disgraced Irish Bishop Eamonn Casey's body is buried in the crypt of Ireland's Galway Cathedral, seen here beyond the trees. Casey died in 2017; a 2024 documentary reported several credible allegations of sexual abuse had been made against him years earlier. (CNS/Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne)

In her 2001 complaint, Ellen Murphy said Casey abused her in 1956 at the Good Shepherd reformatory school in Limerick city. A gag order from the Residential Institutions Redress Board prohibited her from speaking about the incident, but RTE obtained court records. Ellen Murphy died in 2014.

Casey denied the allegations. The Irish police investigated, but Casey was never prosecuted. However, after the documentary, the Irish police commissioner, Drew Harris, said he had ordered a review of the investigation.

The documentary also featured Des Wilson, who worked with Casey for the Irish diaspora in London in the 1960s through the housing charity, Shelter. Wilson said he found it hard to believe the child abuse allegations against the ebullient prelate. However, Ian Elliot, the former head of the Catholic Church in Ireland's National Board for Safeguarding watchdog,  described Casey as a predator.

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According to McAleese, the former president, Casey was "handled with a remarkable delicacy." A professor of criminal law, McAleese advised the Irish bishops about the revelations concerning Annie Murphy in 1992.

"The desire among the bishops was to get the whole thing offside," McAleese said. "There is a price you pay for that in terms of the disintegration of public trust," she told NCR.

The response to Annie Murphy's disclosure was, according to McAleese, "disgracefully misogynistic and fairly typical of the church — blame the woman, ostracize the woman, make her feel small and don't worry about the child. Offer no comfort to the young child raised without a father."

Casey had "certainly not been a good or engaged father, which was a great embarrassment for a church that put such a premium on parenting, particularly within marriage," she said.

McAleese said Casey "had betrayed the trust of the many people who gave money to the diocese, and sometimes directly to him, for the upkeep of churches, for the care of the poor, for the upkeep of schools, and that he had used his power as a bishop to reroute that money for his own private purposes."

When news that he had fathered a son became public, Casey confirmed that he had taken £70,000 (est. US$76,000) from a Galway Diocesan Fund to pay Murphy for their son's upkeep. He said he had intended to pay back the money. A donation repaid this money after he resigned in 1992.

"It never became a criminal matter," McAleese said. "It should have and I think it would have finished out the issue much more effectively than leaving him then to be taken off to America."

McAleese said that she learned through a priest friend who was appointed liaison between the Irish bishops and Casey, that Casey was not humbled by the public revelations of allegations against him. "Literally, everywhere he went, there were problems," she said the priest told her.

"It wasn't the reaction of a man who was sorry for his actions," McAleese said.