

Irish Catholics brace for 'shocking' abuse report

Tom Roberts | Apr. 20, 2009

The Archbishop of Dublin, Ireland, used a Holy Thursday sermon to brace the country's Catholics for what he said would be a shocking report on the extent of clergy sexual abuse in the archdiocese during a 30-year period beginning in 1975.

The results of a three-year investigation are expected to be released as soon as next month, according to Irish press reports.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said that the imminent report will show that thousands of children were sexually abused by Catholic priests, including many serial offenders. The report, he said, "will shock us all" and "will make each of us and the entire church in Dublin a humbler church," according to reports in the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times* newspapers.

The extensive investigation of parishes in the Irish capital was conducted by the government and follows a similar investigation into abuse in the Diocese of Ferns. The Ferns Report, released in 2005, rocked the country with revelations that between 21 and 28 priests raped and sodomized young boys and girls in the diocese over a 40-year period.

The report also documented how two bishops during that period covered up the crimes. The report charges that the bishops placed loyalty to Rome above the welfare of children.

The Dublin Archdiocese commission of Investigation was established in 2006. Martin told the congregation April 9 that he had read secret files that he handed over to the commission and had heard the personal stories of victims.

"It is likely that thousands of children or young people across Ireland were abused by priests in the period under investigation, and the horror of that abuse was not recognized for what it is," he said. "The report will make each of us and the entire church in Dublin a humbler church."

In the same sermon he noted that the Irish church was facing a crisis in the declining number of priests. He said currently 10 times more priests in Dublin are over the age of 70 than are under 40. "Parishes are growing rapidly and their needs are increasing. Fewer priests are being asked to respond to more calls on their time and their ministry." According to the *Irish Times*, the archbishop also predicted, "Inevitably, the structures of priestly ministry will have to change." He added, "In the Archdiocese of Dublin, in a way which we have not seen for generations, lay men and women are today bringing their own charisms to unite them with the charisms of the ministerial priesthood, working together for the building up of the Church and Christ's kingdom."

Martin receives high marks from Dominican Fr. Thomas Doyle for understanding the dimension of the sex abuse scandal, the "enormous damage it has caused" and for cooperating with the investigation into the scandal. Doyle is a long-time advocate for victims of clergy sexual abuse and an outspoken critic of the way U.S. bishops have handled the crisis. He said that when Martin, a former Vatican official, was appointed archbishop

five years ago, "I was suspicious that he was part of the Vatican system and was probably sent there to get things under control."

Doyle, who has testified widely in the United States on behalf of victims and for the Ferns Commission and has served as an expert witness in a number of cases involving parents and victims in Dublin, said he was "impressed" with Martin. He said a number of his contacts in Ireland view Martin as "a different kind of bishop" who has "marched to a different drummer when confronted with this issue. I want to believe him," said Doyle.

Martin was appointed in 1976 to serve in the Pontifical Council for the Family. In 1986, he was appointed under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and was named secretary of that council in 1994. He became archbishop of Dublin in April 2004.

Tom Roberts is NCR editor at large. He can be reached at troberts@ncronline.org.

Source URL (retrieved on 05/26/2017 - 10:20): <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/irish-catholics-brace-shocking-abuse-report>