

Vatican ends probe of clergy abuse in Ireland

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VATICAN CITY -- Following a yearlong investigation into decades of rampant abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, the Vatican on Tuesday (March 20) called for more rigorous screening of would-be priests and compulsory child protection classes in seminaries.

Pope Benedict XVI ordered the "Apostolic Visitation" of Ireland's seminaries, religious orders and four main archdioceses in 2010 after a string of Irish government commissions detailed the extent of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions and exposed a cover-up by several senior churchmen.

The team of church investigators included New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, who was tasked with inspecting Ireland's seminaries, and Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley.

A seven-page summary of the investigation's final report was released by the Vatican on Tuesday, and said investigators identified past "shortcomings" that led to an "inadequate understanding of and reaction to" child abuse, "not least on the part of various bishops and religious superiors."

But the investigators also stressed that the child protection initiatives undertaken since the 1990s were "judged to be excellent."

The Vatican team praised the "attention and care" that the Irish church has shown to the victims, "both in terms of spiritual and psychological assistance and also from a legal and financial standpoint."

Irish church leaders assured the investigators that "all newly discovered cases of abuse" are "promptly" reported both to civil authorities and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican department responsible for prosecuting abusive priests.

The report said the Vatican is considering a restructuring of Ireland's 26 dioceses, and said the scandal was no justification for widespread "dissent" from church doctrine among Irish priests and lay people.

While Ireland's top prelate, Cardinal Sean Brady, welcomed the report and its findings, the Irish branch of the victims' advocacy group SNAP slammed the report as a "tired, ineffective re-hash of the promises made by U.S. bishops a decade ago."

Revelations of the abuse scandals deeply shook Irish society, and led to a diplomatic dispute between Dublin and the Holy See. Three bishops were forced to resign.

A report issued last year by the Irish branch of Amnesty International said the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests "included acts that amounted to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment."

Last July, Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny said the abuse scandal exposed the "dysfunction, disconnection, elitism, the narcissism that dominate the culture of the Vatican to this day."

Kenny also said Catholic priests should be jailed for failing to report child sex abuse crimes they hear during the sacrament of confession, regardless of the confidentiality imposed by church law.

The Holy See temporarily recalled its ambassador in protest. Since then, Ireland has closed its embassy to the Vatican, officially explained as part of a cost-cutting measure.

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