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My dear people and priests,

Once again we are faced with the harrowing evidence of how defenceless and innocent children were abused by some priests. It is important that we should open our hearts first of all to those who suffered such a terrible betrayal of their trust. This abuse blighted many lives. Peoples' faith was damaged or destroyed by men who were called to be signs of the infinite healing and love of God, made visible in Christ Jesus.

It should be one of the first tasks of a Christian community to be a place where survivors are encouraged to end their silence and to seek and find the support that may lead them towards serenity and peace and closure. It is also the task of a Christian community to be a place where safety of children is a priority. The sad picture that emerges from the Dublin Report must stir us never to lose sight of the priority we must give to the safeguarding of children in our parishes and diocese. *Child Sexual Abuse: Framework for a Church Response* was published shortly before I was appointed Bishop of Limerick. Since then, all complaints of child sexual abuse are reported to the Gardaí and the HSE. I meet several times each year with the Gardaí and HSE to review all files. We also have the help of individuals and advisory committees who have the mix of experience and knowledge that is necessary to deal with often complex pastoral situations.

It is a matter of the greatest regret to me if any action or omission of mine contributed to the suffering of children who were abused. I sincerely apologise and humbly ask their forgiveness.

I also want to offer you my sincere apology over the fact that the pain of this Report falls in a particular way on our diocese because I was auxiliary bishop in Dublin. As I look back on that time, I ask myself many questions, especially about the three cases in which the Report criticises me. At no time did I as an auxiliary bishop of Dublin, receive an allegation of sexual abuse and fail to act. When an allegation of sexual abuse of children by a priest was brought to my attention, I responded promptly and conscientiously and in each case notified the Archbishop and Diocesan authorities and co-operated fully with them.

I never deliberately or knowingly sought to cover up or withhold information brought to my attention. There were, as the report notes, occasions when roles/responsibilities were not clear or where I did not have full information concerning cases in which I was asked to become involved.

The appalling statistics about child abuse suggest that every community has within it people who carry the burden of childhood abuse by clergy or by others. What we must do now is to ensure that children who were abused, and the families and friends who love them, are at the centre of our prayers; we should be open to listening to them and to deepening our understanding of their suffering. Though they may feel far from the Church, they may be much closer than they realise to Jesus who prayed "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

We must also recognise what the report shows us about the weakness and sinfulness and suffering that all of us experience in our lives. Every single one of us is completely dependent on the mercy of God.

We are meant to be bearers of that hope to each other and especially those who suffer. Among those, the people whose trust was betrayed and taken advantage of by sexual abuse, should always have a special place.

Wishing God's peace on you,

Donal Murray
BISHOP OF LIMERICK