

LIMERICK LEADER
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Front page news story
by
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UNDER-FIRE Bishop of Limerick, Donal Murray, has received a letter from Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin over what Dr Martin has described as the “inadequate” response of bishops to the publication of the Murphy Report.

Unlike other serving and retired bishops named in the report who have made no comment, Dr Murray has given a press conference and given two lengthy interviews with Limerick's Live 95FM and the Limerick Leader in which he feels he has responded “thoroughly” on every case in which he is criticised or named. Dr Martin pointed out that only two bishops had contacted him since last Thursday although a spokesman for Bishop Murray confirmed he had sent Archbishop Martin “a text message of support” last Sunday and was awaiting a reply.

Dr Martin criticised Dr Murray on Tuesday night for failing to include Dublin victims of clerical abuse as the Limerick bishop engages in a “listening process” in the coming weeks before he makes a final decision on his future.

But speaking in an exclusive interview to this newspaper hours before Dr Martin's criticism, Dr Murray made clear his decision would be informed not just by the clergy and laity in Limerick but public opinion nationwide and particularly abuse victims in Dublin.

He told the Leader the “one thing in the report I feel I most made a mistake about” was not going back to Vallemount, County Wicklow, to reinvestigate concerns about Fr Thomas Naughton. He said he should have done so when he learned of a subsequent sexual assault by Fr Naughton on Donnycarney altar boy Mervyn Rundle. While Dr Murray said it was by then too late to save Mr Rundle, this case causes him “anguish” and is “constantly on my mind”. He pointed out that he only learned the full truth in 2002, by which time he had left Dublin for Limerick, and he had immediately apologised to Naughton's victims.

This failure to go back to Vallemount has been described in Judge Yvonne Murphy's report as “inexcusable” but Dr Murray feels much media reporting of this criticism is unfair. Newspapers had reported his handling of allegations in general were “inexcusable” but Dr Murray said this referred to a case in Vallemount where there had been no original allegation, although he now regrets his “inexperience” meant he wasn't able to find out more about rumours of Naughton's abuse. When the Donnycarney allegations emerged some 18 months later, Dr Murray did inform the Archbishop McNamara and Monsgr Stenson, who were handling the abuse complaint in Donnycarney.

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^At the time, it was not a matter for Dr Murray to reinvestigate the Vallemount situation without being requested to by the Chancellery or Archbishop's House. But he now sees he should have done so or offered to do so.

The interview inside also shows how Dr Murray felt “extremely annoyed” he had not been informed by his boss (then Cardinal Connell) what he was dealing with when he was asked to investigate Fr James McNamee in Wicklow in 1994.

While he accepts the criticism of the report in general, Dr Murray does find some of it “inconsistent” and “unfair” towards him.

Bishop of Killaloe Dr Willie Walsh this week there had been “gross misreading” of the report in relation to Dr Murray. It is understood Dr Murray also received some support from Munster bishops at a meeting on Tuesday. He has also been in touch with the papal nuncio, who he said had been “supportive”.

Dr Murray and Dr Martin are to come face to face at a meeting of the Catholic Hierarchy next week. As he embarks on a period of consultation over the next “couple of weeks”, by which time he may decide to resign, Bishop Murray insisted he had no desire to cling to power for the sake of it.

“I have no urge to hold onto my job; I'm not here defending my good job. What I do want is whatever decision I make, that the truth is heard. I have to say I don't think it is fully being heard at the moment.”

Also in the interview he stated: “I certainly acted in good faith and did my best at all times. I have no pangs of conscience about that.”

While the congregation in St Joseph's applauded him last Sunday, members of the congregation

walked out in Raheen and the Dominicans as his letter was read out.

"They are perfectly entitled to have their view and that is what I have asked to hear. One of the things I do want is the truth to be out there and they are not just reacting to media. I think they have a right to know the truth. I don't want to conduct a campaign. But I would like them to hear it."

Abuse victim Mervyn Rundle this Tuesday called for Dr Murray to resign over his handling of complaints in relation to Naughton. Aged 11, Mr Rundle was sexually abused as an altar boy in Donnycarney.

"He failed us. Murray should certainly leave Limerick and leave the Church area because when people needed help, at the time they needed him, he wasn't there," said Mr Rundle.

Since the Murphy report was published, a deluge of complaints and queries has flooded the diocesan office in Limerick, with some staff "working around the clock" to assist the public and the Bishop of Limerick.

Over 500 emails and phonecalls have been received by the office, with people throughout the world contacting the Bishop's representatives to voice their views on his handling of complaints.

A diocesan spokesperson said they are now seeking to acknowledge each of those queries. More information is available at www.limerickdiocese.org

"All of those emails and phonecalls will be taken into consideration by the Bishop, and will form part of his guidance. It will not be based just on meetings with people in the Limerick diocese," said the spokesperson. He added that they would appeal to the public to have patience until such time as an acknowledgement is issued.

Meetings will be ongoing in the coming days and weeks to help Bishop Murray decide whether he has been of "help or hindrance" in the Limerick diocese.

A spokesperson for Bishop Murray also said he is "not looking to save his position", but has "merely entered into a process of engagement with the people and priest of his diocese".