

**Bishop of Limerick Donal Murray responds to report of the
Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation**

Bishop apologises for any omission that contributed to suffering

The Bishop of Limerick, Donal Murray has today, 26 November, expressed his deepest regret over the horrific abuse of children perpetrated in the Archdiocese of Dublin.

Responding to the publication of the Report of the Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation, Bishop Murray, who served for 14 years (1982 to '96) as auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese, said that his immediate reaction is concern for the men and women who suffered abuse when they were vulnerable children.

Said Bishop Murray: "The Report of the Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation makes for very disturbing reading. The Report establishes and acknowledges the shocking truth of child sexual abuse by priests in the Archdiocese, which I apologise for and deeply regret. Any abuse of children is deplorable and I condemn it unreservedly. Today my thoughts and prayers are with the survivors of abuse and their families.

"The commission identifies failures of communication in the Archdiocese and is critical of my role in a number of cases. 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 wish to state that 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.

"As I indicated in 2002 in response to one particular case, if I had succeeded in deriving more information, it might have been possible to prevent some of the dreadful suffering of child abuse in that instance. I very much wish that I had been able to do so. 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.

"Since I became a bishop twenty seven years ago I have learned a great deal. Many of those lessons have been strongly reinforced by the report of the Commission. There are six particularly important lessons which we must never forget:

- i) We must always see child abuse through the eyes of the child who has been betrayed and abused.
- ii) In order to ensure that they are safe in every Church activity and setting we need vigilance, the observance of correct procedures for responding to abuse and to place the safety of children first.

- iii) All complaints must be promptly reported to the civil authorities. No complaint should ever be accepted with a guarantee of confidentiality, however earnestly that is asked for by the complainant. Our paramount concern is for the safety of children.
- iv) The respect for a person's good name should not lead to the withholding of information or the omission of any action necessary for the safeguarding of children.
- v) The full understanding of the horror of child sexual abuse comes only through hearing and speaking with survivors of abuse.
- vi) In the words of Pope John Paul II "People need to know that there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young.

"One of the most important lessons we have learned from the grave mistakes of the past is that a very particular expertise is required when dealing with complaints of sexual abuse. The fact that this expertise did not exist or was not available exacerbated the problem and resulted in serious inadequacies in how complaints were dealt with. That expertise is now available and many people have been trained to carry out the provisions of the State's child protection guidelines, *Children First*. Now, when people approach the diocese with allegations, they are immediately put in touch with a designated lay person with particular expertise and experience. The Gardaí and HSE are automatically notified.

"*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 Gardai 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.

"I could not repeat often enough that our first concern as a community must be for those who suffered the horror of child sexual abuse, whether in Dublin or elsewhere, whether by priests or by others. We should try to express our own readiness to be healers and to awaken that readiness in our whole community. Those who suffer should always find a ready ear and a practical, caring response. Those who take the difficult step of disclosing the fact that they were abused should never be met with disbelief. They should be able to be confident that they will find an apologetic and supportive hand. For my part I offer that with all my heart and to the very best of my ability,

"Today is a challenge to bishops and priests and to the whole Church community to ensure that best practice in safeguarding children is consistently adhered to. It is vital that we should be for children what we are called to be – signs of the unlimited love of God made visible in Jesus Christ."

The Diocese of Limerick encourages all those who have concerns about child sexual abuse to contact An Garda Síochána, Henry Street, 061-212400, HSE West 061-482792, or the Diocese 087-3233564.

Ends

For further information, contact Rev Paul Finnerty,
Limerick Diocesan Office: (061) 315856 / (087) 9614665
<http://www.limerickdiocese.org/child.htm>