

Statement from Bishop Jim Moriarty on the Holy Father's acceptance of his resignation as Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin

22nd April 2010

The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has today formally accepted my resignation as Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin, which I offered on 23rd December, in the wake of the Murphy Report.

The decision to offer my resignation was the most difficult decision of my ministry. I did not anticipate resigning when I first read the Murphy Report, because I was not directly criticised. However, the Murphy Report covers far more than what individual Bishops did or did not do. Renewal must begin with accepting responsibility for the past. I served as an Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Dublin from 1991 until my appointment to this diocese in 2002. I was part of the governance of the Archdiocese prior to when correct child protection policies and procedures were implemented. Again I accept that from the time I became an Auxiliary Bishop, I should have challenged the prevailing culture. Once more I apologise to all survivors and their families.

I know that words of apology are not enough. Before speaking on other matters, it is important to be able to report that, learning from the past, the Irish Church now has excellent child safeguarding procedures in place. Kildare & Leighlin Diocese has fully subscribed to the definitive '*Standards and Guidance*' document published by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in 2008. This is exemplified in the policy document we subsequently produced ourselves, in our training programmes undergone by priests and lay people, many of the latter having volunteered to act as 'designated person' in their parish, our use of Garda vetting and our co-operation with civil and Church audits. We remain keenly aware of the need for constant vigilance and updating to ensure that the Church is the safest possible place for children.

When I announced before Christmas that I was offering my resignation to the Holy Father, I explained what I hoped it might achieve – “I hope it honours the truth that the survivors have so bravely uncovered and opens the way to a better future for all concerned”.

The truth is that the long struggle of survivors to be heard and respected by church authorities has revealed a culture within the Church that many would simply describe as unchristian. People do not recognise the gentle, endless love of the Lord in narrow interpretations of responsibility and a basic lack of compassion and humility. This has been profoundly dispiriting for all who care about the Church. As I stated in my contribution at the recent gathering of Irish Bishops with the Holy Father – “Let us be clear, our failures have damaged our people’s faith and the strength of our witness”.

The truth is also that the Church is ‘at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal’ (Lumen Gentium 8). I believe the spiritual well-being of the People of God demands that this principle of the Church as always in need of reform, which was embraced at the Second Vatican Council, should again come to the forefront of Church life. I believe, as I said at the recent Vatican gathering “that the goal should be a new fellowship (cf. Acts 4:32-37); a deeper sharing of the mission that transcends the kind of clerical culture that led us here.”

In his *Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland*, as well as stressing the need for justice for survivors, Pope Benedict called for 'a new vision... to inspire present and future generations'. Baroness Nuala O'Loan, who addressed two subsequent open forums in our diocese, surely spoke for many when she said such a vision "must involve an open, transparent, accountable Church... valuing each person as made in the image of God". I believe that there is a tremendous wellspring of support for her conviction that "walking away from our Church is not an option' and that, although 'working to reform it is going to involve a long and hard road... it is one which we must and can walk".

As I recounted at the Chrism Mass in Holy Week, this fidelity and commitment is being lived out in a real and active way by members of the Church every day. I think of all the inspiring deeds of so many in our diocese – in pre-sacramental programmes, on school boards, in youth ministry, in our work with Trócaire, as part of our annual diocesan 'Reach Out' initiatives, in our Polish and African chaplaincies, in liturgy groups, in church choirs, in care for the aged, in bereavement groups, and in all the countless other acts of Christian kindness carried out unseen.

As I leave office today, this will be my abiding memory of my time as Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin - the witness of faith, hope and love in which we have been able to share in so many ways as the People of God, laity, religious and clergy, in this diocese. I offer my heartfelt thanks to one and all. It has been a privilege to serve among you these past eight years and to be part of all this.

I have every confidence that the diocese will continue on this path and rise to the challenges that lie ahead. In this season of Easter we are inspired by the account of the early Church's proclamation of the Good News of the Risen Lord in the Acts of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit who strengthened and unified those first believers is still at work in our day. I would like to end as I began eight years ago at the time of my installation with this prayer for the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin:

*Lord, bless the faith community which traces its origins to Brigid, Conleth and Laserian.
May it be outstanding in charity as St. Brigid was,
may it be constant in faith as St. Conleth of Old Connell,
wise and prayerful as St. Laserian of Leighlin.
Bless its Bishop, priests, religious and laity;
fill them with the light of your love.
Bless its young people; help them to seek your truth.
Bless all who are poor or weak or wounded by life's hurts;
grant them justice, light and hope.
Sin é ár nguí tré Críost ár dTiarna, Amen*

Statement by Bishop Jim Moriarty

23 December 2009

On the Sunday after the 'Murphy Report' into the Archdiocese of Dublin was published (29th November 2009), I stated the following in Carlow Cathedral;

"As you are aware, I served as an Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Dublin from 1991 until my appointment here in 2002. While the Murphy Report does not criticise me directly, I feel it is important to state that I fully accept the overall conclusion of the Commission – that the attempts by Church authorities to 'protect the Church' and to 'avoid scandal' had the most dreadful consequences for children and were deeply wrong."

I do not want to dwell here on individual criticism as I have already responded to that. As I acknowledged in radio interviews last week, the Murphy report covers far more than what individual Bishops did or did not do. Fundamentally it is about how the leadership of the Archdiocese failed over many decades to respond properly to criminal acts against children.

Over the last few weeks, I have been reflecting on what should be my response to the overall conclusion of the Murphy report – particularly because I was part of the governance of the Archdiocese prior to when correct child protection policies and procedures were implemented.

It does not serve the truth to overstate my responsibility and authority within the Archdiocese. Nor does it serve the truth to overlook the fact that the system of management and communications was seriously flawed. However, with the benefit of hindsight, I accept that, from the time I became an Auxiliary Bishop, I should have challenged the prevailing culture.

I know that any action now on my part does not take away the suffering that people have endured. I again apologise to all the survivors and their families. I have today offered my resignation as Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin to the Holy Father. I hope it honours the truth that the survivors have so bravely uncovered and opens the way to a better future for all concerned.

I will endeavour to continue to do my best, as I have throughout my 48 years of ministry, to share Christ's light and hope for the world. We are about to celebrate Christmas, a time when we welcome Christ as the 'light that darkness could not overpower'. It is this truth that leads us forward. Christ is our Light.

May the blessing, the grace and the peace of Christmas be with us all.