

Statement of Resignation from Bishop McAreavey
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DIOCESE OF DROMORE

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Statement from Dr. John McAreavey, Bishop of Dromore

The abuse of any child by a priest is a violation of that child and betrayal of trust. The recent history of the Catholic Church in Ireland in dealing with allegations of sexual abuse has been a tragic one of failure and let down. While every effort is being made to ensure that the failures of the past don't recur – we cannot afford to be any less vigilant

just because we have robust child safeguarding procedures.

In 2011 as the Bishop of Dromore, I welcomed into the diocese the National Board for Safeguarding Children under the leadership of its CEO, Ian Elliott, to conduct an independent audit of all allegations against priests in the diocese of Dromore from 1975-2011.

Whilst it was outside the remit of the audit, which was looking at cases, where there was possible live risk or child-safeguarding issues, I asked the National Board to also review the cases of three deceased priests from the diocese. And specifically I asked them to examine the cases involving Malachy Finnegan.

The first allegation against Malachy Finnegan came to light in 1994 some seven years after he left St. Colman's College. The second allegation came in 1998 and was not related to his tenure at St. Colman's. No further allegations emerged until after his death in January 2002.

The reviewers remarked in their audit report 'we noted that these allegations were brought to the attention of the former Bishop of Dromore and we noted the seriousness of the allegations and are satisfied that all have been referred to the statutory authorities'.

However they also remarked that in their review of the records from that time 'in some instances the practice followed placed too much emphasis on maintaining the name of the accused priest rather than ensuring the safety of children.'

They further commented that they were satisfied that I as Bishop had reported all allegations in Dromore since 1999 and 'that I had taken an active personal interest in supporting victims'.

Since becoming Bishop in 1999 everything I have learned about the abuse of victims I have learned from victims.

"It is their testimonies and their stories, which have impacted most on me. It is through their

perspective that I realized that my decision to say the funeral mass of Malachy Finnegan in 2002 was the wrong one. In November 2002 a victim told me how hurt he was by this, I realised that I had made an error of judgement. It is something I regret and will not repeat.

‘As Bishop, I am conscious of the need for many victims of abuse to receive acknowledgement, an apology, counselling and indeed compensation; with the assistance the diocesan Director of Safeguarding and other advisors I do my best to meet their needs.

“A school should be a place of safety and security for children. It is a place in which parents should have trust and confidence. It is a place where children should be able to express their fears, anxieties and indeed aspirations in the knowledge that the structures of the school can provide the appropriate support.

The actions of Malachy Finnegan were abhorrent, inexcusable and indefensible. From 1994 to 2016 there have been a total of twelve allegations of abuse against him. He has caused hurt, which in some cases may never be healed. Malachy Finnegan has devastated families, including his own, and his former colleagues also feel betrayed by his behavior. I apologise unreservedly to the victims and their families for his actions.

We speak about abuse cases as being historical but we must never lose sight of the reality that the legacy of abuse lives on for victims and for them it is all too present. I ask you to pray for them and their families.

“As always, I encourage anyone who feels that they may have been abused in a church context to come forward and receive the support they are entitled to. We have a Director of Safeguarding in the diocese who is ready and available to help and I hope, if there are those impacted by abuse, that this will help them on the start of their journey of recovery.

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