

LIMERICK LEADER

Article by
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INEXCUSABLE. It is that one-word description of his failure to reinvestigate a complaint about notorious paedophile Fr Thomas Naughton which aides of Bishop of Limerick, Dr Donal Murray, feel has made him a lightning rod for international outrage against vile child abuse in the Archdiocese of Dublin.

Dr Murray himself says he does not wish to make excuses. He does not want to be seen to be clinging on to a nice job. But he does feel the “inexcusable” criticism has been conflated by the media and taken to mean he handled abuse allegations badly.

In the Naughton case, he maintained until this Tuesday night, he had no specific allegation to work with. It only later emerged that children had been abused in Vallemount, County Wicklow, but not before reports came in of subsequent attacks on boys like Mervyn Rundle in Donnycarney where he had been moved by the Archdiocese. His conscience is clear that he was not involved in a cover-up and his failings resulted from “naivety and inexperience”. Nor does he think the combination of cases he dealt with between 1982 and 1996 amount to an unforgivable pattern of negligence.

The Murphy report shows other bishops and clergymen shredding files, giving favourable references to paedophiles, taking out insurance for claims while pretending it wasn't a problem.

“There is nothing to be said in favour of covering up. Reading the report, it would appear so [that others were covering up]. I'd like to hear their side of it but I can't because most of them are dead,” Dr Murray says. For retired clerics like Cardinal Connell and Bishop O'Mahony, it is not a matter of resignation, which has left him the most senior serving churchman being held to account.

But he does want what he calls the “truth” out there. This is not Cardinal Connell's version of what “the truth” might mean, telling half-truths deliberately to mislead. And he hopes his “truth” will inform the process in the next “couple of weeks” by which time he may have resigned.

It is not just priests or the pious who will inform him, he insists, but the wider community in Limerick and around the country, and certainly the people of Dublin and victims like Mervyn Rundle. On Tuesday night, Mervyn Rundle called for him to resign.

Fr Naughton

Dr Murray recalled this week that in 1983, he had visitors to his house in Crumlin about a situation in Vallemount.

“Two people came to my house. They said they wanted to talk to me about Fr Naughton. They said he was too close to the altar boys. I said ‘what do you mean?’. They said they were not suggesting anything wrong was going on. I asked were there any particular boys they were worried about. They said, ‘No, we're not saying anything's wrong’. Any kinds of behaviour? ‘No we're not suggesting anything wrong’.

“It was a very unsatisfactory conversation and the only hint they gave was he should act his age and tell him to have less to do with altar boys and they would rather he was moved. At that stage, I didn't know the parish of Vallemount. I was 18 months a bishop with a huge area of 35 or 40 parishes.”

That's when he decided to go to the Vallemount parish priest, who he knew had a fractious relationship with Fr Naughton over his offensive manner towards parishioners. He requested

this priest to talk to sacristans and teachers who might have heard something. Returning around four days later, Dr Murray was told to set his mind at rest and there was nothing going on in Valleymount.

He then summoned Fr Naughton to his house.

“He [Fr Naughton] said he had done nothing wrong but I now know from experience, that is exactly what you expect from a paedophile. He denied there was anything wrong going on, said ‘these people are just cranks’ and he named them.”

After warning Fr Naughton not to do anything to make parents ‘anxious’, Dr Murray said he had to report the matter to Archbishop’s House.

“It was the first time I ever had to handle anything like that. Secondly, I always felt, I don’t know if anybody else was the same but I always felt that anything like suspicions should be known to the Archbishop [then Ryan] because there had to be some central base. I reported that and also wanted to be sure the Archbishop wouldn’t say to me there was something like that before. At that stage I suppose I did set my mind somewhat at rest, even though I told the PP if anything should arise to let me know immediately. They didn’t get on which was why I was surprised it [the PP’s report on Naughton] was so positive. He actually did want him to be moved. If he had said, ‘Yes, I want him moved’, then you would be worried. I thought he was credible, a very old man, he knew everybody in the parish. But I don’t want any of that to sound as if I don’t anguish about the people who were abused in the next parish [Donnycarney].”

He felt ‘betrayed’ by the Valleymount parish priest, now dead, in that he did not tell him there were rumours all over Valleymount about Fr Naughton. Dr Murray, by then in Limerick, says he only learned about these in 2002.

A woman had confronted him at a confirmation in Valleymount in 1984, telling the Commission she felt Dr Murray had dismissed her.

“I thought she was one of the people he had offended [by his manner]. She thought I knew. If she thought I knew and I was dismissive, I would certainly have apologised.”

The next he heard of Fr Naughton was when the Archbishop (then McNamara) and his auxiliaries discussed the shocking sexual assault on Donnycarney altar boy Mervyn Rundle, who was 11 years old, in 1984-85.

Monsignor Stenson and Archbishop McNamara handled the complaint raised by the family. And at a meeting in late 1985, Dr Murray told the Archbishop: “Remember about what I said about Valleymount that time.”

“We should have gone back [to Valleymount] and I said that to the Commission. I say ‘we’ because it [the report] says somewhere else that I informed them and none of these people thought of going back. But I got the ‘inexcusable’ bit and I don’t know why. I don’t want to make excuses about it but I think it was up to the people investigating the clear allegation.

“I should have suggested to them they should have gone back to Valleymount to investigate. The chancellery and Archbishop were in charge of the investigation and I couldn’t have gone off on my own. Again, I’m not making excuses. That is the one thing in the report I most feel I made a mistake about. I couldn’t have helped Mervyn Rundle because it was his abuse that brought about that situation and it was too late to help him but I do recognise that it should have happened.”

“I honestly believed I was acting in complete good faith. I was doing everything I thought I ought to do. But when you look back on it, you say to yourself there were rumours going around – that’s what I learned in 2002 was there had been rumours going around. Was there any way I could have got at them? I don’t know the answer to that.”

Fr McNamee

Fr James McNamee's reign of terror was so openly known in the Crumlin area that older boys, who knew him as Fr "Smack My Gee" would pelt him with stones. This was the priest who in the 1970s had a swimming pool built in his garden with the rules being only children could use it.

Bishop Murray's involvement in the case went back to 1994, in the middle of the Brendan Smyth affair that would bring down a Government.

"It's complicated and I can well understand people not believing it. I was informed for the first time about any detail of his abuse at all in a memo from Monsgr Stenson in 1994."

Archbishop Connell and Dr Patrick Walsh, a health board psychologist with the Granada Institute, asked Dr Murray to investigate a complaint McNamee was driving around Wicklow (McNamee was then chaplain at the Carmelite monastery in Delgany) with boys in the car, a complaint independently verified by a parent. The nuns had not been told of McNamee's sickening abuse in Crumlin and elsewhere, only that he had been moved there on health grounds.

"He [Stenson] said he [McNamee] has had behavioural difficulties in the past, nude bathing and having young fellows on his shoulders. That was all the detail I had. I had no awareness at all that he had been abusing back to 1960 but the thing that I really find myself quite annoyed about was that I was not told that the sisters in that convent had not been informed about his background either. And I'm also extremely annoyed that I was not informed that another allegation [relating to Crumlin] had come in about three or four weeks previously and I hadn't been told."

Dr Murray said he had been instructed by Dr Walsh, who was not a cleric, to ask McNamee about his health, ask him about altar boys and see what he could find out if the Carmelites had concerns.

"I sent back a report that shows I tried to fulfil all those things. But the Commission understandably felt that I must have known the sisters knew nothing about it and that I should have told them," he said. He does remember asking the nuns about McNamee's attitude to children but they had seemed puzzled by this and said there were no concerns.

McNamee himself denied everything to Dr Murray in relation to having boys in his car.

Bishop Murray left Delgany believing this denial about boys in the car but noted in his report to Mnsgr Stenson and Archbishop Connell there was "unresolved anger" about the earlier Crumlin complaint, about which he went on to note he had "no detailed knowledge".

The Commission finds it "incredible" Bishop Murray was not informed. This, he feels, does not mean they didn't believe him, just that it is beyond belief he wasn't informed by Archbishop's House and the Chancellery.

"It was a case on which my conscience was always completely clear until Cardinal Connell apologised to the nuns four or five years ago that the nuns hadn't been told. That was the first time it ever entered my head that they wouldn't have been told. The Commission doesn't say it but we pointed it out to them that six or seven months later, he was being moved to a nursing home and I'm on record as saying, 'Well, they have to be told'. That was my attitude. If I had known the nuns hadn't been told I would have been saying they have to be told."

Dr Murray disagreed he effectively had been sent on a fool's errand by Cardinal Connell, saying it was the practice of the Archdiocese to provide information to auxiliaries and priests on a "need-to-know" basis that was "far too narrow".

One part of the McNamee case that seems like a cover-up to him was the decision to move him from Crumlin to Delgany in 1979, when Archbishop Ryan was in charge.

"When I was sent I didn't know any of that [McNamee's long history of sexual abuse] and in fact, you can call this part of a cover-up if you like in the sense that when he was moved on to Delgany, it was said it was on health grounds. Now that might have been true but it wasn't the only truth."

Fr Marius

In 1992 a woman in her late 20s complained to Mnsgr Stenson that she was only 12 years old when this priest started to abuse her. Vile abuse including removing her top as he masturbated over her. The Archdiocese was aware that as a Clonliffe seminarian in the 1950s, Marius had indecently assaulted a 15-year-old girl in the cinema. The judge acquitted him, making clear this was not to affect his prospects.

In 1992 it was decided to retire Marius on "health grounds" and he was moved to a parish in Bishop Murray's area. Dr Murray was made aware of his background and Marius was allowed say a Mass a week as long as he didn't come into contact with children.

A "monitoring contract" was drawn up and the Commission found Bishop Murray "failed to put a proper monitoring system in place".

"It's [the Murphy report] a little bit inconsistent here. They blame me for not putting one in place and then say nobody seems to have been responsible for monitoring. The only monitoring done is he had a behavioural contract which he signed. He would never have any contact with children except a handshake in public, no involvement in nursing homes, keep in contact with Stenson, in contact with the PP of Bray, in contact with clinical person, Pat Walsh, submit to counselling etc."

"The main point is the contract doesn't give me any role. There are a number of things in the report that are a little unfair in the sense that I wasn't really the person who drew it up. I understood rightly that all the people named in the contract were the people doing particular jobs and were aware of what they were doing. It appears at some stage we became aware the PP didn't seem to know. He [the PP] might have been getting forgetful at that stage. His role was fairly passive, to report back if he noticed anything."

Fr Horatio

In September 2005, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin received a solicitor's letter where a woman sought justice for "repeated and wanton" acts on a young girl over a three year period from 1987, starting at age 16. Locations included holiday homes, the key to one of which was given to Horatio by notorious paedophile Fr Sean Fortune. Horatio had discussed marrying his victim in 1989.

Fr Horatio told the Commission he had told Dr Murray the "whole story" back in 1989, which Bishop Murray denies.

"The main point is I didn't know there was a relationship. He came to me and said look 'I'm having a problem. I visit a family I really admire but I am really attracted to their daughter. I so admire the family although I wouldn't dream of expressing it in anyway'.

"I said, 'That's a very unhealthy situation. You better not visit any more. One way you could explain it is we move you to another parish and when you get to the next parish, find yourself a good counsellor and think out clearly whether you are built to be celibate.' And he moved out of my area at that stage."

Bishop Murray said he had no knowledge of Horatio's sexual abuse when he suggested moving him to another parish.

"It was not in my power [to move him]. The auxiliaries had no great power. It was the Archbishop who did any moving that was to be done. But you would have a fair bit of power if you said there's a fella here very unhappy where he is and he has to be moved. He was moved to the far side of the city. I went into the meeting and told them the sooner we can get him out of here the better because he needs space for whatever decision he has to make."

Cover-up?

In each of the above cases, Bishop Murray said he has a clear conscience he was not involved in covering up. The one case that causes him “constant anguish” was Fr Naughton and he apologised to people in Donnycarney, Ringsend and Valleymount in 2002 that he couldn’t find out more about the activities of this paedophile.

But was the pattern of abuse so obvious over his term in Dublin that he, as an auxiliary bishop, can be seen to be complicit in an institutional cover-up? At the very least can he admit he was negligent? Is it credible he was unaware of the scale of the problem?

“I can’t see where I’m complained in relation for covering up. I don’t think they did complain me for covering up. There have been a number of cases, I can only find three in which I have been criticised. I shouldn’t say only, because one is too many.”

He described the statement he found the scale incredible “referred to my early time. I became aware of more and more of the scale as I progressed. When I became a bishop, I hadn’t a clue. Another reason I asked myself about Fr Naughton is I was completely inexperienced and when these people walked in it was the first time I had ever given thought to anything like that.”

And that he was derelict in his duty of care to children?

“I wouldn’t accept that. I would accept I was inexperienced and naive in Valleymount. And I want to make clear anything I say is not to minimise what happened to Mervyn Rundle. That is something that is always on my mind.”

Dr Murray is now engaged in a “listening process” where he will gauge opinion in the Diocese of Limerick but also public opinion nationwide and he wants to hear in particular from the victims in Dublin. Limerick West is one of Ireland’s most conservative political constituencies and Deputy Niall Collins, who has read the report insofar as it relates to the bishop, has called on him to resign. But in consulting through pastoral bodies he denied he is looking for comfort from a conservative subset of a conservative subset.

“I will listen to what people say. In the unlikely event it is entirely positive, I still have my own decision to make. It will be a decision about whether I feel I can be Bishop in Limerick in the light of all this. As I say my conscience is actually clear about Dublin even though I recognise that some of the things should have been done differently. There was certainly no deliberate omission on my part.

“It is a tough thing to say to yourself, if I had done something differently, that wouldn’t have happened. But I don’t actually know, whether I could have got anything more out of those two people [in Valleymount]. I suspect now I might have done better.”

This listening process will take a couple of weeks and Dr Murray could not say if he expects to say Mass in St John’s Cathedral on Christmas Day.

“I have no urge to hold on to 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.”

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. I think, as I say, 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.”

He has been in touch with the papal nuncio (who he said was “supportive”) and Cardinal Connell since last Thursday. He had sent a text message of support to Archbishop Martin on Sunday but had not received a reply to date. Archbishop Martin said he had only received phone calls from two of his fellow prelates since the biggest scandal in the history of the

church broke last week.

He said he received some support from Munster bishops at a meeting on Tuesday. But Bishop McAreavey was not among them. He is unsure whether the Northern bishop had in fact read the report when he told the BBC he should consider going.

“Was it possible he was told I had handled allegations inexcusably? I must say I’m kind of annoyed at RTE for keeping on saying that. They say I handled complaints and suspicions badly and in one case inexcusably. The inexcusable is not about handling and allegation but the management of the thing afterwards.”

Does he agree with his local supporters that he is being made a sacrificial lamb?

“If that’s the case, fine, but I’m not going to stand up and fight for my job. If I was going to be a divisive figure here, I don’t want to stay.”

Peter McCloskey

Bishop Murray got support from an unexpected quarter this week when Cathy McCloskey, former wife of Limerick abuse victim Peter McCloskey, and his daughter Amy, asked him to stay on.

Peter McCloskey was raped by Fr Denis Daly while he worked as an altar boy in Caherdavin in the 1980s. Peter’s brother, Joseph, has said that he received no compassion from Bishop Murray, who he claimed had confronted him with lawyers. They also allowed him travel to Sydney to seek files relating to Fr Daly while they were in Limerick all the time, Joseph said. The day Peter McCloskey “started to die”, said Joseph, was when talks with the diocese broke down on March 30, 2006.

Peter McCloskey took his own life two days later.

While Peter’s brother has accused the Bishop of having blood on his hands, his wife and daughters have described him as “kind” and “compassionate” and always supportive.

“I talked to Peter about this at one stage and wrote to him about it [that the diocese brought in a legal expert with pedigree in defending the Church against abuse allegations] and I said: ‘Peter, you began this by getting your solicitor to write to us in a certain kind of language and if I could talk to you I’d be much happier’. I told him once you start that it has to go on, but I want to settle it in a way that satisfies you.

“But I believed him at all times. He was one of most broken people I ever met. Daly was dead, I wasn’t bishop when it happened. I knew nothing about him. I understand they worked something out the others were agreeable to, but Peter was gone by then. It was an awful tragedy.”