

**Transcript of Limerick's Live 95FM Interview**  
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Joe Nash of the "Limerick Today" speaking to Bishop of Limerick Donal Murray following the publication of Commission of Investigation report into Child Sex Abuse Allegations in the Dublin Archdiocese

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JN: Bishop Murray good morning to you

BM: Good morning

JN: Thank you for joining us in the studio. Let me quote directly from the report to begin with. Bishop Murray was another long serving auxiliary bishop from 1982 to 1996. He handled a number of complaints and suspicions badly. For example, he didn't deal properly with the suspicions and concerns that were expressed to him in relation to Fr. Tom Naughton. When a short time later factual evidence of Fr. Naughton's abusing emerged in another parish, Bishop Murray's failure to reinvestigate the earlier suspicions was inexcusable. What's your response to that?

BM: Before I say anything, the whole focus has to be in all of our minds on the children, innocent children who were abused and whose lives were destroyed and I want to offer my sympathy and my apologies to anybody who was abused in Dublin and above all to anybody whose abuse might have been mitigated or prevented if I had acted in another way than I had. My prime concern here isn't to respond or defend myself, could I say about that particular case, what the Commission says first of all, one could misunderstand what the Commission says. The Commission criticised me in three cases. In none of those cases did I receive an allegation of sexual abuse. What happened in the case that they are referring to was that two people came to me, they expressed concern about the closeness of Fr. Naughton to the altar boys. Obviously I questioned them. I asked them whether there were any particular altar boys they were concerned about; they said no, they weren't suggesting anything wrong was going on and I thought that was a good sign as at the time I would have said that if he wasn't isolating altar boys that was a good sign. Now I'm not so sure that would have put my mind at rest. Then I asked them was there any particular kind of behaviour that they were concerned about and again they said they weren't suggesting there was anything wrong going on; they just wanted him to grow up and that I should tell him to have less to do with the altar boys. If I was trying to cover up I would have stopped there. I didn't stop there I went to the parish priest and asked him what did he think; had he heard anything. He was very sceptical that anything was going on. I said to him, look you have to go now – I wouldn't have known people in the parish -- and said 'I want you to go to sacristans, teachers, people who might be in a position to have heard anything if there was any suspicion and I would come back in a few days and you could tell me what you found'. When I came back he said you can put your mind at rest, there's nothing wrong going on. I was actually surprised at how positive his report back was as I knew they didn't get on well, himself and the curate. Then I called Fr. Naughton to my house and I asked him about it. He denied he was doing anything wrong and I said to him look, no matter, even if these things are unfounded or if there are misunderstandings, you have to be very careful about anything you are doing that is causing parents to be concerned. If the altar boys come to celebrate Mass, you just deal with them as far as the celebrating of Mass is concerned, and don't have anything more to do with them. And then I went to the Archbishop and told him what had happened. I was only 18 months a bishop at that stage and wanted to see if there was something else I should have done. I also wanted to be sure there wasn't something else in

this man's file that would make two and two add to four. So that's really what happened. So I accept that afterwards...

JN: What happened to him then?

BM: Nothing happened to him because we hadn't an allegation. The other thing going in that parish was I was getting complaints about his manner, that he was abrasive. Even though the PP said there was nothing going on and he said it would be better to move this man and give him a new start somewhere else. It was decided that would happen at the end of the year. That was the reason he was moved. It was not because of any allegations. We hadn't received any allegation.

JN: He was moved simply because of his manner?

BM: He was moved because he had offended so many people in the parish so really it would be better that he would start somewhere else.

JN: A lot of parish priests offend people in different parishes, including in this diocese and they are not moved?

BM: We can't move them all but this was one where there seemed to be a particular kind of difficulty about his popularity in the parish.

JN: He was moved and pretty quickly evidence emerged of abuse on his part.?

BM: That's right. That's right. That's when we should have gone back.

JN: The Commission says that your behaviour there was inexcusable?

BM: I would accept we should have gone back and I think, in fairness one should say it was the diocese that should have gone back because it would have to have involved the people who had specific evidence.

JN: When did you become aware of the second set of allegations that appeared to have more facts behind them?

BM: I became aware of them actually, before they came in, in the sense that I became aware there had been a fight in that parish and that there was some rumour that it had to do with his relationship with children. When I heard that, I immediately reminded the Archbishop and the other bishops of what I had told them, whatever it was 18 months or two years before.

JN: Why didn't you and others in the Archdiocese go back to those earlier allegations at that time?

BM: I don't think we were thinking in those terms at that time. We should have, we recognise we should have. I think it is important to say that it is a question that couldn't arise now as the people who would be doing the investigation now would be the Gardaí.

JN: How many complaints of sexual abuse would you have handled in your time as an auxiliary bishop?

BM: Handled complaints in the sense that I would have received the original complaint? Very few. You could say I was the first person to hear concerns of any kind about Fr. Naughton but I was not the first person to hear allegations and there were two or three cases but

sometimes I heard allegations of abuse against somebody who was already out of ministry or we were already aware that there were allegations against.

JN: You are mentioned reasonably frequently in the report as being involved at some level in the enquiries into a number of cases, Fr Horatio for example.

BM: I have forgotten what all those names mean. I think I know that one. I think that's the one where they say I wasn't given the information I needed in terms of previous medical assessments and so on. I don't think it criticises me in that case.

JN: Did you say to the Commission that the ultimate responsibility here was the Archbishops?

BM: Well of course that's certainly the truth. I wasn't saying so much that it was the ultimate responsibility of the Archbishop; I was saying that the system, flawed as it was, implied that the person who would have all the information would be the Archbishop. Priests would move around between one bishop's area to another and so on so it was very important that there was something fed into the central administration.

JN: What does it say to you that an Archbishop in the mid '80s was looking for insurance cover for the archdiocese against these allegations of potential claims of child sexual abuse by priests?

BM: I wasn't involved in that decision. I think it was simply that the Archbishop at the time was being told by various American bishops that you should have this insurance, maybe we should, but I don't think at that time there was any appreciation of the scale of the problem.

JN: This may seem like an odd question, it is worth asking, but did you know clearly in your own mind that child sexual abuse was a sin and a crime?

BM: Yes. Of course. Yes. Of course. But I think...as I say, there was a kind of culture in the church and I suspect in other places too of not involving the Gardaí in this sort of thing. I think that was a mistake. It was all wrong.

JN: Where did that come from?

BM: I don't know. I don't know. I certainly didn't initiate it but I think I can see clearly it was wrong. I didn't see clearly then when I was a very short time a bishop, I didn't see it.

JN: Most of the people listening this morning would come to the conclusion that if somebody came with a complaint, particularly in an organisation or elsewhere, the very first step you would take alongside any internal investigation, would be to report it to An Garda Síochána?

BM: Well in fact, no. There would be very little in the way of internal investigation now. Very little. We would establish basic facts - was the priest in the place at the time; that sort of thing.

JN: That's now.

BM: Investigation isn't our job. That was part of the problem, I think. We had no way of doing investigations really in the forensic way the Gardaí can do them.

JN: Exactly and that would still have been the case in the early '80s?

BM: It was indeed.

JN: But then the question comes to mind, why simply not hand over the information in the file to Gardaí and then, with clean hands, you can say....

BM: Absolutely, absolutely that's what should happen and it does happen. And thanks be to God it happens. People are talking about a cover up but it was also a huge burden and a huge anxiety. I mean it's the most difficult thing of all, to be face to face with somebody whose life has been destroyed by somebody who was supposed to be bringing them peace. It's a dreadful experience but the whole thing, our experience is nothing compared to theirs obviously and the pain that they have.

JN: Marie Collins, who is a survivor, and the Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern said yesterday, and you used the word yourself, that there was a cover-up within the Archdiocese of Dublin involving senior people, Archbishops and auxiliary bishops. You were one. Was there a cover-up and were you involved in it?

BM: No. I certainly never was involved in a cover-up. The other two cases I was involved in were cases that had begun long before I was involved at all. I was asked to do certain things in them, in connection with them, but I was not involved in covering up. I think that if one covers-up it is really something that is you see there was an extraordinary idea, I think, that they almost saw parents and children as not being part of the interests of the church. When the Commission talks about protecting the interests of the Church, protecting the interests of the Church means protecting the interests of the people, especially the children.

JN: That didn't appear to be the case.

BM: Yes that's what I'm saying.

JN: You are saying you weren't involved in any cover-up but do you accept the characterisation by the current Minister for Justice as a cover-up?

BM: Oh yes. There are certain things... I would have to go through the whole report in detail but there were certainly things. There was talks about trying to persuade the Gardaí to drop cases and all that sort of thing. I certainly would.... there's no excuse for that.

JN: Are you concerned that there may be a criminal investigation into that cover-up and that you might get dragged into it?

BM: No I'm not. Because I don't think I was involved in any cover-up that I am aware of....

JN: Could you be brought in on the periphery because obviously you had an involvement in certain cases in the way that you have outlined yourself?

BM: Yeah. Well I mean if I am I am. I don't believe I was involved in covering-up anything. Like I said, if I was involved in trying to cover-up that case in Vallemount I would not have gone any further than the fact that the people who came to me said they weren't suggesting there was anything wrong going on.

JN: Another reference that was made even by yourself was in the context of where the Archbishop stood in all of this in the hierarchy of the church, was a respect for canon law. Were you and others respecting canon law over the civil law of the Republic?

BM: No, I think actually what the report is saying is that canon law wasn't being observed in the same way. There seemed to be a period from about 1960's on, before that period there were a number of canonical investigations that took place so I mean obviously it still didn't

justify not approaching Gardaí but these priests were dismissed having followed a canonical investigation but that didn't necessarily do anything much for the children.

JN: It is interesting there are headlines all over the papers and one of them is from today's Irish Examiner and they quote from the report: The archdiocese's preoccupations were the maintenance of secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of the Church's reputation and the preservation of its assets – other considerations, including the welfare of children and justice for victims were subordinate to these priorities?

BM: I think there's truth in that and I am not aware, as I said in that case in Valleymount, I had not got any allegation. I had not got the name of any child. I had not got a description of any kind of behaviour.

JN: Did you become the go-to person in certain cases of allegations of abuse? In other words, was the Archbishop and others saying to you, 'Well, Dr Murray, you've dealt with a number of these.'

BM: I hadn't dealt with that many of them compared to most of the other bishops, I'd say, at the time. No, you would be involved sometimes if the person who was accused was living in your area, maybe out of ministry, maybe in semi-retirement, or whatever, you would be asked to deal with some particular aspect of the case.

JN: What about the suggestion in the report from a woman who said that she approached you at a confirmation and you dismissed her?

BM: I certainly didn't dismiss her. I only vaguely remember that. She was asking me, as I understood it, was he (Fr. Naughton) going to be moved. I knew he was going to be moved in six weeks or so but he hadn't been told so I didn't really feel I could say it straight to her but I thought I said something fairly encouraging that we were looking at it or we were dealing with it. I think that it might be interesting to say too, and this doesn't prove anything except to me, but when the concerns arose in the second parish, I immediately remembered the two people who came to me. I didn't remember that; I didn't remember any other approach because none of the other approaches to my mind had to do with sexual abuse of children, had any reference to children.

JN: Could you have prevented, Bishop Murray, certain instances of abuse if you had acted differently?

BM: Well, when I discovered, and I think that's again about the case in Valleymount, when I discovered around 2001 or 2002, that there were in fact allegations of abuse circulating in Valleymount, that people had said they had gone to the Parish Priest about it; that people had said that a school teacher was aware of it; I obviously said to myself, was there some way I could have got that information, perhaps from the two people who came to me, if they had all that information? You ask yourself that and you say is there another way of asking the question or was there some way maybe I could have made it clear to the parish priest that it was absolutely essential that if he heard anything that he would pass it on and so on I tried to do all those things and I say to myself, could I have done it differently.

JN: Did you believe at all times that when you had taken the information back to the Archbishop, your boss, that he was going to make the decisions and you would have to live with them regardless of what they were?

BM: Well, I don't think so in the sense that I would have to, that we would certainly have to discuss some of these things, not that none of these issues the Commission can criticise me

on, but we would have discussed some issues on how to handle accused people and so on. We would not always have agreed.

JN: Did you believe, and I know that your gut instinct is not evidence, but did you believe in your heart that Fr. Naughton was a child abuser?

BM: No I didn't, I'm afraid. That was the mistake. I was very concerned that that might be what was behind what the two people but after talking to the Parish Priest and after getting all this feedback from him and so on, I'm afraid that the Parish Priest told me to set my mind at rest and I'm afraid that's what I did. It remained in the back of my mind and that's why when the accusations arose in the next parish, I immediately, I immediately remembered the two people who came to me.

JN: When you and others within the Archdiocese communicated with each other over that, and there were a lot of allegations and a lot of complaints coming in, at any point did you think to yourselves, are we really doing the right thing here? There are a lot of things happening under the surface, there are a lot of complaints happening – they are individual, I accept that – but they were certainly building up to a critical mass and yet it is hidden from public view.

BM: I think yes, in a sense, that's one of the great things that has happened in the last, you know, ten, twelve years, is the number of lay people who are now involved in this whole question of child safeguarding and the whole question of dealing with....

JN: But can you understand how that would lead people to the conclusion that there was a deliberate conspiracy or cover-up?

BM: Well yeah, of course I can, but I think it's worth saying that the report also says that communication at that level was poor, in other words the individual auxiliary bishops did not know.

JN: But it says the documentation was excellent?

BM: Yes, yes. But that documentation wasn't shared by the auxiliary bishops. I think there was a sense, and it wasn't entirely wrong but it led to terrible conclusions, but there was a sense that when a person was accused, that you shouldn't be destroying his good name until something was established against him. And so information was shared by the Archbishop on a kind of need to know basis and that need to know was drawn far too narrowly in my view now.

JN: Were you conscious of the need to protect the Church's reputation at all costs?

BM: I don't think I would have wished to protect the Church's reputation at all costs. I would not, I mean, I think, I suppose the real intense understanding, growing in understanding of what abuse does to people only comes when you've spoken to and listened to and talked to victims.

JN: But Marie Collins says the report debunks that view, that it was a learning curve. Her view and she says it is backed up by the Commission, is that you were all highly educated men and you knew exactly what it was from the first instance?

BM: Well I don't like to disagree with the Commission but I would say that I hope we are all on a learning curve. I think the worst thing that would happen would be that we would become complacent and say we know all about this now and say we have it all covered. In

some senses we have to remain learning about best practice about how to be most effective in dealing with these things.

JN: Just to quote again from the report, many of the auxiliary bishops also knew of the fact of abuse, as did officials such as Monsignor Gerard Sheehy and Monsignor Alex Stenson, who worked with the chancellery; Bishop James Kavanagh and Bishop Dermot O'Mahony, Bishop Laurence Forristal, Bishop Donal Murray and Bishop Brendan Comiskey were aware for many years of complaints and/or suspicions of clerical child sexual abuse in the Archdiocese. What's your response to that?

BM: Well that's true. I don't think I was aware of the scale of it. I have to say that when I saw the report first there were cases that I knew nothing about and horrified at the scale of it I have to say. But I did know that there were a number of cases, of course, yes.

JN: Do you think that if women had been in more senior positions in the Roman Catholic Church in that period that the cover-up would ever have happened?

BM: I don't know the answer to that. We certainly have a lot of women involved in our child safeguarding and protecting in Limerick now and they do a great job and, I think, have added a great deal to our work but I don't know the answer to that.

JN: Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, the current Archbishop of Dublin, says you and others must ask (a) if you did the right thing and (b) is your current ministry in Limerick, and to the other auxiliary bishops around the country, is the right one for you?

BM: Yes, indeed, and, you know, I have asked myself that question very often, especially since and, indeed, long before this Commission was set up. But I think I have concluded that I always acted in the best of faith; I always did what I thought was the best. There are occasions such as the one in Valleymount where I say to myself could I have done it differently? Would there have been a different result? I don't know whether there would or not. I would do it differently now and certainly report to the Gardaí now.

JN: Fr Naughton was convicted only in the last year if I am correct?

BM: I am not sure about that. I think there were some cases in Valleymount and there was a civil case long before that though. When I was talking about when it came, when I began to discover there were things going on in Valleymount, there was a civil case in 2002.

JN: Are you considering your position as Bishop of Limerick?

BM: I have been considering for a long time and I have come to the conclusion that I have learned a lot of lessons, both from my own experience and from what I have seen around me, and I think I should implement those lessons and I think we have been implementing them, lessons that are reinforced by the report but lessons that we were implementing before the report came at all, ever since I came to Limerick.

JN: Will you resign?

BM: No.

JN: Is your position tenable?

BM: I believe it is but the question of whether I remain, as far as I am concerned, is a matter for the people of Limerick and the priests of Limerick but I believe we have put a very fine

child safeguarding structures in place and I think that our record for reporting allegations and so on is 100%.

JN: Are you dealing with complaints sexual abuse within the diocese of Limerick?

BM: You mean at the moment? There is no priest under investigation at the moment.

JN: Are you dealing with any historical cases from before your time?

BM: There are historical cases. But obviously people who are dead are not under investigation but we are trying to deal in a number of cases with the people who are victims of priest something of up to 40 years ago maybe.

JN: What assurances can you give parents listening, Catholics listening, that you are a credible arbiter if such a complaint arises again because, I think, what's that old saying, every bishop is a pope in his own diocese?

BM: I believe I have. I suppose I am not the best judge of it. I believe we have dealt correctly and conscientiously with every complaint that I have received since I came to Limerick.

JN: What child protection measures are being used right this minute in the diocese of Limerick?

BM: I think the child safeguarding measures, maybe Aoife (Walshe, Child Protection Training Coordinator, Limerick Diocese) is the best person to talk about those. I think they are in every parish.

JN: And I will give Aoife a chance to talk straight after the break....It should be said in the report it talks about a number of cases that you were involved in. Do you believe that your behaviour in all of those cases, other than what you talked about in the Fr. Naughton case, was exemplary or did you make mistakes in other cases too?

BM: I think the other cases revealed a certain failure of structures. I mean, there was one case in which I was criticised because there was no proper monitoring system in place. There was a question of who was supposed to be doing that, there was also the question of what monitoring system will really work. But the monitoring system that was in place was not established by me and it wasn't adequate but I don't think any monitoring system is adequate to be quite honest. I think that's a question we still have to address.

[JN speaks with Aoife Walshe and Fr Paul Finnerty,]

JN: You are saying you are not going to resign. Two questions: is it possible that you will be moved or forced out if the media storm grows over this and is the Catholic Church in Ireland dead?

BM: I don't think the Catholic Church in Ireland is dead. I think... that... One of the phrases that keeps coming to me during all this period, I think, has been the phrase of St. Paul: "God's strength is made perfect in weakness" and "when we are weak then we are strong". I think the Church thought it was strong in the past, and it's a terrible situation to be in actually. We are far truer to ourselves when we know we are weak.

JN: Could you be forced out?

BM: I have no idea. I have no idea. If I felt my ministry was not the best – was not good, -- for the Diocese of Limerick, I wouldn't have to be forced.



JN: I am sorry; I have to finish it on that.

BM: Could I just say one thing, the worst thing that abuse does in some ways is that it undermines the faith of people. As I've said in the letter that I have sent out to the priests, the people who are abused are closer than they realise to the Lord on the Cross, saying "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me". They are closer to him than we are, I'm afraid.