

Bishop John McAreevey resigns after revelations he concelebrated Mass with paedophile priest



Bishop John McAreevey said his decision to con-celebrate mass with Fr Malachy Finnegan was 'spur of the moment'. Picture by Colm Lenaghan, Pacemaker

Bimpe Archer



(<http://www.irishnews.com/other/ourjournalists/2015/06/23/authors/bimpe-archer-146703/>)

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Fr Malachy Finegan was accused of sexual abuse but was never prosecuted

ONE of the north's most high-profile bishops has resigned amid controversy that he celebrated Mass alongside **a paedophile priest**.

(<http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2018/02/08/news/bishop-regrets-saying-funeral-mass-of-priest-who-sexually-abused-pupils-1251521>)

In a brief statement released through his personal solicitor last night, Bishop of Dromore Dr John McAreavey (69) announced he was leaving his post.

"Following media reports which have disturbed and upset many people in the diocese and further afield I have decided to resign with immediate effect," he said.

"I shall make further comment in due course."

The resignation came amid growing calls for a public inquiry into clerical abuse in Northern Ireland.

Just weeks ago Dr McAreavey apologised for celebrating Requiem Mass for Fr Malachy Finegan **a paedophile and former president at St Colman's College in Newry**.

(<http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2018/02/08/news/school-devastated-at-sexual-abuse-of-former-pupils-by-priest-1251524/?ref=sh>)

Fr Finegan, who died in 2002, has been accused of sex abuse by 12 people.

Dr McAreavey admitted he made "an error of judgment" by officiating at the funeral of a man whose actions he described as "abhorrent, inexcusable and indefensible". The bishop, who has also spoken to a victim of Fr Finegan's, said that his decision to say the Mass "was the wrong one".

In an unusual move, Dr McAreavey's resignation was announced through his personal solicitor, Arthur J Downey, last night.

Previous Irish bishops have typically had their resignations announced by their own diocese.

Allegations about Fr Finegan were first highlighted in a BBC Spotlight programme last month. However, **the first abuse claim against him came to light in 1994.**

(<http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2018/02/09/news/priest-warned-abuse-victim-he-would-be-ruined-if-he-spoke-out-1252366/?ref=sh>)

Since the programme aired, three other sex abuse victims are said to have come forward, joining the 12 others who made similar claims up to 2016.

The Co Down diocese has admitted it was aware of 12 alleged victims.

Dr McAreavey has known of abuse allegations since 1994, when his predecessor Bishop Francis Brooks asked him to liaise with a victim.

Victims and politicians had called for Dr McAreavey to stand down since the revelations emerged. Last month parents of some pupils from St Patrick's Primary School, Hilltown, Carrick Primary School, Burren, and

St Patrick's Mayobridge, objected to Dr McAreavey officiating at their children's confirmations.

It later emerged that in 2000 Dr McAreavey had concelebrated a service with Fr Finegan at his former parish, Clonduff in Hilltown. A spokesman for the diocese insisted that after 1995, Fr Finegan "carried out no public ministry involving daily Mass".

However, he said "on November 29 2000 he arrived unexpectedly at the parish church in Clonduff for the Jubilee Celebration and vested along with other priests before the arrival of the bishop".

The spokesman said Dr McAreavey was "shocked" to see Fr Finegan but the priest's "ill health at that time made him increasingly difficult to manage, therefore a spur of the moment decision was taken to not to confront him just before the Mass started".

He said Dr McAreavey later visited the priest's home to remonstrate with him.

SDLP South Down MLA Sinead Bradley said Dr McAreavey's resignation was the "right thing to do".

"My thoughts are primarily with the victims but also with the wider community that has been deeply hurt," she said.

Amnesty International has called for Secretary of State Karen Bradley to set up a public inquiry into clerical child sex abuse in Northern Ireland following the revelations about Fr Finegan.

Read more: Dr John McAreavey one of north's best-known bishops

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Bishop McAreavey was under pressure for several weeks

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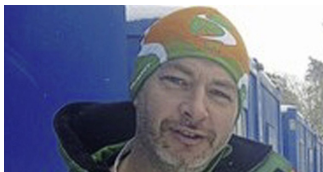


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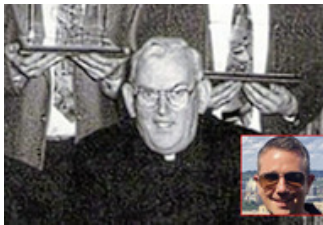
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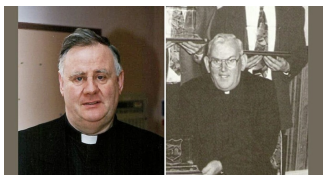
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