

Ireland pushes priests to report confessed sex abuse

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Ireland's prime minister said Catholic priests could be jailed for failing to report child sex abuse crimes they hear during the sacrament of confession, regardless of the confidentiality imposed by church law.

"The law of the land should not be stopped by a crozier or by a collar," said Prime Minister Enda Kenny on Thursday (July 14), a day after a government-sponsored commission criticized a bishop for failing to report allegations of clerical sex abuse.

A report published on Wednesday faulted the Diocese of Cloyne for failing to inform police about 15 allegations of clerical sex abuse from 1996-2009, including two cases in which the alleged victims were still minors at the time of the accusations.

The report also characterized the Vatican as "entirely unhelpful," for downplaying the child protection policies that Irish church leaders established in 1996. The report concluded that, in the case of Cloyne, those policies were "not fully or consistently implemented."

On Thursday, Ireland's foreign minister summoned the papal nuncio, the Vatican's official representative in the country, to respond to those criticisms.

The Cloyne inquiry is the fourth major probe by the Irish government of clerical sex abuse in the Catholic Church since 2003. The investigations have revealed widespread child abuse over several decades by clergy and members of religious orders, leading to the resignations of three bishops.

Bishop John Magee, who served as bishop of Cloyne during the period covered by the report, stepped down from active duty in March 2009, and resigned a year later. He publicly asked "forgiveness and pardon" for his failure to prevent sex abuse.