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## Bishop resigns over handling of sex case



Bishop announced his resignation in Wexford

The Catholic Bishop of Ferns in the Republic of Ireland has resigned following criticism over his handling of sex abuse allegations.

Dr Brendan Comiskey had been under growing pressure to step down since the broadcasting of a BBC television documentary last month, about his handling of the case of Father Sean Fortune.

The bishop announced his resignation at the Diocesan Office in Wexford on Monday.

The bishop said he had "done his best" to deal with the affair but "clearly that was not good enough".

### Abused

He said he had found Fr Fortune "almost impossible to deal with".

The priest committed suicide in 1999 while on bail facing 29 charges of serious sexual assaults on young boys.

After his death, it emerged the police in Northern Ireland had questioned him about child abuse allegations.

They related to complaints made by three

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"My continuation in office...could be an obstacle to healing"
- ▶ **BBC NI's Barbara Collins:**  
"Fr Fortune committed suicide in 1999"

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children at a youth club during the time he worked at a south Belfast orphanage in the 1970s.

Dr Comiskey said he would travel to the Vatican later this week to formally to hand in his resignation.

The bishop apologised to four men whose cases were featured in the documentary and to "all who have been abused by priests of the diocese".

“  
**The sexual abuse of children is deeply abhorrent to me**”

**Bishop Brendan Comiskey**

"The sexual abuse of children is deeply abhorrent to me. I apologise also to the families of victims and to all others who have been offended or hurt in different ways by Fr Sean Fortune," he said.

"In endeavouring to deal with the complexity and the conflict, which always surrounded Fr Fortune and already existed prior to my appointment as Bishop of Ferns in 1984, I can only assure you that I did my best. Clearly that was not good enough."

Dr Comiskey said he had confronted Fr Fortune regularly, removed him from ministry, sought professional advice and "tried compassion and firmness".

"And yet I never managed to achieve any level of satisfactory outcome.

“  
**I should have adopted a more informed and more concerted effort in my dealings with him and for this I ask forgiveness**”

"Fr Fortune committed very grave wrongs and hurt many people.

"Despite the difficulties he presented in management terms, I should have adopted a more informed and more concerted effort in my dealings with him and for this I ask forgiveness."

**Bishop Comiskey**

Dr Comiskey said he now recognised he was

not the person to achieve unity and reconciliation between the diocese and the priest's victims.

Archbishop Sean Brady and Cardinal Desmond Connell of the Irish Episcopal Conference said they were "deeply saddened" by Dr Comiskey's resignation.

They condemned the "grave and repugnant evil" of child abuse by priests and said the affair had damaged the reputation of the church.

In a joint statement they said: "We realise that the whole Church in Ireland is suffering at this time from the scandal caused by this evil and the manner in which it was dealt with at times.

"It is a scandal which has evoked entirely justified outrage."

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