



In one of his most concrete actions since a sexual abuse scandal began sweeping the Roman Catholic Church in Europe, Pope Benedict XVI on Monday appointed a high-profile team of prelates, including the archbishop of New York, to investigate Irish dioceses and seminaries.

The pope had announced that he would open the investigation in a strong letter to Irish Catholics in March. In the letter he expressed “shame and remorse” for “sinful and criminal” acts committed by members of the clergy, following two scathing Irish government reports documenting widespread abuse in church-run schools and the Dublin archdiocese.

Although the pope has spoken out against abuse in recent weeks and accepted the resignation of a number of five Irish bishops for their failure to address child sexual abuse, Monday’s announcement seemed aimed at showing that the Vatican is committed to combating the crisis with actions as well as words. The pope’s March letter had been criticized by some as calling more for spiritual renewal than offering direct action against abusers and the bishops on whose watch abuse happened.

Also on Monday, the pope accepted the resignation of Richard Burke, an Irish-born archbishop in Benin City, Nigeria, who had been suspended after he acknowledged having a 20-year relationship with a woman. In a statement, the bishop apologized and denied accusations of child abuse. He said the sexual relationship began when the woman was 21. The woman has said it began when she was 14.

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