Gay sex claims engulf Ireland's oldest priest-training college

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The archbishop of Dublin will no longer send his student priests to be trained at Ireland's oldest seminary amid claims of sexual harassment, a culture of gay sex and the use of the gay dating app Grindr on the campus.

Dr Diarmuid Martin has condemned the atmosphere at St Patrick's College in Maynooth and will instead advise his seminarians either to be trained at Irish College in Rome or to work in parishes in Dublin.

The leader of Ireland's largest diocese said there had been "poisonous" claims contained in anonymous letters about sex scandals at the college, 16 miles (26 km) from the capital.

Responding to reports coming out of the college, the head of Dublin's Roman Catholics told RTE Radio on Tuesday that he was "somewhat unhappy about an atmosphere that was growing" there. Martin said he felt it was not the healthiest place for his student priests to be.

"There are allegations on different sides," Martin said. "One is that there is a homosexual, a gay culture, that students have been using an app called Grindr, which is a gay dating app, which would be inappropriate for seminarians, not just because they are trained to be celibate priests but because an app like that is something which would be fostering promiscuous sexuality, which is certainly not in any way the mature vision of sexuality one would expect a priest to understand."

The archbishop said there were further allegations that whistleblowers trying to bring claimed wrongdoing to the attention of authorities were being dismissed from the seminary.

"I thought a quarrelsome attitude of that kind was not the healthiest place for my students to be and I decided to send them to the Irish [Pontifical] College [in Rome]," he told RTE.

Martin said at present he would not tell any bishop not to send student priests down to Maynooth but that he would prefer if seminarians were trained in diocese like Dublin where they could work and learn in parishes.

Martin has suggested an "independent person" could be brought to Maynooth to hear the allegations in person rather them appearing via anonymous letters.

Founded in 1795, the college was once the largest seminary in the world. It was built to train 500 trainee Catholic priests every year but numbers have dropped to about 60 in recent years with a fall-off in vocations.

The president of the college on Tuesday evening said he was "very unhappy" about allegations of gay activity as well allegations of abuse on the campus.

Monsignor Hugh Connolly said he had no "concrete details" about the allegations some of which are in letters, others being written about on anonymous blogs.

He said all student priests were expected to live celibately at the college, adding: "There can't be any compromise around that for a seminarian ... that's non-negotiable."

Connolly insisted that there is no investigation under way at the college into claims or even complaints of sexual harassment, misconduct or assault.