News



Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin talks to the media outside the government building in Dublin, Jan. 22, 2025.(AP/Peter Morrison, File)

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Officials in Ireland began work Monday to excavate the site of a former church-run home for unmarried women and their babies to identify the remains of around 800 infants and young children who died there.

The long-awaited excavation at the former Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, County Galway in western Ireland, is part of a reckoning in an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country with a history of abuses in church-run institutions.

The home, which was run by an order of Catholic nuns and closed in 1961, was one of many such institutions that housed tens of thousands of orphans and unmarried pregnant women who were forced to give up their children throughout much of the 20th century.

In 2014, historian Catherine Corless tracked down death certificates for nearly 800 children who died at the home in Tuam between the 1920s and 1961 — but could only find a burial record for one child.

Investigators later found a mass grave containing the remains of babies and young children in an underground sewage structure on the grounds of the home. DNA analysis found that the ages of the dead ranged from 35 weeks gestation to 3 years.

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A major inquiry into the mother-and-baby homes found that in total, about 9,000 children died in 18 different mother-and-baby homes, with major causes including respiratory infections and gastroenteritis, otherwise known as the stomach flu.

The sisters who ran the Tuam home had offered a "profound apology" and acknowledged that they had failed to "protect the inherent dignity" of women and children housed there.

"It's a very, very difficult, harrowing story and situation. We have to wait to see what unfolds now as a result of the excavation," Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin said Monday.

Daniel MacSweeney, who leads the exhumation of the babies' remains at Tuam, said that survivors and family members will have an opportunity to view the works in coming weeks.

"This is a unique and incredibly complex excavation," he said in a statement, adding that the memorial garden at the site will be under forensic control and closed to the public from Monday.

Forensic experts will analyze and preserve remains recovered from the site. Any identified remains will be returned to family members in accordance with their wishes, and unidentified remains will be buried with dignity and respect, officials said.

The works are expected to take two years to complete.