

Church monitor leaves with mixed views

The ex-FBI official, who is stepping down, hailed workers' care for victims but said work must go on.

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The first child-protection monitor for the U.S. Roman Catholic Church said in an interview the day before she steps down that the unrelenting focus on bishops' failures to rein in sexually abusive priests had obscured the efforts of countless diocesan workers and volunteers dedicated to helping victims.

Kathleen McChesney, who left a high-level FBI post two years ago to lead the bishops' new Office of Child and Youth Protection, said yesterday that more improvements were needed in the church's response to the long-running abuse crisis. But she said not enough credit had been given to the nuns, deacons and laypeople quietly redressing clergy wrongdoing.

"Some of these people are the most generous, innovative and kind people you could imagine," McChesney said in an interview. "On the day-to-day level, it isn't the bishops who are sitting down with people and trying to arrange for therapy."

McChesney took the job with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops with the understanding that she would resign after two years. The bishops are searching for her successor, a conference spokesman said.

McChesney is departing as the church reviews the policy she was hired to help implement. Included in its many provisions is a requirement that all guilty clerics be barred from church work, including saying Mass in public and working as parish priests. Many laypeople and victims are concerned that the bishops will weaken the plan, which they adopted under public pressure in June 2002.

Among those raising questions about the bishops' commitment is Illinois Justice Anne Burke, who formerly led the National Review Board, the lay panel that bishops appointed to work with McChesney's office. In a speech Feb. 8 at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., Burke said the church remained "unchastened."

"I would like to believe that the contrite words of present-day members of the hierarchy are trustworthy when they say they are dedicated to ensuring that this will never happen again. And I do believe many of them," Burke said.

"But I have also experienced firsthand the Byzantine intrigues of others who, no matter how contrite they might appear, remain worried that this whole episode should be done with by now so that they can return to a style of authority and control that, for my money, hatched the whole scandal in the first place."

The bishops have said repeatedly that they will keep their promise to safeguard young people.

McChesney said the bishops were "continuing to move forward," and she noted that dioceses spent about \$20 million on child-protection efforts last year.