

More than 600 Catholic Clerics Accused of Sex Abuse of Minors, Incidents Date Back Decades

February 21, 2005

More than 600 U.S. Catholic diocesan priests and deacons were accused in 2004 of sexual abuse of minors, with the majority of allegations of abuse occurring between 1970 and 1974. Half of these clergy had been subject of accusations previously. Most of the alleged offenders (71 percent) were deceased, already removed from ministry, or had been previously returned to the lay state (laicized) when the 2004 allegations were made.

Approximately \$19,785,325 was spent for child protection efforts, such as training programs and background checks. Costs expended in 2004 for settlements, therapy for victims and offenders and attorney fees was estimated at \$139,582,157. This total includes sums expended for allegations reported in previous years.

The figures are based on a survey by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), which was commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The Georgetown-based CARA collected the data in December 2004 and January 2005. The survey report included responses from 181, or 93 percent, of the 195 dioceses and eparchies (dioceses of the Eastern Catholic Churches) in the United States. The data is part of the 2004 Annual Report of the Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP), made public Feb. 18 at a press conference in Washington.

The U.S. bishops voted in November 2004 to establish a data collection procedure whereby dioceses and eparchies would report annually information regarding allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests and deacons and costs associated with the abuse.

According to the CARA data, in 2004, church authorities received at least 898 new credible allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by a diocesan or eparchial priest or deacon. The allegations were made by 889 individuals against 622 clerics. Of this number, 876 allegations were made by adult men and women who alleged abuse as minors in previous years. Of the total, 22, or two percent, were made by boys and girls who were under the age of 18 in 2004. Of the 898 total allegations, nine cases, or one percent, involved solely child pornography. Most allegations came to the attention of the diocese or eparchy from the victim (53 percent) or through an attorney (33 percent).

Most of the victims were male (78 percent) and more than half (56 percent) were between the ages of 10 and 14 when the alleged abuse began.

Of the allegations reported in 2004, 57, or six percent, were determined to be false by the end of that year. In addition, 59 allegations received prior to January 1, 2004, were determined to be false during 2004.

Notwithstanding the year in which the abuse was reported, 256 diocesan priests and deacons remain temporarily removed from ministry pending investigation of allegations; and 35 remain in active ministry pending a preliminary investigation of an allegation.

Of the money expended in 2004, which includes sums expended for allegations reported in previous years, \$93,364,172 was for settlements to victims, and \$6,613,283 was for payment for therapy for victims, if separate from settlements. Therapy for offenders amounted to \$1,413,093, and payments for attorney fees were \$32,706,598.

Insurance covered about 32 percent of costs.

About a third of all U.S. priests belong to religious institutes. Seventy-one percent, or 158, of clerical religious institutes and of mixed religious institutes belonging to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, also responded to the survey. (Mixed institutes are made up of both priests and brothers, though only priests were included in the survey.) These institutes reported 194 new credible allegations of sexual abuse had been made against 134 priests and deacons of their religious communities. Less than half, 43 percent, had been the subject of previous allegations before 2004.

An estimated 78 percent of their victims were male, and an estimated 53 percent were between the ages of 10 and 14 when the alleged abuse began. Most allegations took place between 1965 and 1969.

Currently, 27 religious priests and deacons remain temporarily removed from ministry pending investigation of allegations; and seven remain in active ministry pending a preliminary investigation of an allegation.

Total costs expended in 2004 by religious institutes as a result of sexual allegations made in 2004 and previously was approximately \$18,220,654. In addition, approximately \$414,084 was spent for child protection efforts, such as training programs and background checks.

The CARA data did not include information that identifies an offender or a victim. Nevertheless, the OCYP report stated, the importance of data "in understanding and evaluating the depth of the problem of sexual abuse within the church cannot be overstated.

"The statistics provided over time will more clearly illustrate whether the Church has been successful in reducing the incidence of abuse," the OCYP report noted.