

Annual audit shows decline in sexual abuse reports

WASHINGTON - Reported cases of child sexual abuse in U.S. dioceses and religious institutes declined between the 2008 and 2009 audits to evaluate how church institutions are complying with the U.S. bishops' 2002 "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

The 2009 annual report also showed that costs to dioceses and religious orders for lawsuits and other allegation-related expenses also decreased. In addition, it reported on how dioceses and religious orders are complying with provisions calling for education about sexual abuse for children and all who work with them, and for handling all allegations of sexual abuse, among other obligations included in the charter.

According to the 2009 report released by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops March 23, a total of 513 victims came forward with 513 credible allegations against 346 people who were under the authority of dioceses or religious orders. That represents a decline from 2008 in all three figures of between 33 and 36 percent. The vast majority of those allegations related to incidents dating back decades, the report said.

The U.S. bishops adopted the charter in response to a wave of reports of sexual abuse of minors involving church personnel and criticism of how the church had handled allegations of abuse in the past.

In 2004, the combined number of reported allegations of abuse for religious orders and dioceses was 1,092 allegations against 756 people by 1,083 victims, figures which have generally declined each year since then.

Data collected by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University found 398 new credible allegations of abuse were reported by dioceses and eparchies in 2009; the allegations were made by 398 victims against 286 individuals. In reports from religious orders, there were 115 people who made 115

allegations involving 60 priests or brothers.

Among the allegations reported by dioceses, six involved children who were under the age of 18 in 2009. The remaining 392 cases involved adults who alleged they were abused when they were minors. Among religious orders, none of the new allegations involved people who were under 18 in 2009.

Costs to dioceses and religious orders declined by a total of \$316 million, with the vast majority of that from a \$310 million decrease in the amount paid out in legal settlements between 2008 and 2009. Religious institutes reported a \$44 million overall drop in costs, including \$42 million less in legal settlements. Dioceses and eparchies paid out \$272 million less than in the previous year, including \$269 million less for settlements.

As in previous years, a few dioceses and eparchies declined to be audited. They included: the Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., and the eparchies of St. Peter the Apostle in El Cajon, Calif., for Chaldeans; Newton for Melkites in Massachusetts, Our Lady of Nareg in New York for Armenian Catholics in the U.S. and Canada; St. Josaphat of Parma, Ohio, for Ukrainians; and Our Lady of Deliverance of Newark, N.J., for Syriac Catholics. The report said they declined for “various reasons.”

On most provisions of the charter, only a few dioceses were cited during the year for failing to comply with aspects of the procedures it sets out. In nearly all cases, the report said, those problems were corrected by the time the annual report was completed.

For example, the audit found that the Archdiocese of San Francisco was noncompliant with an article of the charter about the public ministry of priests accused of abuse. It said some priests in the archdiocese who were removed from public ministry were permitted to concelebrate Mass in a public forum. “The noncompliance was remedied during the audit process,” the report said.

“Much discussion ensued with the Archdiocese of San Francisco regarding the definition of the term ‘public ministry,’” the report said. The bishops’ Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People has interpreted “public ministry” as being any ministry that includes people other than the priest. One possible

exception, it explained, would be a Mass concelebrated by the accused priest with another priest or priests and no one else present.

The auditors at the Gavin Group “received a subsequent letter from the Archdiocese of San Francisco advising that (the problem) had been addressed and that a ‘strict interpretation of public ministry is now the policy,’“ it said.

In another case the report described as noncompliance, the Diocese of Baker, Ore., does not provide the charter-mandated safe environment training for children and youths.

It noted that Baker Bishop Robert F. Vasa “feels it’s inappropriate to provide any type of sex education to any prepubescent child.” Training is being prepared for parents, the audit said, and the program is expected to be in place for the next audit period.

A majority of the Catholic children in the diocese attend public schools, where they receive state-mandated safe environment training, the report said.

The Baker Diocese did not participate in last year’s audit.

Data for the survey of allegations and costs was collected by CARA between December 2009 and February 2010. CARA received responses from 193 of the 195 dioceses and eparchies and from 159 of the 219 religious institutes. The Diocese of Gallup, N.M., was unable to get its material together by the reporting deadline.