

Archdiocese rings in ethics hotline

At the end of January, the Archdiocese of Baltimore will introduce an ethics hotline for its employees, volunteers, parishioners, vendors and other interested parties to report financial and human resource issues confidentially.

The week of Jan. 15, a brochure and poster detailing the new hotline was mailed to all schools and parishes in the archdiocese, and prior to that, a letter was sent from Cardinal William H. Keeler to all pastors, associate pastors, pastoral life directors and principals announcing the program.

“The use of a hotline is growing more common in other Arch/diocesan and nonprofit organizations and we believe will help us achieve our goals of transparency and accountability throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore,” the cardinal wrote.

According to Ashley Conley, archdiocesan financial affairs manager, the creation of the ethics hotline stemmed from the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, a federal law in response to corporate and accounting scandals. Although the legislation applies to public companies, Ms. Conley said “there’s thought that it will eventually apply to nonprofits and we (the archdiocese) would rather be ahead of the curve than behind it.”

She said a seven-member audit committee consisting of community members with different areas of expertise overwhelmingly approved implementing an ethics hotline in the archdiocese. The decision was also approved by the board of financial administration and priest consultants.

An independent company, EthicsPoint, will provide the hotline.

Reports can be filed by calling 1-888-572-8026, or via the Web at www.archbalt.org by using the EthicsPoint link or by going to www.ethicspoint.com.

Ms. Conley said the Archdiocese of Chicago, which only accepts financial reports, was one of the first to create a hotline and typically receives 15-20 reports monthly.

The Baltimore hotline will cost \$5,000 to implement and \$10,000 annually to

maintain.

“Considering what it’s doing, it’s relatively inexpensive,” Ms. Conley said.

Once a report has been filed, Ms. Conley, manager of internal audit, Joseph Spadaro, executive director of management services and Len Strom, executive director of human resources, will receive reports and meet weekly to review them and decide how they will be followed up.

Through EthicsPoint, users are issued an ID code and they create their own password.

“If they file a report and we view it, we have the ability to then ask them follow up questions,” Ms. Conley said. “Once we decide how to follow up, internal audit will do fraud investigation (conducted by one of four financial affairs specialists) or human resources will do an investigation.”

“In any fraud case in which fraud can be substantiated, the archdiocese has taken the position that we’ll turn everything over to the state’s attorney,” Ms. Conley said.

Along with the hotline, the archdiocese is also working on a fraud policy, whistleblower policy and conflict of interest policy to be displayed on the Web page.