

Dublin Archdiocese on brink of financial collapse due to abuse payouts

DUBLIN - The Dublin Archdiocese is on the brink of financial collapse because of payouts to victims of clergy sexual abuse, according to an internal report.

The report - prepared by the diocesan Council of Priests and obtained by The Irish Catholic newspaper - said that "reserves the diocese had built up over decades have been spent on seeking to compensate, somewhat, victims of child sexual abuse by priests."

So far, 172 civil actions from people alleging abuse have been taken against 44 priests of the Dublin Archdiocese; 117 have been concluded and 55 are ongoing. The costs, so far, to the archdiocese for settlement of claims regarding child sexual abuse by priests is currently at 13.5 million euros (\$20 million) - 9.3 million euros in settlements and 4.2 million euros in legal costs for both sides.

"This means the diocese will have to go into debt for a considerable period and will not have resources for other projects unless we fundraise for them specifically," the document added.

"This is entirely appropriate. It goes without saying that the diocese must do what it can to support these people in a sensitive way," the report noted.

"We are in a precarious position in many parishes and in the diocese, close even to a state of financial collapse," it said.

In addition to this substantial outlay, the diocese has invested considerable resources in training some 2,500 volunteers in parishes to ensure that child-safeguarding standards are reached and in setting up a child protection office.

The archdiocese will consult with priests regarding finances across the diocese in September, with a view to planning up to 2020.

The document proposed a parish levy based on the number of Catholic families in the parish; diocesan officials believe it could raise up to 3 million euros per year. Officials also hope to secure 20 million euros from parishes with “surplus funds” to plug a deficit in the general fund.

The document notes: “Collections in the diocese have been decreasing in recent years. In a time of economic downturn, as well as declining participation at Sunday Mass, this is not surprising. On the other hand, even the most committed often do not understand what the various church collections are for.”

In a hint that the central administration of the diocese may be slashed, the document warns that any proposed changes “must include an assessment of all central administration posts” and adds that pay cuts must be considered at diocesan agencies and for parish pastoral workers.

Recently filed accounts reveal that the cost of the archdiocesan central administration has increased by 500 percent in less than 10 years, while the amount of money it spent on diocesan and national pastoral services and commissions has fallen sharply.

The document proposes a publicity campaign to raise awareness among parishioners about the depth of the financial crisis in the hope of raising additional revenue.