

Vatican prepares revisions to 2001 sex abuse norms

VATICAN CITY - The Vatican is preparing to update the 2001 norms that deal with priestly sex abuse of minors, in effect codifying practices that have been in place for several years.

The revisions have been in the pipeline for some time and were expected to be published in mid-July, Vatican sources said. While the changes are not “earthshaking,” they will ultimately strengthen the church’s efforts to identify and discipline priests who abuse minors, the sources said.

The revisions will be published with ample documentation and will be accompanied by a glossary of church law terms, aimed at helping nonexperts understand the complex rules and procedures that the Vatican has in place for dealing with sex abuse allegations.

The revisions were expected to extend the church law’s statute of limitations on accusations of sexual abuse, from 10 years after the alleged victim’s 18th birthday to 20 years. For several years, Vatican officials have been routinely granting exceptions to the 10-year statute of limitations.

The revisions also make it clear that use of child pornography would fall under the category of clerical sexual abuse of minors. In 2009, the Vatican determined that any instance of a priest downloading child pornography from the Internet would be a form of serious abuse that a bishop must report to the doctrinal congregation, which oversees cases of sexual abuse.

The revised norms modify the procedures for priestly sex abuse cases that were promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 2001, when he classified sexual abuse of a minor by a priest as one of the “most grave crimes” and gave the doctrinal congregation juridical control over such cases.

The revisions incorporate changes made by Pope John Paul in 2003; those simplified some of the procedures and gave the doctrinal congregation the power, in some

“very grave and clear cases,” to laicize without an ecclesiastical trial priests who have sexually abused minors.

In April, the Vatican placed online a guide to understanding the church’s provisions for sex abuse cases. That guide mentioned the revisions under preparation and said those revisions would not change the basic procedures already in place.

The sources said the Vatican was not preparing to publish other documents on priestly sex abuse. Although some have argued that some of the strict sex abuse norms adopted by U.S. bishops in 2002 should be universalized, the sources said there was no imminent plan to do that.