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Diocese releases report on abuse

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Since 1950, three allegations of sexual abuse against minors by clergy members in the Catholic Diocese of Rockford have been proven, according to a report released by church officials Friday.

The report is a component of a nationwide audit that will be released Feb. 27 tracking the scope of sexual abuse in the Catholic church between 1950 and 2002. It sets out to determine a comprehensive number of abuse allegations and total cost of legal fees those cases have accumulated across the country.

"In publishing this report ... I turn our collective focus to a reality that is very painful, but one which we must face and about which we must be open," said Bishop Thomas Doran, head of the Rockford diocese, which serves 11 counties including Kane and McHenry.

Friday's report comes through a directive of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops and its 2002 program aimed at tracking and solving the problem of sexual abuse within the Catholic church.

In the run up to the national report's release, local dioceses have been encouraged by the bishop's council to release local findings in the "spirit of transparency," said bishops' council spokeswoman Sister Mary Ann Walsh.

But victim's rights groups say reports like Rockford's, the first published in the Chicago area, and the forthcoming national version, are anything but open and honest.

First off, they say, the numbers are gathered by internal church staffers at local levels and then sent to a New York university for computation. And the information does not, to the dissatisfaction of those groups, break down the information diocese by diocese in the national report or, at any level, reveal the names, parishes and years the alleged abuses occurred.

"How can we be assured he is giving all the information," said Barbara Blaine, president of the victim's rights group SNAP, or Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. "There is no mechanism to determine if these numbers are accurate or complete. By refusing to give the names it brings into question the thoroughness of the study."

Church officials say the study doesn't have names or dates by design. When the bishops council ordered the study, it guaranteed anonymity in an attempt to bring back unhindered, accurate numbers.

"The bishops wanted to get a handle on the problem," said Walsh. "That is a general policy in research."

Walsh compared the method to similar tactics used in drug use surveys that use anonymous responses.

In Rockford's case, the report says 32 people made sexual abuse allegations against 27 priests and one deacon between 1950 and 2002. Of the 27 priests, six were what are called religious priests, or members of a religious order such as the Jesuits, rather than accountable directly to the diocese. Those cases were turned over to leaders of the respective orders.

Of the 22 diocesan clergymen, accountable to the diocese leadership, allegations against five men were classified as without merit. Charges against three men were proven and charges levied at 14 other were listed as yet unsubstantiated or unproven.

Doran's report says there are no clergymen working in the Rockford diocese today that have had allegations made against them.

As far as time periods, the report says only that eight of the allegations happened in the 1960s and six happened in the 1970s. The report also outlines that several of the accused priests have since died.

There are no additional specifics about criminal charges, such as those facing former priest Mark Campobello, who faces felony charges stemming from alleged abuse incidents at Aurora Central Catholic High School and St. Peter's church in Geneva in 1999 and 2000.

Rick Springer, Midwest coordinator for the abuse victim's group The Linkup, says not having more information included in these reports is a turn in the wrong direction.

"That alone is going right back to the same old thing," he said. "I think it is very important we be honest and open and that they do talk about the parishes they were assigned to and the times it occurred.

"As long as they have that problem, this is never going to go away," he added.

What information is included, has been published as part of a four-page report in The Observer, the official newspaper of the Rockford diocese.

The Observer Editor Penny Wiegert said Bishop Doran wanted to guarantee local parishioners could see the numbers from their own area before hearing the national report.

Local reports from the Chicago Archdiocese and the Joliet diocese are expected as well.

Joliet's should come by the end of the month, or early February at the latest, said spokesman John Cullen.

Chicago has opted not to pre-empt the national report and will wait until the end of February, said spokesman James Dwyer.

"We have traditionally released numbers in the past and will do so at the appropriate time," he said. "Anyone who thinks we have been trying to hide something is mistaken."

#### GRAPHIC: Abuse allegations

The Catholic Diocese of Rockford on Friday released a report which details sex abuse allegations in its jurisdiction from 1950 to 2002.

#### Allegations:

32 total allegations made against 28 clergymen

- 5 found to be without merit
- 14 were unsubstantiated or unproven
- 3 were substantiated
- 6 allegations handled by religious orders outside the diocese

#### Financial cost:

- The diocese has spent \$110,110 in response to allegations. Of that, \$105,110 was spent on counseling for victims.

Source: Catholic Diocese of Rockford