

Critics scoff at claim of clergy compliance

Author(s): Rob Olmstead Daily Herald Staff Writer

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All three area Roman Catholic dioceses were found in compliance for 2004 with U.S. Bishops' guidelines on preventing and reporting sexual abuse by priests, the church announced Friday.

But a critic said the fact that the Rockford Diocese could be found in compliance - when it was found in contempt of court for not cooperating with a criminal abuse investigation - shows just how weak and ineffectual the guidelines really are.

"It's another situation where the bishops set the ground rules, they pick the umpires ... and now they're declaring themselves winners," said Barbara Blaine, president of Survivor's Network of Those Abused by Priests.

Blaine was referring to Mark **Campobello**, a priest who was stationed in Geneva and had sexual relations with a teenage girl. In 2003, a Kane County judge ordered the diocese to turn over documents to the state's attorney it had on that incident and another involving an Aurora girl.

Rockford refused and was found in contempt by the judge and the case moved to an Illinois appellate court, which again ordered the diocese to turn over the documents in 2004. Rockford did, but under seal to the judge. Meanwhile, **Campobello** pleaded guilty in both cases, and Rockford successfully argued that the documents no longer needed to be reviewed by the judge or state's attorney since the criminal cases had been disposed.

Penny Wiegert, a diocese spokeswoman, said the court proceeding and the compliance audit are separate matters and shouldn't be confused.

The audit finds they are doing everything the church ordered, whereas "the contempt charge represents our disagreement with what the court needs relevant to that (criminal) case," Wiegert said.

The audits indicated that in 2004 there were no complaints of sexual abuse by clergy in the Chicago Archdiocese and seven in Rockford. All seven were against one priest, William Joffe, who was removed many years ago. Rockford had previously announced four of those complaints, but Wiegert did not have information on the other three that have come forward since then.

The Joliet Diocese did not say how many cases were reported in 2004. Spokesman John Cullen said the diocese has pledged to release a report within two weeks and that the number "may" be reported at that time.

All three dioceses were found to either have complete background checks on staffers, including priests, or have a schedule in place for them.

In the Chicago Archdiocese, four confidentiality agreements were signed, the audits said. Rockford's audit did not say how many were signed, but Wiegert said she thought it was zero. Joliet did not report how many were signed, but again Cullen said that "may" be part of the upcoming report.

Blaine said the previous charter by the U.S. Bishops insisted confidentiality agreements were not to be signed, and she doubted the explanation that these were instituted at the request of the victims.

Every victim she'd ever met wanted the abuser's name publicized, but not their own, and probably didn't understand the implication of the agreements, Blaine said.

Jim Dwyer, spokesman for the Chicago Archdiocese, said those confidentiality agreements simply say the church won't publicize them at the victims' request. If the victims want to come forward, they are still free to do so, he insisted.

Nationally, Roman Catholic bishops said that over the last year they received 1,092 new allegations of sexual abuse against at least 756 Catholic priests and deacons.

Half of the accused priests over the past year had been previously accused of abuse, said Kathleen McChesney, executive director of the bishops' Office of Child and Youth Protection.

The auditors found that more than 95 percent of dioceses have taken the required steps to keep children safe. Seven dioceses and Eastern rite territories were out of compliance and one diocese, Lincoln, Neb., refused to participate.

"The crisis of sexual abuse of minors within the Catholic Church is not over," McChesney said. "What is over is the denial that this problem exists."

- Daily Herald news services contributed to this report.

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