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Christian Bros give $243 million to abuse victims

Michael Kelly Catholic News Service | Nov. 25, 2009

DUBLIN, Ireland -- The Irish Christian Brothers have announced plans to contribute 161 million euros ($243 million) for assistance to victims of abuse in government schools and orphanages run by the congregation.

"We understand and regret that nothing we say or do can turn back the clock for those affected by abuse," said Brother Edmund Garvey, a member of the congregation's leadership team, Nov. 25. "Our fervent hope is that the initiatives now proposed will assist in the provision of support services to former residents of the institutions as well as the facilities, resources and scope to protect, cherish and educate present and future generations of children."

Figures reviewed by a government-appointed assessment panel show that the brothers' total contribution amounts to 67 percent of their assets. The remainder of the assets will be used to continue the congregation's work educating 37,000 young people in 96 schools around Ireland and for the welfare of brothers.

In May, an independent commission on child abuse issued a report that said a climate of fear created by pervasive, excessive and arbitrary punishment permeated most of Ireland's residential care institutions for children and all those run for boys from 1940 through the 1970s. The report also said that in several institutions managed by the Christian Brothers, sexual abuse of boys was a chronic problem.

Following a June 4 meeting with the Irish prime minister and other government ministers, the Christian Brothers and 17 other orders agreed to an independent audit of their assets, so that their ability to pay further compensation could be determined. The brothers are the first congregation to announce their new contribution.

The Christian Brothers' latest contribution includes a donation of 30 million euros to a government trust plus an additional 4 million euros to counseling services for victims. It will also involve the transfer of Catholic schools' athletic fields, valued at 127 million euros, into the joint ownership of the government and a voluntary Catholic schools trust.

Under the terms of a 2002 deal with the Irish government, the 18 religious congregations received indemnity from being sued by victims in exchange for contributing 128 million euros to a victims compensation fund.

Irish Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe said he would not comment on the offer from the Christian Brothers until all other offers from congregations had been received.

More than 10,000 former residents of religious-run institutions in Ireland allege that they were abused while in care.

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