NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Austrian bishops' new measures on sexual abuse

Jonathan Luxmoore Catholic News Service | Mar. 6, 2010

Austria's Catholic bishops announced new measures to counter clerical sexual abuse after a spate of allegations against local priests.

"Church bodies have a responsibility to act clearly and consistently towards all suspected cases and accusations," the Austrian bishops' conference said in a March 5 statement.

"Care must be directed above all towards the victims and appropriate consequences drawn for the perpetrators. We therefore believe improvements are necessary to the measures we have taken previously," the bishops said.

The document was issued after the bishops' March 1-4 meeting at Sankt Poulten. It said all dioceses had taken steps during the last 15 years to prevent abuse by clergy by opening special offices, or Ombudsstellen, to handle abuse claims and establishing training programs for clergy and lay church workers.

However, the statement added, cases of abuse "in both church and society" also had been ignored, and said detailed guidelines adopted by the Vienna Archdiocese would form the basis for new instructions for the church nationwide.

"With shame and hurt, we acknowledge that the conviction has emerged in recent years in Austria that nothing counts more than the truth in accusations of sex abuse," said the bishops, who oversee a church that claims the membership of 78 percent of Austria's population of 8.1 million.

"We then invite everyone who has suffered to turn to their diocesan ombudsman's office for a protected and confidential talk, and we ask the culprits to give an honest account," the bishops said.

The statement came on the heels of two late February announcements involving incidents of alleged abuse. Prosecutors in Salzburg Feb. 22 said they are investigating abuse claims against a religious order priest while officials of the Graz-Seckau Diocese confirmed February 24 that an abuse victim attempted to blackmail clergy for 1 million euros.

In their statement, published on the bishops' conference Web site at www.bischofskonferenz.at, the bishops said they appointed a group of experts to prepare a "detailed total concept" for improving the church's handling of abuse charges in time for their June meeting.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/01/2015 - 02:39*): http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/austrian-bishops-new-measures-sexual-abuse