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200 claims of church-related abuse received

Cian Molloy Catholic News Service | May. 17, 2010

DUBLIN -- A new report from a church-funded body set up to improve child protection procedures and policies reported nearly 200 new allegations of church-related child abuse in a year.

Ian Elliott, chief executive officer of the National Board for the Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church, said publication of two prominent reports on church abuse might have increased the number of victims coming forward to complain of abuse and that the number of allegations may well be down by the end of this reporting year in March 2011.

The board's report, issued May 17, said that "children should be safer than they once were, and those that seek to harm children should feel much less secure."

The report said the national board -- an independent advisory and auditing body founded and funded by the Irish bishops in 2006 -- received 197 new allegations of church-related child abuse between April 1, 2009, and March 31.

All allegations reported to the board also were reported to the civil authorities. In each case, the complainants were adults who said they had been abused as children.

The majority of cases involved sexual abuse, but some were complaints of physical or emotional abuse; 87 related to dioceses and the remaining 110 involved religious orders. Eighty-three of the alleged perpetrators are deceased; of the 114 allegations relating to living people, 35 have already been laicized or dismissed from their congregation or order.

The decision to publish an annual report on child protection initiatives, policy and failings was made by the bishops and religious orders in advance of last year's publication of the Irish government's Murphy Report, which found that child abuse and neglect had been endemic in church-run child-care institutions, and the Ryan Report, which found that the Dublin Archdiocese had covered up allegations of clerical child abuse for decades.

The National Board for the Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church annual report found that 100 percent of parishes in 18 of Ireland's 28 dioceses now have an appointed and trained "safeguarding representative"; in five dioceses the percentage of parishes with a safeguarding representative ranges between 95 percent and 99 percent.

In three dioceses -- Clonfert, Killala and Kilkenny -- no parish-safeguarding representatives have been appointed because people are still being trained to be contacts for people alleging or suspecting abusive behavior.

In addition to training for parish reps, the board has run courses for dioceses and congregations on record keeping and on "managing risky individuals."

The board is commencing a series of audits of child protection policies and practices in individual dioceses, starting with dioceses in Northern Ireland and the northern part of the Irish Republic.

Elliott confirmed that he had spoken to retired police Det. Martin Ridge about his claims of a cover-up in Raphoe, Ireland, and that the board will publish the results of its first series of diocesan audits next year. After auditing the dioceses, the board will begin auditing congregations.

Maeve Lewis, director of the victim support group One in Four, told Catholic News Service, "In many ways the real work of the board is only just beginning with the auditing of the dioceses, but we are glad that all allegations are now being reported to the authorities, and we are glad that the board has acknowledged that policies are being implemented in different ways, which is what we are finding when we are working on behalf of victims."

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