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German bishops release sex abuse guidelines

Niels Sorrells Religion News Service | Aug. 31, 2010

BERLIN -- Officials and employees of Germany's Roman Catholic Church will be required to immediately report suspicions of child abuse to the police under new guidelines set to go into effect on Wednesday (Sept. 1), the German Bishops Conference announced.

The new guidelines are in response to a wave of scandal that washed over the church in the winter, as dozens of decades-old accusations of physical and sexual abuse of children came to light.

"The horrible revelations and experiences of the recent months have shown us that our guidelines of 2002 were not precise enough in all points," said Trier Bishop Stephan Ackermann, who was appointed by the conference to lead a team creating the new guidelines.

The previous guidelines had only required officials to report suspected abuse "as soon as possible."

The new guidelines allow officials to not report cases to authorities if the abused child, or the parents, requests that no report be filed.

The guidelines also require all dioceses to have at least one person who does not directly report to the bishop available as a contact person for reporting suspected abuse. Those accused of abuse are barred from working with children and all church employees who work with children will have to undergo more thorough screening.

Ackermann said that the question of financial reimbursement for past victims is still an ongoing discussion that will be carried out at a roundtable of church and government officials and experts. But he promised it would not be swept aside. "We will not hide behind the roundtable."

Several organizations representing victims called the guidelines a good start, but Germany's Justice Ministry said more clarification would be needed.

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