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Crime and punishment in the church gets a new look

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ROME -- By the end of 2012, the Vatican may be ready to issue a set of comprehensive revisions to the laws governing crime and punishment in the church -- adding rigor and specificity to the procedures and penalties to be imposed for, among other things, sexual abuse by clergy.

To be clear, the looming revisions to the penal section of the church?s internal Code of Canon Law are not intended as an alternative to reporting acts which are also crimes under civil law, including sexual abuse, to police and prosecutors. Instead, the revisions are intended to beef up the church?s internal response to these offenses -- and, according to Vatican officials responsible for the revisions, to intervene earlier to nip potential abuse in the bud.

The project is being carried out by the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, which is sort of the Attorney General?s office of the Vatican, responsible both for interpreting and updating the church?s Code of Canon Law.

For the past two years, the council has been working on a revision of the penal section of the code, which is found in book six. In late January a draft was finalized and sent privately to roughly thirty consulters, mostly experts in canon law around the world, who will have a couple of months to study it and submit their recommendations.

By the summer a new draft will be prepared incorporating those reactions, which will be printed and set out to bishops? conferences for comment. The idea is to have a final version ready to submit to Pope Benedict XVI by the end of 2012.

For Allen's full report, see: **Crime and punishment in the church gets a new look** [1]

John Allen is in Rome for the next week. Check back toNCRonline.org[2] frequently for more reports and exclusive coverage.

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