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Key events in US church response to clergy sex abuse crisis

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WASHINGTON -- Here is a timeline for some key events in the clergy sex abuse crisis in the United States and the church response to it.

1980-1984

1983 -- First nationally publicized case: Father Gilbert Gauthé is suspended by Diocese of Lafayette, La., after he admits having sexually abused at least three dozen children.

1985-1989

1985 -- Father Gauthé sentenced to 20 years in prison.

1985 -- Several state Catholic conferences and individual dioceses begin developing policies governing abuse allegations.

1985 -- Bishops discuss problem in executive session at a June meeting.

1988 -- Bishops' general counsel acknowledges scope and extent of crisis in public statement.

1988 -- Victims' advocacy group Survivors' Network of those Abused by Priests forms.

1990-1994

1990 -- Bishops' priestly life committee studies question of reassignment of abusive priests.

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June 1992 -- Bishops affirm five principles for dioceses to deal with child sexual abuse; they include responding promptly and openly to all allegations.

November 1992 -- Cardinal Roger Mahony and other bishops meet with victims.

1993 -- Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse established. Pope John Paul II forms joint study commission with U.S. bishops on priest abusers.

1994 -- Pope allows for some exceptions to canon law to make it easier to laicize priests who commit sex crimes against minors.

1994-2001 -- Ad hoc committee issues "Restoring Trust" materials to dioceses, urging written policies with special emphasis on education, prevention and pastoral response.

1995-1999

1998 -- Bishops attend a symposium on working with victims and healing.

2000-2002

2000 -- U.S. bishops meet with other English-speaking bishops' conferences in Rome about clergy sex abuse.

2001 -- Vatican doctrinal congregation takes juridical control over cases of sexual abuse of minors by priests, classifying it as one of several "graver offenses" against church law.

January 2002 -- Boston Globe launches series on clergy sex abuse; case of defrocked Boston archdiocesan priest John J. Geoghan figures prominently. Small group of Boston lay Catholics begins to meet, expresses outrage over the scandal. Group grows to become Voice of the Faithful.

February 2002 -- Geoghan convicted of child sexual abuse, sentenced to 10 years in prison.

March 2002 -- Boston Archdiocese agrees to pay \$15 million to \$30 million in settlement with plaintiffs in Geoghan case.

April 2002 -- Pope meets with 12 U.S. cardinals and bishops' conference officers at Vatican. He tells them he is "deeply grieved" by news of clerical sexual abuse and says there is no place in the priesthood or religious life for those who would harm children.

June 2002 -- Bishops approve "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," their landmark document responding to the crisis. Bishops establish National Review Board, a lay group to work with the USCCB in preventing sexual abuse of minors.

December 2002 -- Pope accepts resignation of Cardinal Bernard Law as archbishop of Boston.

2003-2008

2003 -- Annual audits of dioceses begin to ensure compliance with the charter.

2003 -- California opens a one-year window for child abuse victims to file civil lawsuits previously barred by statutes of limitations, resulting in multimillion dollar settlements against dioceses and religious orders in the state.

February 2004 -- Report on nature and scope of clergy sex abuse problem in U.S. is released, showing that 4,392 priests were accused of abusing 10,667 minors between 1950 and 2002.

July 2004 -- Archdiocese of Portland, Ore., becomes first U.S. diocese to file for bankruptcy protection because of sex abuse lawsuits. Others follow, including Tucson, Ariz.; Fairbanks, Alaska; Spokane, Wash., Davenport, Iowa; San Diego; Milwaukee and Wilmington, Del.

June 2005 -- Ad hoc committee becomes standing Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People.

November 2005 -- National Review Board commissions John Jay College of Criminal Justice to study the causes and context of clergy sex abuse problem. Bishops approve new Program of Priestly Formation; it orders the rejection of any seminary applicant and expulsion of any seminarian who has molested a child or shows inclination to do so.

April 2008 -- Pope Benedict XVI during U.S. visit meets privately in Washington with small group of survivors of clergy sex abuse.

2009-2011

2009 -- Oregon province of the Society of Jesus files for bankruptcy protection after more than 500 people make claims against the province. A second U.S. religious order, the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers, files for bankruptcy protection in 2011.

2010 -- Vatican issues revised procedures, penalties for clergy sex abuse cases.

February 2011 -- Philadelphia grand jury indicts priests, others for abusing or failing to protect children, says allegations against 37 priests still in ministry were credible.

May 2011 -- Vatican doctrinal congregation says every bishops' conference in the world must have guidelines for handling accusations of clerical sex abuse in place within a year; John Jay report on causes and context of clergy sex abuse problem is released.

[Contributing to this story was CNS visual media manager Nancy Wiechec.]

Editor's Note: The full text of the John Jay report is now available as a pdf file: **Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010**

For more coverage of the John Jay report, see:

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