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

Vatican investigates Benedictines over abuse cases

Simon Caldwell Catholic News Service | Oct. 25, 2011

LONDON -- At the request of the Vatican, a bishop has conducted a review of child protection procedures at a Benedictine abbey following a number of high-profile child abuse cases.

Auxiliary Bishop John Arnold of Westminster and Abbot Richard Yeo, president of the English Benedictine Congregation, conducted the apostolic visitation at Ealing Abbey and the neighboring St, Benedict's School during September.

They have already made their report to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which ordered the visitation.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, confirmed to Catholic News Service Oct. 25 that Bishop Arnold was asked by the doctrinal congregation to conduct the apostolic visitation.

The congregation, he said, has competency for handling "questions regarding the sexual abuse of minors."

"When the final report of the visitation is ready, it will be given to the congregation, which will take the appropriate steps," Father Lombardi said.

The purpose of the visitation was to ensure that the English and Welsh church's stringent and updated child protection and safeguarding procedures -- put in place in 2002 and revised in 2007 -- have been followed to the letter, said an Oct. 25 statement emailed to Catholic News Service by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

"In accordance with the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission's procedures, all allegations of abuse are passed onto the statutory authorities as has happened with the historic cases at Ealing Abbey," the statement said.

"The Catholic Church in England and Wales is determined to ensure its robust safeguarding procedures are followed, and this visitation is consistent with that aim," it added. "Any person with an allegation of abuse is urged to report it to the statutory authorities."

According to The Times newspaper, which carried a report about the visitation on the front page of its Oct. 25 edition, Cardinal William Levada, prefect of the doctrinal congregation, decided to intervene following a meeting earlier this year between Archbishop Antonio Mennini, the papal nuncio to Great Britain, and Jonathan West, a Catholic whose son was a student at St. Benedict's.

West raised the cases of abuse in Ealing following the conviction and jailing of Father David Pearce, a monk, for offenses against pubescent boys at the school over a 36-year period.

The case attained a high profile in the British media because Father Pearce was able to sexually assault a pupil after he was placed on restricted ministry following complaints against him.

In October 2009, he pleaded guilty to 10 counts of indecent assault and one count of sexual assault against five boys and was jailed for five years.

According The Times, Father Pearce had been "simply dismissed as a rogue priest" until investigations by reporters discovered allegations against other priests and teachers.

These included John Maestri, a former math teacher who in 2009 received a suspended two-year jail sentence for indecently assaulting a boy between 1979 and 1981. He had previously served a 30-month jail term after he admitted to three counts of indecent assault against boys between 1980 and 1984.

Father Gregory Chillman, a former deputy head teacher of the school, has been placed on restricted ministry following allegations of inappropriate behavior.

Father Laurence Soper, who taught at St. Benedict's from 1972 to 1984 and was the abbot of Ealing Abbey throughout most of the 1990s, disappeared in March from the Benedictine headquarters in Rome, where he was treasurer of the International Benedictine Federation, after he learned he would be charged with child abuse. He is still missing.

Cindy Wooden at the Vatican contributed to this story.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/31/2014 - 12:42*): http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/vatican-investigates-benedictines-over-abuse-cases