

Audit shows compliance of dioceses

The audit found 90 percent of America's Catholic priests comply with safeguards against sexual abuse

By Jon Sawyer
St. Louis Post-Dispatch (KRT)

WASHINGTON — An outside audit finding general compliance with safeguards against sexual abuse by Catholic priests was described by church leaders Tuesday as important but only a start in addressing one of the worst crises ever for the Catholic Church in America.

The audit was commissioned by the Office of Child and Youth Protection, an internal watchdog group established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops after its enactment of a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

The audit, released Tuesday, found that 171, or 90 percent, of the 195 dioceses and eparchies — Eastern Rite divisions of the church — were in compliance with the

reporting and procedural safeguards required under the charter, approved by the bishops at their meeting in Dallas in June 2002.

Auditors told the diocese that it had to fulfill three "instructions" — a directive given when a particular requirement of the charter had not been met. Fewer than one-third of dioceses were given instructions. Less-severe "recommendations" were issued when there was incomplete implementation of a part of the charter, or where significant improvement could be realized.

Groups representing victims of priest sexual abuse said they were disappointed by audit criteria that they said permitted bishops, in effect, to grade their own performance.

"It's disappointing," said David Clohessy of St. Louis, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP. "It's largely what we feared — a lot of self-praise for very minimal steps and a huge focus on policy and procedure and paperwork, which has never been a serious factor in abuse." "There were written codes of

conduct for priests, formal complaint procedures and written diocesan communication plans already," Clohessy said. "No child was abused because those procedures were not adequate."

"The priests currently in service in our church are credible, faithful members of the clergy," Belleville, Ill., Bishop Wilton D. Gregory said. "We've done everything we can to remove anyone who has credible allegations against them. The priests who are serving are men of integrity."

The audit was conducted under the direction of former FBI official William A. Gavin and involved site visits by 54 auditors, most of them former FBI agents.

The audit also recommended a series of additional steps, all endorsed by the National Review Board, including annual reports by the conference's Office of Child and Youth Protection that would include detailed data on the number of allegations, actions taken against priests, numbers of victims and financial cost to dioceses.

Some of the outstanding ques-

tions will be addressed in two further studies due by late next month: a detailed account of all past abuses, conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York, and a "causes/context study" aimed at assessing the roots of abuse through interviews with priests, perpetrators and victims.

"You can talk about how we need to improve some of these mechanisms, about the need for better follow-through, but there's been a fundamental change in the landscape," Robert Bennett, a member of the National Review Board, said.

"You've got this national board, representing the laity, going out into the bowels of the church — looking at records, getting access to individual priests. That has never happened before, and I don't think that's a genie you can get back in the bottle. It's here to stay."

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CLOSURE

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provides bus passes to faculty and students, which can be utilized by most coming and going from campus, and that many live near or on campus anyway.

Also, he said a large majority of students came to campus Tuesday despite the weather.

"If the vast majority of faculty and students can be on campus then we ought not to deprive them," Williams said, adding that he realized some students couldn't make it, and he expected them to exercise their good judgment on whether to come to campus.

For those students who couldn't make it to class, University Registrar

Herb Chereck said he sent an e-mail to all departments urging them to be "understanding and reasonable" when enforcing mandatory class attendance policies. If the departments have further questions, he urged them to contact him. He has received no phone calls, he said.

Williams remembered the last time the University was closed because of bad weather at the end of Thanksgiving break in 1985. There was a snowstorm across the state that prevented many students from getting back to Eugene, he said.

French student Sarah Winger and Eugene resident Steve Bridge braved the trip from the south hills of Eugene to campus Tuesday morning. Once he arrived, Bridge fought to keep his feet

below him on the slick ice covering University Street.

Winger said she thought it would have been a good idea to shut down campus.

"Considering there probably won't be another day like this, it wouldn't hurt," she said.

Bridge agreed.

"You really could hurt yourself just walking around campus," Bridge said.

English student Jenny Dorner, who huddled below an umbrella to escape the freezing rain, wondered if officials would have closed campus if it hadn't been only the second day of classes.

She "almost killed" herself on her bicycle, she said.

"There's always that risk," Williams said, referring to the danger of stu-

dents walking around campus. "I think our students are adults. They'll exercise their good judgment. People have to take care of themselves under these circumstances."

Williams was aware of no reports of student or employee injuries, he said.

Not all students thought school should have been closed, however.

Environmental Science student Arista Hickman joked that Tuesday was a good day to show off University students' resolve.

"I think it just shows how tough we are at Oregon," she said. "We're not OSU wussies."

Contact the people/culture/faith reporter at jaredpaben@dailymerald.com.

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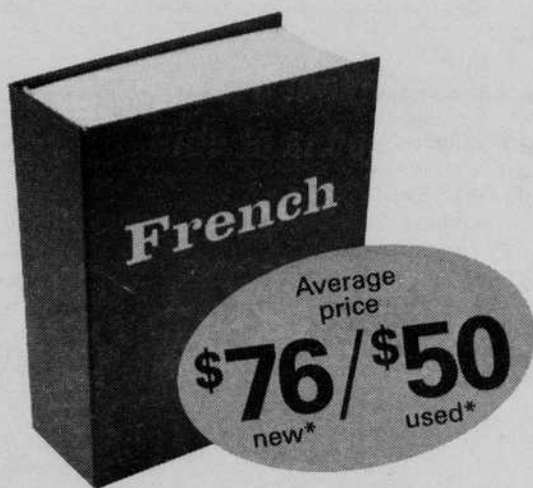
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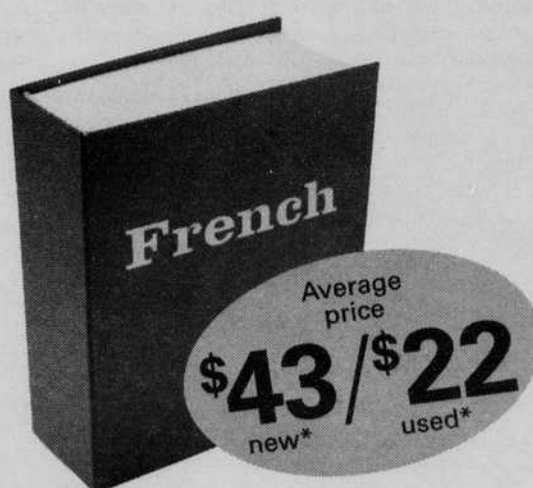
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