

WORLD & NATION

Pope labels scandals as betrayal of priesthood

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Church leaders from Pope John Paul II on down addressed the growing scandal of clerical sex abuse, even as new details emerged about cases inside and outside the United States.

In a letter March 21 to the world's priests, the pope said the perpetrators of such scandals have betrayed the priesthood and cast a "shadow of suspicion" over the many good priests in the world.

"As priests we are personally and profoundly afflicted by the sins of some of our brothers who have betrayed the grace of ordination in succumbing even to the most grievous forms of the *mysterium iniquitatis* ("mystery of evil") at work in the world," the pope said.

He said the church was concerned for the victims of such abuse and wants to handle each case "in truth and justice." At the same time, he asked for prayers to reawaken the spiritual ideals of the priesthood.

At a press conference, Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, head of the Vatican's Congregation for Clergy, said the church has "never neglected the problem of sexual abuse, even before it ended up on the front pages of international newspapers."

Cardinal Castrillon noted that in 2001 the pope had strengthened some of the provisions and consolidated the Vatican's role in handling such cases.

In the United States, Cardinal Edward M. Egan of New York issued a letter defending his handling of past cases of clergy sex abuse while he was bishop of Bridgeport, Conn., from 1988 to 2000. The letter followed media reports questioning his oversight in Bridgeport, where some priests



Ed Foster Jr./CNS

Bishop Robert N. Lynch fields questions March 22 regarding harassment allegations leveled against him by a former male employee of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Fla.

accused of past sex abuse had been allowed to continue working after psychiatric evaluation.

In a sermon in St. Patrick's Cathedral March 24, Cardinal Egan said he had taken steps to prevent future abuse in the New York Archdiocese.

Under Cardinal Egan's new policy, the archdiocese will report alleged clerical abuse of minors to civil authorities "when there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred and if the victims do

not oppose the reporting."

Bishop Thomas V. Daily of Brooklyn also issued a message saying that he regretted some of the decisions he made as an auxiliary bishop of Boston but that the Brooklyn Diocese's response has been proper in two publicized cases in which charges of abuse have been made.

Meanwhile, in California, criminal charges were dismissed or dropped against two former priests accused of molesting minors. A third priest was arrested and two others appeared in court on sex charges.

In Boston, Cardinal Bernard F. Law's 15-member Commission for the Protection of Children met for the first time March 16. The commission is charged with critiquing archdiocesan policies and advising the cardinal on future handling of sex-abuse allegations.

In the United States and around the world came other related developments:

- Rochester's Father Kevin E. McKenna, president of the Canon Law Society of America, issued a statement with the society's president-elect, calling on the U.S. bishops to safeguard the rights of the accused and their accusers as the scandal over clergy sex abuse continues to unfold.

- A new lawsuit, citing the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, known as RICO, accuses three U.S. bishops and their dioceses of engaging in racketeering by conspiring to cover up sexual abuse by priests. The lawsuit filed March 22 names Bishop Anthony J. O'Connell, who submitted his resignation March 8 as head of the Diocese of Palm Beach, Fla.; Bishop John R. Gaydos of Jefferson City, Mo.; Bishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Knoxville, Tenn.; and their three dioceses. The latter bishops had no jurisdiction over

Bishop O'Connell, who has admitted to an instance of sexual misconduct when stationed in Missouri. Bishop O'Connell had left their dioceses by the time of their appointments.

- Bishop Robert N. Lynch of St. Petersburg, Fla., has been accused of sexual harassment by his former communications director Bill Urbanski, but the bishop said he "unequivocally" denies any wrongdoing. Bishop Lynch said he may have exercised poor judgment but that there was no sexual misconduct.

- Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss of Omaha told an 80-year-old former Catholic schoolteacher, "You should be ashamed of yourself!" because she wrote a letter to a local newspaper criticizing the archbishop's handling of a case involving a priest accused of viewing child pornography. In a letter to the woman, Archbishop Curtiss said she should have discussed the issue with him first, and he gave her a "penance" of one Hail Mary.

- In Rome, U.S. diocesan seminarians attended special prayer services and house meetings to reflect on the sex-abuse scandal and the challenge of rekindling trust in priests among the Catholic faithful. The future priests reported feelings of anger, disbelief and a sense of loss at the recent revelations, but said their overwhelming reaction was a renewed emphasis on priestly commitment.

- Archbishop John P. Foley, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, said the real tragedy of clerical sex abuse is not the embarrassment caused to the church, but the grave offense against God and children. Speaking in Philadelphia March 13, he said he suggested to Pope John Paul that the church declare a period of prayer and reparation for the "tragic moral flaws" revealed in the lives of some priests.

- Archbishop Juliusz Paetz of Poznan, Poland, vigorously denied allegations that he sexually molested Catholic seminarians, saying his words and actions had been misinterpreted. The Vatican was investigating the accusations.

- French investigators closed their case against an auxiliary bishop of Paris, Bishop Jean-Michel di Falco, because the statute of limitations had expired on allegations of sexual abuse dating back to 30 years ago. The bishop had denied the accusations, and an archdiocesan investigation last year found them baseless.

FBI issues information on pornography ring

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The FBI said at least two Catholic priests and six clergy members of other religious denominations were among more than 89 people charged so far in "Operation Candyman," a nationwide crackdown on the spread of child pornography on the Internet.

Officials said people in such jobs as school bus driver, nurse, teacher's aide, police officer, child photographer and therapist were also charged.

One Catholic priest was identified as Father Thomas A. Rydzewski. He was an associate pastor at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore at the time of his arrest last December charging him with possession of child pornography.

An FBI affidavit said agents found electronic and print images of underage boys and girls engaged in sexual activity at Father Rydzewski's quarters in the rectory and in his parents' home.

He has been placed on administrative leave and has been undergoing treatment.

News reports in several parts of the country had identified the other priest as Father John Hess of the St. Louis Archdiocese, but at the time of the FBI announcement March 18, no charges had been brought against him. He has been under investigation since authorities seized his computer at Sacred Heart Parish in Florissant, Mo. The archdiocese placed him on leave.

Steven Berry, an FBI spokesman in Washington, confirmed to Catholic News Service that two Catholic priests have been charged, but declined to identify the second one even by geographic location.

Pete Gulotta, FBI spokesman in the Baltimore field office, which covers Maryland and Delaware, told CNS that Father Rydzewski was one of eight persons in his district who have been investigated in Operation Candyman and the only one arrested so far.

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