

Bankruptcy OK'd in Boston

Church also releases additional abuse files

BOSTON (CNS) — The Boston archdiocesan finance council voted Dec. 4 to allow Cardinal Bernard F. Law to pursue reorganizing the archdiocese under Chapter 11 of the Federal Bankruptcy Code.

No U.S. diocese has ever made a Chapter 11 filing, in which a court determines what a corporation must do to satisfy creditors equitably and, if possible, regain solvency.

"No final determination to file Chapter 11 has been made at this time," said archdiocesan spokeswoman Donna M. Morrissey.

The archdiocese faces some 450 lawsuits for alleged sexual abuse of minors by its priests.

The day before the finance council met, more than 2,000 pages of archdiocesan files on eight priests accused of sexual misconduct in the 1960s to 1990s were released after a judge turned down archdiocesan requests to keep the documents sealed.

The documents — made public when lawyers for alleged victims of Father Paul R. Shanley added the materials to their courtroom file — marked the first phase in release of what is expected to total about 11,000 pages of files on 65 priests accused of sexual abuse.

Included in the files were cases of priests receiving or retaining an assignment despite recommendations against it.

Among the accused priests in the files made public Dec. 3 were:

- Father Thomas P. Forry, who allegedly molested a young girl and inappropriately touched her brother, carried on a 10-year sexual affair with a woman, molested her young son and threatened her husband with death if the husband spoke to authorities. After admitting the love



Reuters/CNS

Protesters in Boston Dec. 8 call for Cardinal Bernard F. Law to resign. Attorneys for abuse victims say newly released church files reveal that Cardinal Law knew priests were abusing parishioners and reassigned them.

affair with the woman in 1984, he refused a recommendation of long-term inpatient psychiatric care and was allowed to return to ministry after a few months of outpatient therapy. In 1993 he was suspended and he and the archdiocese reached an out-of-court settlement with the molested son of the woman he had an affair with. Two years later, the archdiocesan review board lifted all restrictions on his ministry. He continued in ministry despite other complaints until early 2002.

- Father Robert V. Meffan, 73, accused by at least three women of having recruited them as teenagers to religious life in the 1960s and '70s and then forcing sexual acts on them by saying it was a part of their spiritual formation to become "brides of Christ." The alleged acts stopped short of intercourse.

- Father Robert M. Burns, a priest from Youngstown, Ohio, who

after receiving treatment for child molestation was given regular assignments in two Boston archdiocesan parishes from 1982 to 1991, despite warnings from Youngstown Bishop James W. Malone and the treatment institute that he should be kept away from children. He was removed from ministry in 1991 after a complaint that he had raped a boy in his first Boston parish.

- Father Richard A. Buntel, removed from ministry in 1994, who in 1983 was accused of giving a 15-year-old boy cocaine in exchange for sex and was described as having a reputation in his parish for drug abuse and rumored homosexual activity.

- Father Peter J. Frost, 62, who was removed from active ministry in 1992 and has admitted that he began sexually abusing boys back in 1969, when he was a deacon preparing to be ordained a priest.

Cardinal Law visits Vatican to discuss problems

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Boston Cardinal Bernard F. Law made an unannounced visit to Rome for discussions with Vatican officials amid further disclosures of cases of priestly misconduct in Boston and the specter of a potential archdiocesan bankruptcy filing.

Cardinal Law was scheduled to meet separately Dec. 10 with Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, and Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, and was expected to be received by Pope John Paul II several days

later, a senior Vatican official said.

Dioceses must seek authorization from the clergy congregation for any major financial decisions, including bankruptcy filings. The bishops' congregation is responsible for preparing episcopal appointments and resignations for the pope.

The senior official said that, contrary to some news reports, the Vatican was not weighing the option of assigning Cardinal Law a coadjutor archbishop to assist him in resolving the archdiocese's difficulties and who eventually would succeed him.

The cardinal's visit came less than

a week after the Boston archdiocesan finance council voted to allow him to pursue reorganizing the archdiocese under Chapter 11 of the Federal Bankruptcy Code.

The cardinal's visit also coincided with increasing anger among sex-abuse victims' groups following the Dec. 3 release of more than 2,000 pages of archdiocesan files on eight priests accused of sexual misconduct in the 1960s to the 1990s.

Because of the new disclosures, some 50 of the archdiocese's 900 priests began circulating a draft petition for the cardinal's resignation.

ORDERS CONCERNED WITH NORMS CLAUSE

ROME (CNS) — Representatives of U.S. men's religious orders traveled to Rome in late November to voice concern at the Vatican about the addition of a clause applying to them in revised U.S. clerical sex-abuse norms.

The revised norms, adopted by the U.S. bishops in November and currently awaiting Vatican approval, include a new provision extending bishops' oversight in abuse cases to include religious — not just diocesan — clergy.

CARDINAL SAYS MEDIA DISCREDITS CHURCH

ROME (CNS) — Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation, said this year's media coverage of U.S. clerical sex abuse seemed distorted and was an "intentional" effort to discredit the church.

"In the United States, there is constant news on this topic, but less than 1 percent of priests are guilty of acts of this type," he said in response to a reporter's question Nov. 30 in Murcia, Spain, after speaking at a university conference. "The constant presence of these news items does not correspond to the objectivity of the information or to the statistical objectivity of the facts."

LEADERS ASK ASHCROFT FOR PORN PROSECUTION

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Cardinal William H. Keeler of Baltimore and other religious leaders met Dec. 6 with U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft seeking more vigorous prosecution of companies that distribute illegal pornography.

At a press conference following the meeting, the religious leaders identified three companies listed among the Fortune 500 as distributors: AT&T and AT&T/Comcast through their cable television systems, and General Motors through its ownership of the Echostar satellite TV service.

Meetings with companies over the past two years to persuade them to stop distributing pornography failed, religious leaders said, prompting the meeting with Ashcroft.

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