

AGENCY MUST PAY FOR CONTRACEPTION

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (CNS) — The California Supreme Court said March 1 that Catholic Charities of Sacramento must include birth-control coverage in employee health-care plans.

Catholic Charities challenged the 1999 state law that requires all employers to include contraceptives when they provide insurance coverage for prescriptions. The law includes an exemption for "religious employers."

The Supreme Court said Catholic Charities does not qualify as a religious employer because it offers secular services to the public without regard for the recipients' beliefs and without preaching about Catholic values.

COURT: STATES CAN DENY SCHOLARSHIPS

WASHINGTON (CNS) — States do not have to provide tax-funded scholarships to college students who are pursuing careers in ministry, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Feb. 25.

In a 7-2 vote, the court said that the Washington Promise Scholarship program did not unlawfully discriminate against students studying theology or violate their First Amendment right to religious freedom.

Joshua Davey, the student at the center of this debate, won a merit scholarship in 1999 but was denied the ability to use it when he told officials at Northwest College in Kirkland, Wash., that he planned to use the money to pursue a theology degree.

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Sun., Mar. 7: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Psalms 27:1, 7-9, 13-14; Philippians 3:17-4:1 or 3:20-4:1; Luke 9:28B-36.

Mon., Mar. 8: Daniel 9:4B-10; Psalms 79:8-9, 11, 13; Luke 6:36-38.

Tue., Mar. 9: Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Psalms 50:8-9, 16BC-17, 21, 23; Matthew 23:1-12.

Wed., Mar. 10: Jeremiah 18:18-20; Psalms 31:5-6, 14-16; Matthew 20:17-28.

Thu., Mar. 11: Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalms 1:1-4, 6; Luke 16:19-31.

Fri., Mar. 12: Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13A, 17B-28; Psalms 105:16-21; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46.

Sat., Mar. 13: Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Psalms 103:1-4, 9-12; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32.

Abuse reports released

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Catholic Church's scandal of clergy sexual abuse of minors made another round of international headlines and broadcast news leads with the Feb. 27 release of two major documents — a study of the nature and scope of the abuse since 1950 and a report on its causes.

Both documents were released at a press conference in Washington.

The study was conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. It found that, from 1950 to the end of 2002, 10,667 people claimed they had been childhood victims of sex abuse carried out by a total of 4,392 of the roughly 110,000 priests who served in U.S. dioceses and religious orders during that time.

That worked out to 4 percent of U.S. priests. Among diocesan clergy, who make up about two-thirds of American priests, 4.3 percent were accused of abuse. Among priests in religious orders, who form the remaining third of all priests, 2.7 percent faced accusations.

Deacons, with more than 15,000 ordained since the permanent diaconate was restored in 1967, accounted for only 41 accusations, or less than 0.3 percent. Because the number was so small, the John Jay study rolled that figure into accusations against priests, effectively ignoring permanent deacons except for a couple of brief mentions.

According to the study, up to the end of 2002 costs related to sex abuse totaled \$573 million, with \$219 million of that covered by insurance.

The all-lay National Review Board, formed by the bishops in their 2002 "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," issued the accompanying report on the causes and context of the abuse crisis.

It called sinfulness the overriding key to understanding and interpreting the crisis.

"The actions of priests who sexually abused minors were grievously sinful. The inaction of those bishops who failed to protect their people from predators was also grievously sinful," the board said. "Somehow the 'smoke of Satan' was allowed to enter the church, and as a result the church itself has been deeply wounded. Its ability to speak clearly and credibly on moral issues has been se-



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Mark of faith

Bobbi Hassett, 10, receives ashes from Father Stephen Mbugua Ngari during an Ash Wednesday Mass Feb. 25 at St. Joseph's Church in Rush. Father Ngari, who is currently assisting at Rochester's St. Boniface Church and working at St. John Fisher College, is on a one-year sabbatical from Egerton University in his home country of Kenya.

riously impaired."

The John Jay study noted that most of the reported abuse occurred between 1960 and 1990, peaking in the 1970s. The board's report said one of the apparent causes of the crisis was that, "historically, seminaries paid inadequate attention to the human formation of candidates for the priesthood."

The board called for more careful screening of seminary candidates and more careful oversight of priests in the first years after ordination.

Noting that "the overwhelming majority of reported acts of sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy victimized boys," the board said the question of admitting priesthood candidates who are homosexually oriented must be addressed.

The report criticized bishops who ignored allegations by victims, who protected abusive priests, who prized secrecy to avoid scandal, who treated victims as a legal problem. It said many bishops relied too heavily on the advice of therapists in deciding to return offending priests to ministry.

It called for further steps to make bishops more accountable for their actions, including "greater participation by the laity in the life of the church."

It commended the bishops for the steps they have taken in the past two years to end the abuse and create a safe environment for children in parishes and Catholic institutions.

At a second press conference following the release of the documents, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S.

Conference of Catholic Bishops, described the two documents as "a vital benchmark" in the bishops' efforts to right the wrongs of the past.

"The release of the John Jay study is an important step in the work we have set out to do to ensure our church is a safe and holy place for all people," said Bishop Matthew H. Clark, bishop of the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y.

Bishop Clark noted that Diocese of Rochester, in a spirit of openness and candor, released on Jan. 6 the figures it reported to the study. At the same time the diocese issued the findings of an independent audit of its "Creating a Safe Environment" program.

"The finding of full compliance by an independent body is a clear indicator that we are taking the necessary steps in the Diocese of Rochester to ensure our children, youth and vulnerable adults are protected," the bishop said.

