

Diocese in full compliance

Passes second audit on protecting children

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced that, for the second year, the Diocese of Rochester is in full compliance with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

This determination was the result of an audit conducted locally Sept. 13-17 by the Gavin Group, a Boston firm commissioned by the USCCB. The Gavin Group sent to Rochester an audit team of two retired FBI agents, who reviewed diocesan records and policies. They also conducted interviews with Bishop Clark and other diocesan officials, abuse victims and members of a local independent review board that assesses allegations of sexual abuse and makes recommendations to the bishop regarding such allegations and the suitability for ministry of accused clerics.

The audit is intended to assess the compliance of U.S. dioceses and eparchies with the child-protection charter, which the bishops adopted in 2002 to address and prevent sexual abuse in the church. All U.S. dioceses and eparchies are subject to these audits, which began in 2003.

"Being found in full compliance by the auditors affirms we are very much on the right course as we strive to create a safe and holy environment for all in the church of

Rochester," Bishop Clark wrote in his November "Along the Way" column, which appears on page 2 of this edition.

Since the 2003 audit, no charges of sexual abuse of minors have been brought against priests or deacons in active ministry, according to Doug Mandelaro, diocesan director of communications. Father Daniel Condon, diocesan chancellor, said the diocese has received three allegations of sexual abuse since the last audit. All three allegations related to priests who already had been removed from ministry because of previous allegations.

The Rochester Diocese also was found to be in full compliance with charter standards during the inaugural audit, which was conducted in September 2003. As part of that procedure, auditors from the Gavin Group had asked the diocese to make some minor procedural revisions: revising and distributing a pamphlet on procedures for filing a sexual-abuse complaint; bringing priest-personnel policies in line with the U.S. bishops' charter; and implementing a plan for "safe environment" training for parents and children. All of these adjustments have been made, Mandelaro said.

In January 2004 Bishop Clark released results of the 2003 audit, as well as local results of a national study conducted on behalf of the National Review Board, an independent panel formed by the bishops to oversee progress of all U.S. dioceses and eparchies in implementing provisions of the child-protection char-

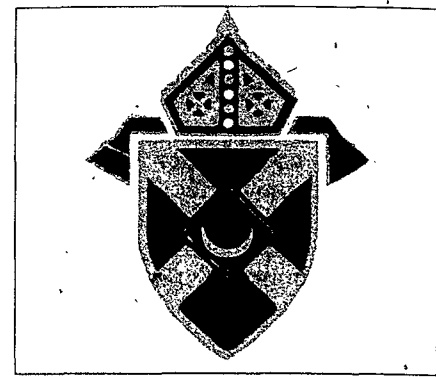
ter. Conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, that study assessed the scope and nature of the sexual-abuse crisis in the U.S. church on a diocese-by-diocese basis.

In conjunction with the John Jay study, Bishop Clark revealed that the Diocese of Rochester had paid out a total of \$1.51 million between the years 1950 and 2003 in response to cases of sexual abuse of minors by priests; that 36 diocesan priests had been the subjects of sexual-abuse complaints during that time; and that 18 of them had resigned or had been suspended from ministry as a result of allegations.

More than two-thirds of the 114 allegations brought forward in the Diocese of Rochester from 1950 to 2003 were filed during the year 2002, at a time when media coverage and public awareness about the church's sexual-abuse crisis were at a crescendo. Most of the allegations involved incidents dating back to the 1970s and 1980s.

Several years before the U.S. bishops adopted their child-protection charter, the Rochester Diocese already had begun to address the problem of sexual abuse. In 1993, the bishop established a review board of diocesan officials as well as law-enforcement officials and experts on sexual abuse. Also in 1993, the diocese began mandating sexual-misconduct workshops for all its employees, and appointed two victims' advocates.

More recently, in compliance with the charter, Bishop Clark in-



stituted a Code of Pastoral Conduct in May 2003. The code requires additional training for diocesan and parish employees and volunteers, as well as criminal background checks for all such workers.

"We have now done more than 12,000 background checks on priests, deacons, seminarians, diocesan and parish employees, and volunteers," Mandelaro said.

In his November *Courier* column, Bishop Clark wrote that the diocese will strive to continue improving its programs related to sexual abuse and keeping them well-publicized.

"Having learned from the past, now let us be the force and example for change and awareness — not only in our church, but in all of our society, so that our children and all those who are vulnerable will be better protected no matter where they go," he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To report a case of possible sexual abuse and receive help and guidance from the Diocese of Rochester, victims are encouraged to contact the victims' assistance coordinators appointed by Bishop Matthew H. Clark: Barbara Pedeville: 585/328-3228, ext. 1215 or 800/388-7177, ext. 1215; or Father Robert Ring, 315/730-0882.

Auditors find all charter standards being met

According to a summary of the Gavin Group's 2004 audit findings on the Diocese of Rochester, the diocese has met standards of the U.S. bishops' charter in all the following areas:

Healing and reconciliation:

- Has a policy in place for preven-

tion of sexual abuse of minors by clergy.

- Provides outreach for victims/survivors and their families.
 - Has offered to meet with victims/survivors who have reported allegations since the last audit.
 - Provides outreach for faith communities in which sexual abuse occurred.
 - Has a mechanism in place for prompt response to a credible allegation.
 - Has two victim-assistance coordinators, Barbara Pedeville and Father Robert Ring.
 - Has had a review board in place since 1993.
 - Has printed and publicized procedures for making complaints of abuse.
- Effective response:**
- Has reported all allegations of

sexual abuse of a minor since the last audit.

- Has an effective liaison with civil authorities.
- Cooperates with authorities about reporting when the person is no longer a minor.
- Advises victims/survivors of their right to report allegations to civil authorities.
- Complies with all applicable canon law.
- Permanently removes a priest or deacon against whom an offense is proven.
- Offers professional assistance to offending priests or deacons.
- Has clear, well-publicized standards of behavior for church personnel.
- Maintains a policy of openness and transparency on issues regarding sexual abuse of children.

Protecting the faithful in the future:

- Has fully implemented a "safe environment" program that includes educational programs for children; parents and guardians; ministers; diocesan and parish employees; educators; and volunteers.
- Has clear, well-publicized standards of conduct for these people.
- Conducts background checks for all diocesan and parish personnel who have regular contact with children.
- Provides adequate screening and evaluation in determining the fitness of candidates for ordination.
- Has not transferred any priest or deacon to another assignment, or to another diocese for residence, if that person has had a credible allegation of sexual abuse made against him since the last audit.

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