

Abuse policy 'could use improvement'

Catholic official,
others urge changes

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The Archdiocese of Louisville's policy on dealing with cases of child sexual abuse needs revision, a top church official said.

"We have learned a lot from what has happened in Boston and elsewhere," said Brian Reynolds, chief administrative officer for the archdiocese.

"Our policies are consistent with the norms of both Kentucky law and the norms of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops," but recent news "suggests the policies could use improvement."

The archdiocese's policy calls for church workers to follow civil laws on reporting child abuse. It does not require them to call police when an adult makes allegations of being abused as a child years earlier.

The policy also calls for internal investigation of cases, aid to potential victims, psychological evaluations of the accused and the removal of known molesters from ministry with children.

David Richart, director of the National Institute on Children, Youth & Families at Spalding University, said the archdiocese's emphasis on internal investigation in abuse cases leaves the policy wanting.

Reynolds said the archdiocese has not yet decided on all of the revisions it plans, but said he expected it would address one concern of child advocates — that the policy neither explicitly spells out Kentucky's law on reporting child abuse nor provides phone numbers to call.

The archdiocese's current policy has been in place since



David Richart of the National Institute on Children, Youth & Families said churches are ill-equipped to investigate abuse.

1993. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis, which stretches south to the Kentucky border, implemented a similar policy in the early 1990s.

Susan Borcherts, spokeswoman, said Indianapolis archdiocesan officials have reviewed their policy but do not expect major changes. "We're pretty satisfied with it," she said.

The current Louisville archdiocese policy says there are reporting requirements but never says what they are — an obligation on all citizens to report any suspected abuse of a minor.

Asked in an interview whether the archdiocesan policy should print the law explicitly, Reynolds agreed. "That's a great recommendation."

The Indianapolis policy does spell out Indiana state law, though it does not include phone numbers of child advocate groups and law enforcement authorities.

Louisville Archbishop Thomas Kelly has tried to reassure local Catholics that "we are doing all we can to prevent and deal with" the problem of sexual abuse of children through investigating past cases and better screening and training of new priests.

Reynolds said more than a dozen people have contacted the archdiocese since Kelly issued a call earlier this year for victims of sexual abuse to contact it. All spoke of abuse that occurred decades earlier, sometimes by priests who have since

died, he said. Borcherts said the Indianapolis archdiocese would not disclose how many complaints it has received.

None of the reports have been turned over to civil authorities, but the Louisville archdiocese is conducting its own investigations.

Richart contends, however, that churches and other private organizations are ill-equipped to investigate abuse and have conflicts of interest in doing so.

"The Catholic Church does not have the expertise to do an investigation," Richart said. "It is not an independent law enforcement authority."

Another child advocate agreed.

"Essentially, we advocates believe that the 'trust us, we're good people doing God's work,' self-regulation mindset is not appropriate," said Jack Levine of the Center for Florida's Children. "We don't do it for barbershops, restaurants, or pet groomers; why for children's services?"

David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said he recommends abuse victims at least consult police, a lawyer or some other adviser before going to the church.

"We think survivors should trust their gut instincts, but check with somebody first," he said. "Don't go to the church first, and don't go to the church alone."

"I wish I could be charitable and assume the best motives. But history tells us church leaders have pretty consistently worked hard to cover things up."

Reynolds acknowledged such feelings are common.

"The church has to earn trust again," he said. "The church can't expect people to trust it if they have been hurt and have not had an experience that rebuilds that trust."

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

If you know of a child being physically or sexually abused, you are required by Kentucky and Indiana law to call the police.

Indiana law allows no exceptions, while Kentucky law allows exceptions only if the abuse is learned in a clergy-penitent or attorney-client discussion.

Kentucky: The statewide 24-hour child abuse hotline is (800) 752-6200

Jefferson County: Louisville and Jefferson County police's 24-hour abuse hotline is 595-4550

Indiana: The state hotline is (800) 800-5556
County hotlines:
Harrison: 738-2101;
Floyd: 948-5300; Clark: 283-4471;

An adult who wishes to report abuse from childhood can call the same numbers.

Local Catholic officials have also asked if anyone who believes a priest has committed abuse to call them, though some victim advocates recommend at least consulting police or a lawyer before doing so.

The numbers are:
Archdiocese of Louisville: 585-3291
Archdiocese of Indianapolis: (800) 382-9836, ext. 7325