

Bishops: New Sex Abuse Claims Top 1,000

By RACHEL ZOLL, AP Religion Writer

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The nation's Roman Catholic bishops said Friday that over the last year they received 1,092 new allegations of sexual abuse against at least 756 Catholic priests and deacons.

Half of the accused priests over the past year had been previously accused of abuse, said Kathleen McChesney, executive director of the bishops' Office of Child and Youth Protection.

Most of the alleged incidents occurred decades ago: 72 percent of the priests were either dead, defrocked or removed from public ministry before the newest allegations were received, McChesney said.

The information came as the bishops released a new national audit of U.S. dioceses to determine how well they've complied with the child protection policy American prelates instituted nearly three years ago at the height of the clergy molestation crisis. Teams of auditors, comprised mainly of former FBI agents, compiled data in visits to dioceses across the country.

The auditors found that more than 95 percent of dioceses have taken the required steps to keep children safe. Seven dioceses and Eastern rite territories were out of compliance and one diocese, Lincoln, Neb., refused to participate.

"The crisis of sexual abuse of minors within the Catholic Church is not over," she said. "What is over is the denial that this problem exists."

But the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests said the audits were "minimal and misleading," contending bishops had too much control over who participated in the review.

The report is the latest in a series the bishops commissioned to restore trust in their leadership after the clergy molestation crisis erupted in the Archdiocese of Boston and spread nationwide.

Last year, the bishops released an unprecedented statistical review that found 4,392 priests had been accused of molesting minors in 10,667 cases between 1950 and 2002.

A first series of audits, also released a year ago, found 90 percent of the 195 U.S. dioceses were fully compliant with the child protection policy the bishops adopted under intense public pressure in June 2002. But auditors also found shortcomings in the reforms, such as ineffective monitoring of guilty priests.

The bishops have already authorized a third national audit this coming year, however they angered victims' groups by deciding to reduce the number of dioceses that will receive full onsite reviews.