For Immediate Release

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Independent audit gives Seattle Archdiocese commendation

Sexual abuse prevention, pastoral care program called “national model”
National audit results to be released Tuesday, Jan. 6

(Seattle) Archbishop Alexander J. Brunett and the Archdiocese of Seattle received commendation from an independent audit team dispatched here to verify compliance with strict national standards for addressing clergy sexual abuse of minors. Auditors said the program in the Seattle Archdiocese “could serve as the national model for the Catholic Church in the United States.”

The analysis of the sexual abuse programs was part of an independent national audit to ensure that dioceses around the country are implementing the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” adopted by U.S. Catholic Bishops at their meeting in Dallas, Texas in June 2002.

“While we are gratified by this recognition, we also are humbled,” said Archbishop Brunett. “Despite our best efforts, our task is not complete if even one victim or family member needs compassion and care as a result of these terrible events.”

Archbishop Brunett recently announced that a consultative panel of community professionals will conduct a meeting with victims and their families to receive further input and suggestions to improve archdiocesan policies and procedures.

The Office of Child and Youth Protection, established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to assist dioceses implement the charter and to ensure consistent application of its guidelines and procedures, will release audit results for every diocese in the country on Tuesday, Jan. 6. The audit was conducted by the Gavin Group, Inc. of Boston, Massachusetts.

“Under the leadership of Archbishop Alex J. Brunett the Archdiocese of Seattle has constructed an effective and efficient program designed for the protection of children and young people from clerical sexual abuse as well as for the pastoral care of the victims of such abuse,” the audit team said in its report. “The audit commends Archbishop Brunett in the development of a program that could serve as the national model for the Catholic Church in the United States.”

The auditors also credited Archbishop Brunett’s predecessors who “laid the foundation for this exceptional program.” The first archdiocesan policies to address clergy sexual abuse allegations were implemented in 1987. Those policies were expanded and improved in 1991.

In addition to recognition for compliance with the principles and procedures established by the bishops in 2002, auditors cited Archbishop Brunett’s leadership and the commitment of the archdiocesan staff in implementing the program. Archbishop Brunett credited his predecessors, staff and the community experts who have helped him develop and implement the programs.

“Previous Archbishops acted on the best information available at the time when the first allegations of abuse came to their attention,” said Archbishop Brunett. “They and their staffs deserve commendation for their hard work and for having the wisdom to seek advice from the community.”
Archbishop Brunett also was commended for creating separate panels of community experts to help him review policies and to determine the suitability for ministry of accused priests. The Archdiocesan Policy Review Board periodically reviews the policies and procedures in place to address problems associated with sexual abuse. The Archdiocese also maintains an independent Case Review Board that makes recommendations regarding the credibility of any child abuse accusation made against a priest and whether the priest should be permanently removed from ministry as a consequence of the accusation.

“The audit has determined that this division of labor between the archdiocesan Policy Review Board and the Case Review Board works extremely well,” according to the report. “...this creative and imaginative approach ...is identified as a ‘best practice’ that may be exported to other dioceses to assist them with operational improvements.”

The Seattle audit was conducted in the fall of 2003 by the audit team of John A. McGinnis and Michael W. Stuart. McGinnis and Stewart were among more than 50 auditors hired by the Gavin Group. The independent audit teams, made up primarily of individuals with FBI backgrounds, were charged with producing a public report on the progress made by each diocese in implementing the standards in the charter adopted by the USCCB last year.

In addition to a thorough review of records and interviews with bishops, clergy and staff, auditors also interviewed individuals who had reported instances of abuse to the archdiocese since June 2002, local district attorneys, diocesan (lay) review board members and some parishioners.

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