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With the Aug. 14 release of a Pennsylvania grand jury report on priestly sexual abuse of minors, the U.S. Catholic Church again is confronting questions about its response to abuse allegations dating back several decades.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has taken steps to address abuse claims and prevent abuse, including the 2002 adoption of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and special legal norms. Annual reports have documented compliance with mandated policies and practices to protect children and respond to allegations of clergy abuse. The charter was revised in 2005, 2011, and 2018.

Here are some key events in the U.S. church's response to allegations of abuse during the past 35 years.

1983

-- The Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, suspends Fr. Gilbert Gauthe after he admits having sexually abused at least three dozen boys and girls. Over the next three years, lawsuits against the diocese and the priest's criminal trial and conviction draw national media attention for the first time to the clergy sexual abuse of children.

1985

-- Several dioceses and state Catholic conferences develop policies for responding to abuse allegations.

-- At their spring meeting, the bishops discuss the abuse problem. A few bishops are given a report by three specialists, labeled confidential, warning that the problem is of crisis proportions and could cost the church billions of dollars.

-- In the fall, Fr. Michael Peterson, one of the report's authors, mails it to bishops who head dioceses. Although the bishops already have started addressing many of the issues at a national level through their own internal procedures and structures, several years later the report is leaked and victims and their lawyers cite its recommendations as evidence that the bishops were given a plan to follow in 1985 but simply ignored it.

1986-1990

-- Many dioceses establish stronger personnel policies and training programs to prevent abuse. In fall 1987, the bishops discuss the issue again, focusing on canonical issues of dealing with accused priests.

-- The conference sends bishops guidelines on developing personnel policies to prevent and respond to abuse. Many bishops re-evaluate decisions whether to return a treated priest to ministry after therapy or what kind of ministry to permit him to do.

-- While the numbers of allegations and lawsuits grow, a new trend develops: As time goes on, more of the new claims concern abuse from the distant past rather than recent misconduct.

1992

-- Following a daylong discussion behind closed doors at the bishops' annual June meeting, the bishops' conference president issues a five-point statement summarizing principles behind the guidelines sent to dioceses four years earlier: Respond promptly to allegations; remove the offender and provide treatment for him if evidence supports an allegation; report incidents as required under civil law and cooperate in any criminal investigation; reach out to victims and their families; and "deal as openly as possible with members of the community about this incident."

-- At their November meeting, the bishops discuss the issue further and a group of bishops meets with adult survivors of abuse. The bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry forms a subcommittee on sexual abuse to make recommendations to the bishops.

1993

-- The new subcommittee develops proposals for the bishops to discuss and recommends the bishops form a special task group to address the legal, moral, canonical, medical, therapeutic, pastoral, ministerial and administrative issues surrounding sexual abuse and its prevention.

-- Archbishop Robert Sanchez of Santa Fe, New Mexico, resigns following allegations of past sexual impropriety with two teenage girls.

-- At their June meeting, the bishops openly discuss clerical sexual abuse and the conference president appoints an Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse to address the issue.

-- Several years of Vatican-U.S. discussions culminate in a meeting of a U.S. bishops delegation with Vatican officials and a letter from Pope John Paul II publicly condemning sexual abuse of minors by U.S. priests.

-- At their November meeting, the bishops petition the Vatican for U.S. exceptions to general church law to make it easier to laicize priests who commit sex crimes against minors.

-- John Paul authorizes special U.S. church laws for five years extending the statute of limitations on church trials and penalties for clerics who sexually abuse minors.

-- A Boston priest, John Geoghan, frequently accused of inappropriate conduct with children during 32 years of priesthood, is quietly removed from all ministry, and four years later is laicized by special papal decree.

-- The ad hoc committee commissions a survey of seminaries to assess their psychological screening of candidates and formation in sexuality issues.

-- The committee gives the bishops and the media the first volume of "Restoring Trust," which includes a detailed evaluation of existing diocesan policies and recommendations for more effective policies. Updated volumes are released in 1995

and 1996.

1997

-- At the committee's request, a video on boundary issues in ministry is developed to help dioceses improve formation of church personnel.

-- The committee is reauthorized for three more years and mandated to focus on issues of healing for victims, education and future options for priest offenders.

1999-2001

-- The Vatican extends the special U.S. legislation on clerical sexual abuse of minors for 10 years.

-- The committee continues working on education and prevention issues and on diocesan policy reviews. It updates "Restoring Trust" resources and meets with victims and victim advisory groups.

-- The pope reserves certain especially serious church crimes, including clerical sexual abuse of minors, to the immediate jurisdiction of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The new legislation also extends the special U.S. legislation, with slight modification, to the entire church.

2002

-- The Boston Globe begins an investigative series in January on decades of Boston archdiocesan mishandling of child abuse allegations and the priests who were accused. Archdiocesan personnel files on Geoghan -- released to the Globe by court order less than two weeks before Geoghan's criminal trial for child molestation -- are the most important evidence for the series.

-- Accused in civil suits of imposing indecent conduct or sexual abuse on at least 130 children, Geoghan is convicted of a single crime Jan. 18 and later sentenced to 10 years in prison.

-- The Globe series quickly sparks dramatic policy changes by the Boston Archdiocese. The story quickly burgeons into a national one as other news media begin similar investigations in their dioceses.

-- By April, the U.S. cardinals are summoned for a Vatican summit. The pope declares there is no place in ministry or religious life for anyone who would harm the young. The Vatican authorizes the U.S. bishops to propose special legislation that would bind all U.S. dioceses to adopt certain policies and practices to prevent and respond to clerical sexual abuse of minors.

-- Meeting in Dallas in June, the bishops adopt a "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and special legal norms, subject to Vatican approval, to assure that all dioceses adhere to the charter.

-- A National Review Board is formed to oversee the compliance of dioceses with the charter and to commission two major national studies on the scope of the problem and its causes. A national Office for Child and Youth Protection is formed to help dioceses meet charter requirements and to assess each diocese's compliance.

-- Dioceses across the country begin updating their policies, establishing or modifying diocesan review boards, naming outreach coordinators, developing programs for victims and their families, forming or expanding safe environment programs and requiring background checks on staff and volunteers who work with children.

-- In December, Cardinal Bernard Law, faced with massive loss of confidence after nearly a year of intense scandal and controversy, resigns as archbishop of Boston.

2003

-- The pope approves the norms as law for the U.S. church.

-- The Gavin Group, composed mainly of former FBI agents, is commissioned to conduct the first independent audit of dioceses to assess whether their policies and practices comply with the requirements of the charter and norms.

2004

-- The first annual report on the diocesan compliance audits is released Jan. 6. Annual reports continue to be released.

2006

-- A new Program of Priestly Formation that emphasizes human formation of seminarians, especially on formation for celibacy, is issued for all U.S. seminaries. It explicitly forbids seminary applicants who were involved in sexual abuse of minors.

2008

-- During a U.S. visit, Pope Benedict XVI meets in Washington with victims of priestly sexual abuse after pledging the church's continued efforts to help heal the wounds caused by such acts.

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2010

-- The Vatican revises procedures for handling priestly sexual abuse cases, streamlining disciplinary measures, extending the statute of limitations and defining child pornography as an act of sexual abuse.

2011

-- John Jay College of Criminal Justice releases "The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010," as required by the charter. The report concludes there is "no single identifiable 'cause' of sexually abusive behavior toward minors" and encourages steps to deny abusers "the opportunity to abuse."

2012

-- Msgr. William Lynn, secretary for clergy of the Philadelphia Archdiocese from 1992 to 2004, is convicted of conspiracy for failing to properly supervise an abusive priest and ensure the welfare of his victim. He receives a three- to six-year prison term.

-- A Missouri judge convicts Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph of failing to report suspected child abuse, a misdemeanor. The charge was filed after the bishop learned a priest's computer contained child pornography and failed to report the incident to authorities.

2013

-- Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, announces that Cardinal Roger Mahony would not have any administrative or public duties in the archdiocese because of past failures to protect children from clergy sex abuse, although the cardinal remained in "good standing."

2015

-- Pope Francis says the leaders of the world's bishops' conferences and religious orders must do everything possible to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse and are offer appropriate care for victims and their families.

-- Francis approves new procedures for the Vatican to investigate and judge claims of "abuse of office" by bishops who allegedly failed to protect minors and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse.

-- Francis accepts the resignations of Archbishop John Nienstedt and Auxiliary Bishop Lee Piche of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Days earlier, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office filed criminal and civil charges against the archdiocese alleging it failed to protect three boys who were sexually abused from 2008 to 2010 by an archdiocesan priest who was later dismissed from priesthood.

2017

-- Archdiocese of New York receives an allegation that then-Msgr. Theodore McCarrick abused a teenage boy in 1971 and 1972.

2018

-- U.S. bishops approve changes to the charter that Bishop Timothy Doherty of Lafayette, Indiana, chairman of the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People, said would strengthen protections for young people.

-- New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan announces that McCarrick has been removed from ministry at the Vatican's direction after an investigation by the Archdiocese of New York found credible a charge that he sexually abused a teenager. Later, The New York Times publishes a front-page story detailing alleged abuse of two seminarians who became priests in the Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey, by McCarrick in the 1980s that resulted in settlements to both men.

-- Francis accepts McCarrick's resignation from the College of Cardinals and suspends him from public ministry, ordering him to a "life of prayer and penance until the accusations against him are examined in a canonical trial.

-- A Pennsylvania grand jury releases a report linking more than 300 priests with sexual abuse claims involving more than 1,000 victims in six of the state's eight dioceses, stating the Catholic Church hid allegations of abuse and brushed aside victims. In a joint statement Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, USCCB president, Doherty, committee chairman, said the bishops "are shamed by and sorry for the sins and omissions by Catholic priests and Catholic bishops" and were "committed to work in determined ways so that such abuse cannot happen."