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Germany's Roman Catholic bishops on March 5 approved new guidelines that likely will provide for payments ranging up to about 50,000 euros ($55,700) each for victims of sexual abuse by clergy.

The church has been shaken in recent years by scandals in several countries, including Germany. A church-commissioned report in 2018 concluded that at least 3,677 people were abused by clergy in Germany between 1946 and 2014 — more than half of them 13 or younger and nearly a third of them altar boys. A top bishop has apologized for the abuse.

The German Bishops' Conference said at the end of a regular meeting March 5 that compensation payments would be decided by "a central and independent body on the basis of an examination of plausibility."

Their level will be oriented toward awards by courts in comparable cases and toward the "upper region" of those awards, it said.

Such awards range between 5,000 and 50,000 euros "as a rule, and there are also sums that go beyond that," said Trier Bishop Stephan Ackermann, the German church's point man on the abuse scandal.

Until now, people could apply for "payments in recognition of suffering." The bishops' conference says that payments totalling 10.1 million euros to a little over 2,000 people have been recommended since 2011, according to the dpa news agency – an average of some 5,000 euros each.

The new guidelines didn't satisfy representatives of victims. They fell short of a recommendation presented to the bishops by an independent working group last year for payments ranging up to 300,000 or 400,000 euros each.

The details of how to implement the guidelines are to be worked out by this fall. The bishops' conference stressed that payments are "voluntary and independent of legal claims."

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