News



In this April 22, 2010 file photo, an offertory box with letters reading "Church Sacrifice, thanks be to God" is attached at the Augsburg Dom cathedral, southern Germany. The Catholic church in Germany is launching a new system to compensate victims of sexual abuse by clergy that will provide for payments ranging up to about 50,000 euros ($58,400) each. (AP File/Matthias Schrader)

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The Catholic Church in Germany is setting up a new system to compensate survivors of sexual abuse by clergy that will provide for payments of up to about 50,000 euros ($58,400) each.

Victims will be able to apply for payments under the new system starting Jan. 1, the head of the German Bishops' Conference, Limburg Bishop Georg Baetzing, said Thursday after conference members signed off at a regular twice-yearly meeting on details of a proposal approved in March.

The Catholic Church church has been shaken in recent years by sex abuse and cover-up scandals in several countries, including Germany, the homeland of Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI.

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 the victims were ages 13 or younger when the abuse took place, and nearly a third of them were altar boys. A top bishop has apologized for the abuse.

The level of compensation will be based on the awards from court judgments and verdicts in comparable cases and oriented toward the "upper region" of those payments, Baetzing said, meaning "a framework of up to 50,000 euros."

"These are one-time payments that will be set individually by an independent body for every person affected who makes an application," he added.

The compensation-setting body will include medical, psychological, legal and educational experts who do not work for the church, the bishop said. Its members are to be appointed by a committee whose majority is from outside the church.

Under the previous system, people could apply for church compensation in Germany for "payments in recognition of suffering." Payments under that system have averaged about 5,000 euros ($5823) since 2011.

Baetzing said individuals who already received one of those payments will be able to reapply under the new system. As with the existing procedures, victims will be able to seek reimbursement for the costs of therapy or couples counseling.

The new guidelines did not satisfy victims' representatives when they were unveiled in March. They fell short of a recommendation presented to the bishops by an independent working group last year for payments ranging to up to 300,000

($349,000) or 400,000 euros ($465,400) per person.

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