

Priest puts number of abused at 100,000

By James L. Franklin
GLOBE STAFF

Rev. Andrew M. Greeley, the Chicago priest, author and sociologist, has estimated that 2,000 to 4,000 members of the Roman Catholic clergy in the United States have abused young people, that their victims number "well in excess" of 100,000 persons, and that the cost of treatment, lawyers and liability settlements is running at "\$50 million a year and rising."

Those estimates, which Father Greeley bases on official information released by the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, are contained in an article in the March 20 issue of *America* magazine, published biweekly by the Jesuit Fathers of the United States.

The article was prompted by recent arguments from a range of Catholic voices who insist that the sexual abuse problem "may not be so bad as the public image suggests and that it is under control at the present time," in Father Greeley's words.

Based on experience in Chicago, the largest US archdiocese, the sexual abuse problem is huge, if only because of the large backlog of cases, and the Catholic Church must still overcome a strong tendency to deny its importance, he writes.

Father Greeley says the Chicago archdiocese's own report on abuse cases suggests a "conservative conclusion," that "an estimate of one out of 10 priests as sexual abusers might be too high and an estimate of one out of 20 might be too low."

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FATHER ANDREW GREELEY

"Hence, between, 2,000 and 4,000 priests might be guilty of sexual abuse of children or minors," he said, extrapolating the findings to the US population of about 53,000 priests.

Medical evidence suggests that abusers may have as many as 200 to 300 victims, Father Greeley said. Using an estimate of 50 victims and 2,500 abusers, he estimates that there are more than 100,000 victims, "each one a human being who has suffered a terrible personal tragedy."

Chicago has reported spending \$1.8 million for legal costs and treatment for victims in 1992, and the archdiocese projects higher costs this year. "On the basis of this number, \$50 million a year and rising does not seem to be an unreasonable estimate of costs to the church - to the lay person, that is," he said.

Father Greeley is a priest in the Chicago archdiocese and a sociologist who has often criticized the hier-

archy of his church for its handling of issues, particularly the way teachings on issues of sex affect lay members of the church.

But he has also been quick to defend Catholic institutions against what he regards as unfair criticism.

For example, Father Greeley suggests the bishops are "ahead of the rank-and-file clergy," with "most priests, on the other hand, still engaged in denial."

A "substantial proportion" of the bishops "know they have a grimly serious problem on their hands and are in the process of doing something about it, however belatedly and however reluctantly," Father Greeley said.

Some Catholics have wondered out loud whether the abuse problem has been overblown. Father Greeley cited recent articles in *Commonweal* magazine, an independent, lay-edited and predominantly liberal bi-weekly; and by two neoconservatives, Philip Jenkins in the *Chronicles of the Rockford Institute* and Rev. Richard John Neuhaus in his own magazine, *First Things*.

"All blame the media for exaggerating the problem and all express some skepticism about the charges being made," Father Greeley writes. "Everything seems designed to reassure laity and to protect the church and the clergy from unjust attack, the same motives that led bishops to cover up sexual abuse cases in the past."

Father Neuhaus, who left a distinguished career as a Lutheran pastor to become a Catholic priest, said yesterday that he would "plead guilty to wanting to protect the church and the clergy and everybody else from unjust attack ... on such a flammable subject."

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