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Swedish Court upholds religious freedom in Chabad case

The Algemeiner (22.10.2012) - A Swedish appellate court has upheld the right for Chabad-Lubavitch representatives to homeschool their children in accordance with their religious faith, overturning a previous Swedish law that prohibits religion as a motive for homeschooling.

The case originated with last year when Gothenburg city authorities began fining the Namdar family until they enrolled their children in Swedish public schools.

In a nine-page unanimous verdict, the court ruled that the "government is deciding that the recent change to the law [that religion is not regarded as a valid reason] cannot stand in contravention to Sweden's international obligation."

"I'm grateful to G-d for the insight and sensitivity of the judges," said Rabbi Alexander Namdar.

In a statement responding to the ruling, Chabad-Lubavitch Executive Director Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky also praised the decision: "The court's decision, confirming that Sweden will uphold the fundamental values of religious freedom and human rights of citizens, could have far-reaching ramifications. It is a manifestation of the responsibility of government to protect and cherish these values so vital to life and society."

According to a Swedish politician behind the original law, the law was created to protect immigrant children who were being denied an education by their family for religious reason.

Catholic Church says child abuse cases rose in 2011

By Andrew Stern

Reuters (10.04.2012) - The number of credible allegations of sexual abuse of minors committed by Roman Catholic priests or deacons in the United States rose 15 percent last year, and the church spent \$144 million to deal with the ongoing scandal, according to a church-sponsored audit released on Tuesday.

A total of 489 people reported credible allegations of abuse by priests or deacons in 2011, the bulk of them involving adults victimized when they were children decades ago by now-deceased clerics, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said in a report on its ninth annual audit of the issue.

Twenty-one of the victims were younger than 19 and victimized more recently. Attorneys for victims say there are likely tens of thousands more victims who have never come forward since the scandal erupted in Boston in 2002.

"We renew our promise to strive to the fullest to end the societal scourge of child sexual abuse," Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the conference, said in an introductory letter to the report.

Critics of the church's handling of the sex abuse crisis scoffed at the audit, saying it minimized the extent of the abuse and the culpability of the church hierarchy.

The yearly audit for the bishops identified credible allegations against 406 priests or deacons. In 2010, there were 428 credible allegations against 345 offenders. More than one-third of the alleged perpetrators had never been charged before.

The figures for victims and offenders were twice as high earlier in the decade, then dropped off beginning in 2008.

Twelve accused clerics remained active in ministry pending the outcome of investigations. Eleven percent of new allegations were deemed false.

Altogether, U.S. dioceses and religious institutes spent \$144 million on abuse settlement-related costs, which included \$50 million for settlements, \$37 million in attorneys' fees, \$6 million on therapy for victims and \$10 million on support for offenders. About a quarter of the settlement amount was covered by church insurance policies.

The church spent another \$33 million on child protection efforts last year. Nearly all church employees have undergone training on the issue, the bishops' audit said, and a majority of children in parishes have been instructed how identify when they are being "groomed" for abuse and what to do.

"The church must continue to be vigilant. The church must do all she can never to let abuse happen again. And we must all continue to work with full resolve toward the healing and reconciliation of the victims/survivors," Dolan said.

The yearly audit was conducted for the first time by StoneBridge Business Partners, which visited one-third of the 195 dioceses. Data was also provided by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

Critics such as the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and BishopAccountability.org have said the church cannot police itself, and that the crime of church higher-ups hiding and transferring offending priests is a persistent problem.

SNAP's outreach director Barbara Dorris called the audits "nearly meaningless." BishopAccountability.org president Terence McKiernan called it a "serious disservice to the public by pretending that all is well."

A trial is under way for a member of the church hierarchy in Philadelphia, Monsignor William Lynn, who is accused of transferring offending priests to unsuspecting parishes.

Lynn, 61, is the highest-ranking member of the U.S. church to go on trial in an abuse-related case, though Kansas City, Missouri, Bishop Robert Finn is to go on trial in September on a charge he failed to report to authorities about a priest found with pornographic pictures of young girls.

"Those horrific cases prove that, when it comes to kids' safety, little in church hierarchy has changed," Dorris said.

McKiernan of BishopAccountability.org said the number of priests credibly accused of molesting children since 1950 has now increased to more than 6,100.

Altogether, U.S. dioceses have spent \$2.1 billion on settlement-related costs for the abuse scandal between 2004 through last year, according to the report. Eight dioceses, a Jesuit province, and the Irish Christian Brotherhood, a Catholic brotherhood that runs schools and orphanages, have declared bankruptcy since 2004, claiming overwhelming debts from the costs of the scandal.
