

World & Nation

U.S. bishops commit to addressing 'tragedy' of pedophilia

By Julie Asher

Washington (NC) — A statement released Tuesday, Feb. 9, on behalf of the United States Catholic Council said the U.S. Catholic bishops are "deeply committed" to addressing the "tragedy" of pedophilia and other forms of child abuse through strong education and prevention efforts and through the Church's "healing ministry."

The statement was issued by Mark Chopko, general council to the USCC.

Child molestation is a "profound tragedy" for all involved and a "direct threat to the future well-being and stability" of U.S. society, said Chopko, who said it is a tragedy that some child abusers have been leaders in communities or placed "in positions of great trust."

The statement specifically dealt with pedophilia, or the sexual attraction of adults to children. Some of those accused of pedophilia-related child abuse have been Catholic priests.

In a February 9 interview with National Catholic News Service, Chopko said the statement was issued "in response to a renewed interest in the issue and that people want to know what the Church is doing about it." The statement, he said, "is an effort at public education."

The statement observed that pedophilia "is neither a Church nor a clerical problem exclusively but one affecting religious and secular groups alike." It added that the disorder of pedophilia can affect men and women "whether they are married, single or celibate."

Chopko said steps taken by the Catholic conference to address pedophilia include programs to educate bishops and their advisers, health officials, diocesan administrators and

attorneys.

According to Chopko, the bishops considered the topic of pedophilia and its clinical, legal and pastoral ramifications during a closed session of their 1986 spring meeting in Collegeville, Mn. The bishops reportedly questioned experts on the problem. Chopko said the bishops also discussed the topic in November, 1987, during a closed executive session of their general meeting.

He noted that individual dioceses have supplemented the efforts of the USCC by implementing their own programs, including:

- programs to educate diocesan personnel working with children regarding the

prevention of child abuse;

- development of guidelines and policies for reporting of incidents and for responding to specific complaints through suspension from employment or active ministry, whenever appropriate;
- awareness of the effects of abuse both on its victims and on the accused; and
- commitment to helping victims and their families recover from the abuse, rehabilitating the offender and reconciling "all involved in the ministry of the Church."

Chopko emphasized that the USCC is not a national governing board and cannot direct

dioceses — which are separate and independent — to take specific actions.

He said, however, that the conference, principally through the general council, provides a forum for general guidance and consultation, and facilitates discussions among individuals and groups who deal with the problem. When asked to do so, the conference also gives advice to diocesan attorneys and officials, he said.

The USCC has no reasonable estimate of the number of pedophilia cases, Chopko said, but added that "even one report . . . is cause for concern because it indicates that a child has been victimized."

Pope names Bishop Wuerl to lead Pittsburgh diocese

By Liz Schevtchuk

Washington (NC) — Bishop Donald W. Wuerl, former auxiliary bishop of Seattle, has been named by Pope John Paul II to be the new bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Bishop Wuerl's appointment was announced February 12 by Archbishop Pio Laghi, pronuncio to the United States.

The 47-year-old bishop is native of Pittsburgh. He succeeds Archbishop Anthony Bevilacqua, who was installed February 11 as head of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

With appointment in December, 1985, as auxiliary bishop of Seattle, Bishop Wuerl became a major figure in the controversy regarding Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen's administration of that archdiocese.

On September 4, 1986, Archbishop Hunthausen announced that the Vatican had instructed him to relinquish to Bishop Wuerl all

episcopal authority over several key administrative areas within the archdiocese. Among the areas ceded to the auxiliary bishop were liturgy, priestly formation and education and the marriage court. The Vatican action drew frequent criticism from Catholics in Seattle and elsewhere in the nation.

After a three-member U.S. bishops' commission helped resolve the case, Bishop Wuerl's Seattle assignment ended on May 27, 1987. The Vatican restored Archbishop Hunthausen's powers and appointed Bishop Thomas J. Murphy of Great Falls-Billings, Mt., as coadjutor archbishop with right of succession.

A report prepared on the Seattle situation by the three commission members — Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco and Cardinals Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago and John H. O'Connor of New York — praised Bishop Wuerl's efforts to fulfill his responsi-

bilities in Seattle, "despite exceedingly difficult circumstances beyond his control."

When the Seattle changes were announced May 27, Bishop Wuerl told the National Catholic News Service that he had known many enriching and faith-filled experiences in that archdiocese, but said, "I'm glad it's over; I'm glad it's settled."

Bishop Wuerl said he felt no bitterness about the events in Seattle. "This is not a question of personal animosities but of issues," he said. "What we're talking about here — what this is all about from the start — is issues . . . not personalities."

When he learned of Bishop Wuerl's appointment to Pittsburgh, Archbishop Hunthausen issued a statement saying, he was delighted. "I know that I speak for the people of this archdiocese in extending to Bishop Wuerl our heartfelt and prayerful congratulations and in assuring him of our prayers as he undertakes his challenging new responsibilities," the statement said.

Weekend set for deacons, wives

The deacons of the Diocese of Ogdensburg are hosting their second annual continuing education weekend March 18, 19 and 20 in Saranac Lake, N.Y. The topic for the weekend will be "Ministering to the Separated and Divorced."

All deacons and their wives are invited. Call (518)359-3680 from 5 to 9 p.m. any evening. Deadline for reservations is February 12.

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