

Expert: Church must confront misconduct

By Father Thomas C. Widner, SJ
Catholic News Service

CHICAGO — The church must be totally open and honest about issues of clerical sexual misconduct, Conventual Franciscan Father Canice Connors told members of the National Federation of Priests' Councils May 5.

Father Connors, president of St. Luke's Institute, a Maryland psychiatric treatment facility for priests and religious, was one of the main speakers as the NFPC marked its 25th anniversary at its annual convention May 3-7 in Chicago.

In other sessions the federation looked at other aspects of the priesthood today, reviewed peacemaking in the church 10 years after the U.S. bishops' peace pastoral, and started a three-phase program, Project Future Directions, to assess the NFPC's future.

Father Connors said priests must be "willing recipients of the anger" of victims of clerical sexual misconduct, who are often enraged at their treatment by the church.

"If in our desire to escape the problem we turn a deaf ear, then they will use tactics of revenge and tactics of litigation" to get their anger out, he said.

Despite the wide media attention to priests who victimize children, "we are not a tribe of pedophiles," he said.

In psychiatry pedophilia is used to describe the mental disorder suffered by people who are "exclusively interested in prepubescent children," he said.

But less than one-tenth of priests treated for sexual abuse of minors have that problem, he said. Most are sexually attracted to adolescents, and their situation is more responsive to treatment, he said.

Father Connors said seminary formation in the past may have contributed to the problem. "Seminarians were told to beware the feminine. They were even told to walk across the street if an attractive girl approached," he said.

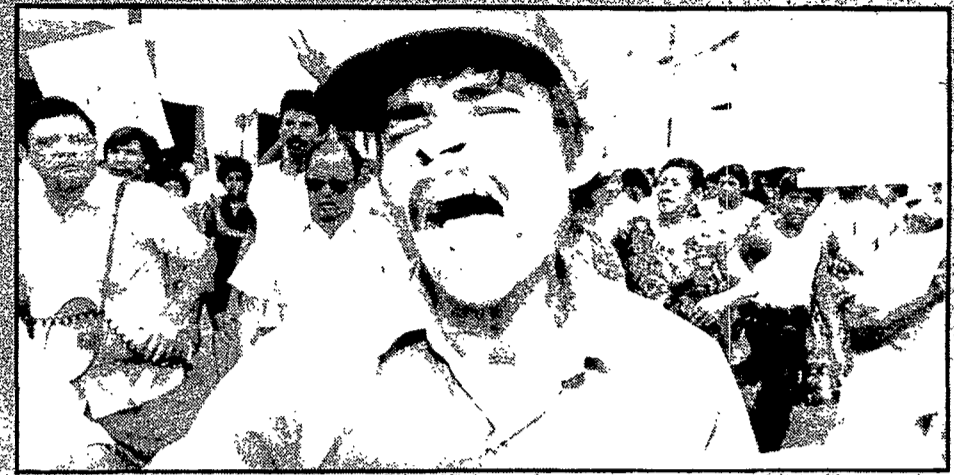
To highlight the ineffectiveness of trying to hide the problem, he told the

priests that it was one cover-up incident in Canada which led to exposure of all the abuse cases there.

A provincial attorney, angered by church-state collusion to minimize publicity when a priest went to trial for sexual abuse of a minor, reopened the case when he was promoted to crown attorney. In the ensuing investigation more than 30 Canadian priests and brothers were accused of sex crimes against children. Some of the alleged incidents dated back to the 1960s.

He said he believes U.S. dioceses have been developing adequate policies to deal with the issue. About three out of four priests in recovery from such sexual addictions are not returned to active ministry, he said.

Angry Nicaraguans



AP/Wide World Photos

1,000 protest lagging economy

An unemployed man shows his discontent over Nicaragua's lagging economy during a rally in Chinandega, located 90 miles northeast of Managua. More than 1,000 unemployed Nicaraguans staged the protest calling for the government to invigorate the dormant economy.

Pope, in Sicily, angrily denounces Mafia

AGRIGENTO, Sicily (CNS) — Pope John Paul II, visiting the crime-plagued island of Sicily, denounced the Mafia and warned its members that they face "the judgment of God" for their attacks on innocent people.

During a pastoral visit to five Sicilian cities May 8-10, the pope contrasted the island's chronic problems of corruption, unemployment and organized crime with the human and spiritual resources of most of the population.

In order to help "break the ancestral chains of hatred and vendetta," the Sicilian church has to make sure its faithful live the Gospel in their daily lives, he said.

It was the pope's third and longest visit to Sicily, taking him from the western cities of Trapani, Erice and Mazara del Vallo to the central Mafia strongholds of Agrigento and Caltanissetta. The trip came after a year of bloodshed on the island that included the slayings of two leading anti-Mafia magistrates.

At the end of a televised Mass in Agrigento May 9, the pope delivered his most categorical and emotional condemnation of Mafia activities. As ushers prepared to remove the microphone from the altar, the pope took hold of it and spoke extemporaneously about the criminal underworld.

"Those who have so many human

victims on their consciences must understand — understand that killing innocent people is not allowed!" he said.

"No man, no human group, no Mafia can trample upon this sacrosanct right!" he said to sustained applause from tens of thousands of people.

The pope said Sicilians were on the whole "a people who love life and who give life" but who are held hostage by a minority criminal culture. He described the Mafia as "a culture of death, profoundly inhuman, anti-Gospel, an enemy of human dignity and civil peace."

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