

# U.S. bishops move on key issues

## Act on sex abuse, health care reform

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

NEW ORLEANS — The U.S. Catholic bishops announced a new effort June 17 to end the scandal of priests sexually abusing minors.

The decision was the news highlight of the June 17-19 meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference.

Other issues also occupied the bishops, ranging from national health care reform to the new Catholic catechism, from their national TV network to the confirmation age.

Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, NCCB president, named Bishop John F. Kinney of Bismarck, N.D., to head a new Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse with a wide mandate to recommend NCCB actions and policies to stem sex abuse in the church and eventually to draw on the church's experience to help American society as a whole confront the issue.

In an impassioned speech Bishop Kinney said the bishops may have to do a lot of "uncomfortable listening ... if we are to 'lance the boil' for the health and credibility of the church in our country."

He launched the listening process with an invitation to representatives of abuse survivor groups to meet with him in Washington as soon as possible after the bishops' meeting.

One of the first tasks of his committee — which includes six other bishops and plans to use a number of experts as consultants — will be to study the detailed recommendations for local and national church action produced by experts who met in St. Louis last February to discuss all aspects of child sexual abuse by priests.

The bishops received additional impetus for decisive action on the sex abuse problem from Pope John Paul II.

A papal letter to the bishops, discussed by them during a June 19 session closed to the press and released June 21 at their national headquarters in Washington, expressed deep pain that priests could abuse children and quoted Jesus' words condemning those

who scandalize children.

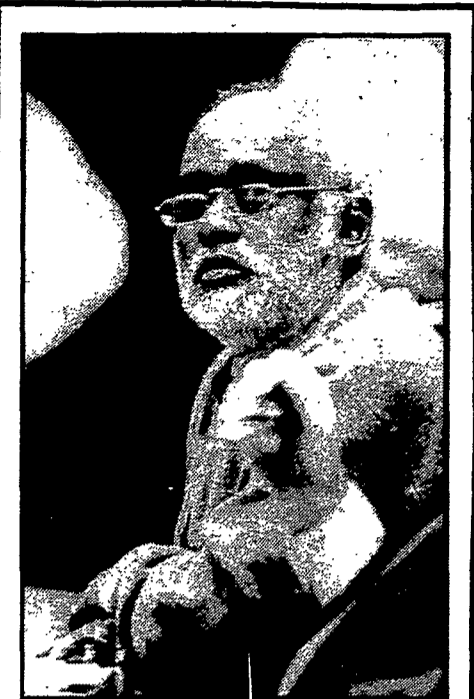
"I fully share your sorrow and your concern, especially your concern for the victims so seriously hurt by these misdeeds," he wrote.

Other major actions by the bishops included:

- Unanimous adoption of a resolution endorsing comprehensive health care reform in the United States. The 10-page statement spells out principles for reform, including an insistence on universal access to adequate health care and rejection of abortion coverage.

- Near-unanimous approval of a resolution urging Rome to end the delays in approving the English translation of the "Catechism of the Catholic Church." Submitted by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago, the resolution asks for a final English text by Aug. 1 if possible.

- A decision to make the confirmation age in the United States range between the age of discretion, about 7, and 18. If it is approved by Rome, the rule will allow virtually all dioceses to continue current policies or to experiment within the age range in an effort to improve on current practice.



AP/Wide World Photos

## N.Y. doctor gets nearly 10 years

Dr. Abu Hayat, a New York doctor whose botched illegal abortion led to the birth of a child with a severed arm, is sentenced to nearly 10 years in prison June 14 on eight charges stemming from an Oct. 25, 1991, abortion on Rosa Rodriguez and a March 17, 1991, abortion on Marie Moise.

## N.Y. state panel calls for tuition tax credits

By James Brelg  
Catholic News Service

ALBANY — A panel appointed by New York state's commissioner of education recommended June 16 that income tax credits be enacted to help ensure the continuation of Catholic schools in the state.

"The Catholic schools are an asset to New York state, both in relieving the fiscal burden of 280,000 students that may otherwise be the responsibility of public schools, and in their ability to educate poor, minority and at-risk students," said the 78-page report prepared by the nine-member Blue Ribbon Panel on Catholic Schools.

"Unless these schools are assisted in meeting their financial crisis, the state risks losing this asset," it added.

The panel, chaired by former New York Gov. Hugh Carey, also recommended that legislation be passed to allow nonpublic schools to participate in state-funded initiatives in learning technology.

Appointed last October by Thomas Sobol, state education commissioner, the panel was charged with examining "the current condition of Catholic school education in New York state" and asked to formulate recommendations "on creative ways to help stabilize enrollment or reverse the current pattern of Catholic school closings while ensuring that the quality of the education ... is maintained."

During the past 20 years, enrollment in Catholic schools has declined state-wide by more than 57 percent, almost twice the rate of the decrease in public school enrollment.

While the panel was asked to find solutions, it was specifically excluded from studying public funding of nonpublic schools. Nevertheless, in its main recommendation, it said that "legislation should be enacted which would provide state income tax credits (1) for tuition and education-related expenses for one's own children and (2) for donations to schools, programs and scholarship funds for the benefit of other children."

As proposed, the credits would apply to children in public as well as nonpublic schools and would have a maximum amount of \$1,000 on a joint or individual tax return. The credit would apply only on joint returns with adjusted gross income not exceeding \$55,000 and individual returns of no more than \$30,000.

"To encourage the support of business and industry," the panel added that the legislation should also "provide for a tax credit for contributions"

made by corporations toward nonpublic education.

The panel's second recommendation involved new initiatives in school-based technologies which enhance learning, such as interactive media, CD-ROM computer technology, educational TV and telecommunications. Any such efforts should be shared equally by public and nonpublic schools, the panel said.

The report included statistical information which refuted one myth about Catholic schools — that their students often perform better on standardized tests and are more likely to attend college because Catholic schools hand-select students.

The panel declared that Catholic schools are "an educational asset for New York state, especially in urban areas and for minority populations."

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