

# NCCB head: Letter cleared air on abuse

## Pope showed understanding

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

ROME — Pope John Paul II's recent letter to U.S. bishops on sexual abuse by clergy has "cleared the air," and demonstrated papal understanding and encouragement on a difficult issue, said Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

At the same time, a draft document recently drawn up by a U.S.-Vatican commission provides a "wonderful foundation" for helping U.S. bishops deal with sexually abusive priests, Archbishop Keeler said in an interview in Rome June 30.

Archbishop Keeler said the pope's June letter demonstrated that he grasped the significance of the problem in all its dimensions, following talks with groups of U.S. bishops throughout the year.

"I would say that it has really cleared the air in a wonderful way. I haven't talked to all the bishops, but every one I've talked to is quite pleased," the archbishop said.

"Before, the Holy Father was hearing from U.S. bishops about the pressures caused by this problem. Now he's hearing, 'Thank you for helping us,'" he said.

In his letter, the pope said he shared the bishops' sorrow and concern over the recent cases, especially for victims of sexual abuse. He announced the formation of the U.S.-Vatican commission to help U.S. bishops make better use of church law in dealing with offenders.

After an intensive meeting in June, that commission produced a draft document that is being reviewed by the pope and other Vatican officials.

The draft addresses several areas of church law that have been problematic for U.S. dioceses seeking to defrock known sex abusers among the clergy. While he refused to disclose particular recommendations of the joint commission, Archbishop Keeler said the document provides help on two specific issues:

- Differing statutes of limitations between church law and civil law on sex-abuse crimes.
- Differing definitions of a minor in cases of sexual molestation. A minor is defined by church law as someone under the age of 16, while in most U.S. states it is 18.

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# Pope's health tests 'normal' year after surgery

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Medical tests July 2 showed Pope John Paul II's condition to be "normal" nearly a year after surgical removal of an intestinal tumor, a Vatican spokesman said.

The pope underwent a CAT scan (computerized axial tomography exam) of his abdomen at Rome's Gemelli Hospital, and returned to the Vatican about an hour and a half later.

"The results of the test — as for all others performed following his surgery of July 15, 1992 — were normal," said spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls.

The test was carried out "in the framework of periodic clinical check-ups," and the pope was expected to resume his regular schedule of meetings and ceremonies the next day, Navarro-Valls said.

The spokesman said the tests were given at 8 p.m. so they would not interfere with the pontiff's appointments that day, which included a meeting with U.S. bishops, and so the hospital's routine would not be disturbed.

U.S. bishops who met with the pope all week described him as fit and alert.

## Correction

The July 1 article on diocesan priests celebrating their ordination jubilees incorrectly reported Monsignor William H. Shannon's residence. Monsignor Shannon — professor emeritus at Nazareth College — resides at 4095 East Ave. He is chaplain at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse.

This information also appears incorrectly in the Diocesan Directory. We regret the error.

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