

**Here is bishops' meeting at a glance**

WASHINGTON (CNS) — When the U.S. bishops met in Washington Nov. 15-18 for the fall meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, they:

- Warned against U.S. isolationism in a new statement on war and peace today, 10 years after their landmark peace pastoral.
- Issued a statement praising socially active parishes and urging more attention to the social mission of the parish.
- Urged parents to put children's needs first and to avoid unhealthy competition with each other in a pastoral message on family life and values.
- Got off to a rocky start on one of their most massive liturgical projects in years, deferring until next year a vote on the first of seven sections of a revised Sacramentary, the book of prayers at Mass.
- Set rules strengthening doctrinal review of translations in a new process of amendment, debate and vote on each section of the Sacramentary.
- Approved an overall 1994 budget of \$41.7 million for the offices and agencies of the NCCB and U.S. Catholic Conference.
- Thanked 10,000 U.S. permanent deacons in a statement marking 25 years since the revival of the permanent diaconate.
- Elected Msgr. Robert N. Lynch to another year as NCCB general secretary and Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy of Seattle to a three-year term as treasurer.
- Gave the Committee for Pro-Life Affairs a go-ahead to draft a new NCCB statement on abortion in support of an anticipated 1994 papal encyclical on moral questions surrounding life and death.
- Endorsed a statement by their Committee on Migration welcoming newcomers to America and criticizing a rise in U.S. anti-immigrant attitudes.
- Heard reports on a variety of topics including sexual abuse of children, the retirement fund for religious and The Catholic University of America.

**Gathering is beset by abuse allegations**

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien  
Catholic News Service

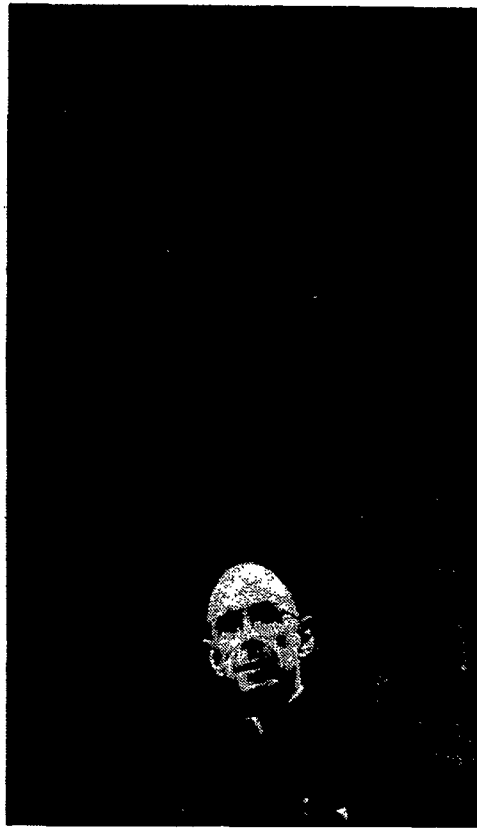
WASHINGTON (CNS) — At a fall general meeting beset by sex abuse allegations against one of their top-ranking members, the U.S. bishops addressed the problem of clergy sex abuse in November from various angles.

- They asked the Vatican to allow exceptions to canon law that would increase their ability to laicize priests who have sexually abused minors.
- They approved nonbinding guidelines for the transfer of religious order priests that would help the church guard against "instances of harmful or scandalous behavior."
- They heard a lengthy report on the activities of their 5-month-old Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, which met with victims of clergy sex abuse before the Nov. 15-18 general assembly.
- And they rallied around Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago, who has denied allegations that he sexually abused a teenager in the 1970s.

"The first few months of our committee work have made me increasingly aware of the complexity and far-reaching effects of problems related to sexual abuse within the church," said Bishop John F. Kinney of Bismarck, N.D., chairman of the ad hoc committee formed last June. "We all know that there are no fast, easy answers."

The new rules for dismissing abusive priests, which must be approved by the Vatican, represent one small step in the U.S. church effort against clergy sex abuse, said Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia at a Nov. 17 press conference after the vote. "I do not anticipate that it will be used very frequently," said the cardinal of the revised provisions in the Code of Canon Law that permit a bishop to initiate a church court proceeding that would laicize priests who have been found guilty of sexual abuse of minors.

- The bishops approved:
- Raising the age at which a victim of sexual abuse by a priest is considered a minor from under 16 to under 18.
  - Changing the statute of limitations for prosecuting a priest accused



AP/Wide World Photos  
**Cardinal Joseph Bernardin addresses the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Nov. 15.**

of sexually abusing a minor, to allow such prosecution up until the minor's 23rd birthday or up until two years after the bishop first "receives information which at least seems to be true" alleging such abuse.

- Making the extensions in the statute of limitations retroactive.
- Making a diocese's ordinary

metropolitan or regional court of appeals the exclusive appellate court for a first-level appeal of a decision laicizing a priest found guilty of sexually abusing a minor.

The guidelines for transfer of religious from one diocese to another were not aimed solely at those suspected of sex abuse.

"Our concerns deal with a broader range of seriously improper behavior, such as untreated addictions to alcohol and other substances, abusive behavior or misconduct (especially that of a sexual nature), and financial improprieties," said an explanatory statement on the guidelines, which passed on a voice vote.

"No cleric or religious will be given an assignment where there is any reasonable probability that he or she may bring harm to the church or to individual persons, particularly minors."

In his report, Bishop Kinney said his committee "cannot provide a quick remedy or painkiller" but would focus on the areas of pastoral response, clergy issues, general resources, education and research.

One of the committee's goals, he said, is to "serve as a clearinghouse to gather information about what is already being done" to prepare effective policies and procedures to deal with sex abuse at the local level.

The real work in healing the wounds caused by clergy sex abuse will be done by individual bishops, Bishop Kinney said.

Contributing to this story were Jerry Filteau, Mark Pattison and Patricia Zapor.

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