

# WORLD & NATION

## Rome summit focuses on fate of abusive priests

By John Norton and Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — As an unprecedented Vatican-U.S. church summit on clerical sex abuse got under way, U.S. participants said they were debating the central question of whether priests who abuse minors could ever receive another assignment.

Pope John Paul II told participants at the April 23-24 meeting's opening session that there was no place in the priesthood for "those who would harm the young," but also said church leaders could not overlook "the power of Christian conversion."

The closed-door meeting, held in a 16th-century room of the pope's Apostolic Palace, brought together eight ranking Vatican officials, three top officials of the U.S. bishops' conference and all but one of the 13 U.S. cardinals.

### U.S. cardinals, bishops participate in meeting

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The following U.S. cardinals and bishops were listed as participants in the April 23-24 summit at the Vatican to discuss the Catholic Church's reaction to the scandal of clerical sexual abuse in the United States.

Cardinals resident in the United States:

Bernard F. Law of Boston

Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles

Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia

William H. Keeler of Baltimore

Adam J. Maida of Detroit

Francis E. George of Chicago

Theodore E. McCarrick of Washington

Edward M. Egan of New York

James A. Hickey, retired archbishop of Washington

Avery Dulles, Jesuit theologian

From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president

Bishop William S. Skylstad of Spokane, Wash., vice president

Mgr. William P. Fay, general secretary

U.S. cardinals working at the Vatican:

William W. Baum, retired

Edmund C. Szoka, president of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State

J. Francis Stafford, president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

At a packed press briefing April 23 at the U.S. seminary in Rome, participants said issues raised at the first session included the potential reassignment of priests who have abused minors, strengthening the observance of celibacy, seminary screening and formation, and homosexuality.

In response to reporters' questions, they said calls for the resignation of Boston Cardinal Bernard F. Law, who is under fire for reassigning priest-abusers, were not mentioned.

But one of prelates at the briefing, Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, said Cardinal Law raised the issue at a private meeting of the U.S. church leaders the night before the summit. He said the cardinal apologized to his colleagues, acknowledging that "if he had not made some mistakes, we would not be here."

The American cardinals were given the first part of the meeting to make individual presentations. Cardinal George said the mood was "serious, even somber."

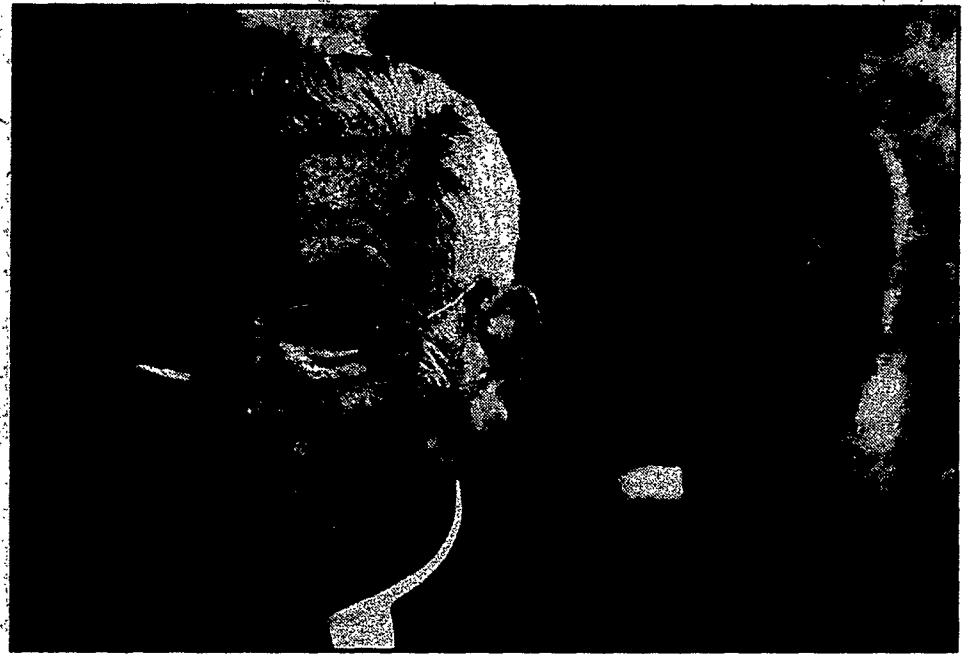
After presentations from Vatican officials, the second day was to be devoted to an open discussion of proposals.

The pope told participants he was "deeply grieved" by the clerical sex abuse, which he called an appalling sin.

"There is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young," he said.

Cardinal George said church leaders at the summit were split on whether to adopt a "zero-tolerance" policy for priest-abusers, in large part because abuse of minors could encompass a broad variety of behaviors.

"There is a difference between a moral monster like (convicted pedophile former Boston priest John) Geoghan, who preys



Reuters/CNS

U.S. Cardinals William H. Keeler of Baltimore and Anthony J. Bevilacqua chat at Rome's Fiumicino Airport April 22. U.S. cardinals were arriving in Rome for a special summit on clergy sex abuse.

upon little children and does so in a serial fashion, and someone who perhaps under the influence of alcohol engages in an action with a 17- or 16-year old young woman, who returns his affection," he said.

Another issue raised at the meeting was the potential link between the current crisis and homosexuality in the priesthood. Some church leaders have argued that most of the recently reported cases relate to homosexual activity, not pedophilia in the strict sense, since many of the victims were teen-age males.

In response to a reporter's question, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said "a homosexual atmosphere or dynamic" in a seminary causes difficulties within the seminary and in recruiting candidates to the priesthood, because it can dissuade heterosexual men

from pursuing a vocation.

"It is an ongoing struggle," he said. "It is most importantly a struggle to ensure that the Catholic priesthood is not dominated by homosexual men; (that) not only is it not dominated by homosexual men, but the candidates that we receive are healthy in every possible way: psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually."

Cardinal George said the question should not be whether a priesthood candidate is homosexual or not, but whether he is "capable of marriage and family, because an ordained priest is a married man" with the church as his bride.

"Putting the question of orientation in a different focus," he said, bishops should ask whether candidates have "reserves of 'generativity' and generosity" and could see themselves as being married and bringing forth new life.

## Cardinals Egan, Law speak out on abuse

BOSTON (CNS) — As the U.S. cardinals began heading to Rome for an April 23-24 clergy sex abuse summit with Vatican officials, Boston's Cardinal Bernard F. Law called the abuse scandal "a wake-up call for the church."

New York Cardinal Edward M. Egan said he was "deeply sorry" if any mistakes in handling sex abuse cases were made in New York or his former diocese, Bridgeport, Conn.

Cardinal Law — at the center of a roiling controversy for the past three months over his past handling of priests who molested children — spoke at length about the summit at Sunday Mass April 21 in his cathedral, just hours before catching a flight to Rome. It was his first public appearance in two weeks.

"The crisis of clergy sexual abuse of minors is not just a media-driven or public perception concern in the United States, but is a very serious issue undermining the mission of the Catholic Church," he said.

He compared the sex abuse crisis in the U.S. church with "last year's Sept. 11 tragedy, a crisis which shocks the heart and soul and which must spark immediate and decisive changes in order to prevent possible recurrence in the future."

Cardinal Egan — embroiled in his own controversy over his handling of allegations against priests when he was bishop of Bridgeport in the 1990s — issued a brief letter that was read in New York archdiocesan parishes the weekend of April 20-21.

He said in his years in Bridgeport and New York he acted on the best medical and behavioral advice available to him, but "it is clear that today we have a much better understanding of the problem."

"If in hindsight we also discover that mistakes may have been made as regards

prompt removal of priests and assistance to victims, I am deeply sorry," he wrote.

Both cardinals cited the protection of children from abuse as the church's top priority and asked people to pray for them during the Rome summit to address the issue.

Cardinal Law outlined a 10-point plan of major issues he planned to bring to the Rome meeting, including child protection, abuse prevention and education, assistance to victims and various pastoral responses to all those affected by abuse.

He made a call for a study by experts of "cases of living priests against whom credible allegations of abuse have been made" to learn more about the phenomenon of sexual molestation of children "and, specifically, concerning this pathology as it relates to clergy."

In his talk, Cardinal Law acknowledged, as he had earlier in a letter to priests, that many believe he has lost the people's trust and should resign.

"Please know that as long as I am in a position to do so, I will work tirelessly to address this crisis and to underscore its severity," he said.

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### Correction

A story on page five of the April 18 *Catholic Courier* regarding children's Internet use contained incorrect information. The story incorrectly stated that a child using a computer at the Penfield Public Library had witnessed a man on the computer next to him viewing pornography. It was not the child, but the child's mother who witnessed the man viewing pornography and informed library officials.