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Cardinal Bernard Law is expected to take recommendations from his Commission for the Protection of Children to the bishops' meeting in Dallas.

# Bishops' meeting opens in Dallas

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Three key issues face the U.S. bishops as they meet to deal with clergy sexual abuse of minors — aiding the victims, dealing firmly with clerical offenders and protecting children.

One major question remained unresolved before the June 13-15 meeting in Dallas: Would the bishops adopt a universal zero-tolerance policy, or would they allow some extremely limited exceptions for apparently reformed one-time past offenders?

They plainly planned to give notice that laicization will be requested for a priest who molests a child in the future and that the same fate awaits those with more than one admitted or proven accusation in the past.

When the current crisis began in Boston in January, Cardinal Bernard F. Law spelled out a strict policy that not even a one-time past offender will be allowed to hold any church post again.

After receiving a draft report June 6 from the Cardinal's Commission for the Protection of Children — a blue-ribbon group formed to advise him on sex abuse policy — he endorsed what he called "the commission's strong recommendation for a zero-tolerance policy with no exceptions."

Cardinals William H. Keeler of Baltimore and Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles are among top churchmen who have said they will seek an across-the-board policy with no exceptions.

Cardinal Adam J. Maida of Detroit expressed concern about a blanket policy al-

lowing no exceptions but also said the exception clause as drafted is confusing and "has to be more clearly explained, or taken out altogether."

He and others suggested that something like a life of seclusion and penance in a monastery could be an alternative to defrocking for at least some priests who have molested children.

Archbishop Harry J. Flynn of St. Paul-Minneapolis, chairman of the committee that drafted the policy, said an exception clause appeared to represent a minority position among the bishops, but the committee included it in the draft in order to put it on the table for debate.

Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago threw out a challenge at a press conference

Continued on page 6



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## Inside This Week



...of the ...  
...of the ...  
...of the ...

...Church ...  
...of progress ...  
...in Dallas ...  
Page 3



...share ...  
...of harmonica ...  
...performed ...  
...throughout world ...  
Page 10

## Singles: Stand up and be counted

While lecturing on a recent Sunday at St. Rita's Church in Webster, Kathleen Anne was profoundly reminded of her status as a single person.

"The homily focused on marriage. Then the Marriage Encounter couple got up," recalled Anne, 38. "While I was sitting there, I thought to myself, gosh, we really don't have an advocate for singles — but we're a big part of the church. I was thinking, I don't know if these (single) people know they're a very important part of the community."

Yet in many parts of Anne's life, she said, people pass judgment on her social status. "There's such a taboo — 'You're about 40 (years old) and single, what's wrong with you?'" she remarked.

Anne's concerns are shared by Sister of St. Joseph Judith Whalen, pastoral minister at St. Rita's. "I think the singles should stand up and be counted," stated Sister Whalen, who, with Anne, co-founded the group "Singles and Singles Again" more than 10 years ago.

In an era of high divorce rates and marrying at later ages, single adults are a growing segment of the population. The Catholic Church has yet to catch up to this trend, contends Nora Bradbury-Haehl.

"In society and church, we tend to think of married-with-children as the norm. In actuality, that's so few people's reality," said Bradbury-Haehl, diocesan coordinator of young-adult ministry.

Consequently, singles may feel relegated to the periphery of parish life. "Whether it's their own perception or the reality, often single people go to Mass on Sunday and they feel like they're surrounded by families," Bradbury-Haehl said. Compounding this feeling, she added, is the fact that sacramental programs and religious education are tailored to families.



"There aren't a lot of natural opportunities in parishes for singles. We're very child-focused," she remarked.

### Church-based ministries

A limited number of parish-based singles groups does exist in the Diocese of Rochester. One such ministry began in 1991, after Anne — who was newly divorced at the time and had two small children — asked Sister Whalen how she could link up with Catholics in similar situations.

"There wasn't anything," Anne recalled.

Continued on page 14

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