

Draft charter up for discussion, amendments

I have just returned to my room after celebrating a peaceful and beautiful evening prayer service in Sacred Heart Cathedral. About 120 people gathered to participate in this Service for Healing and Hope. We prayed that God would heal victims of sexual abuse by clergy and guide the U.S. bishops in our deliberations in Dallas during the latter part of the week.

Our meeting will begin on Thursday morning and conclude at noon on Saturday. Our only agenda item will be a draft document called a charter, which — if finally approved — will set the standard for all the dioceses in our country as they develop or refine their policies relative to this abuse issue.

As I review the charter, I am happy to notice that our diocesan policy stands up well against what is called for by the document. Were the draft to remain unchanged, we would need to make only relatively minor adjustments in our policy to be in full harmony with it. Surely, it will be amended after what I am sure will be very lively discussions. Whatever the results of our deliberations, you can be sure that our diocesan policy will, if anything, become stronger.

Let me try to answer a question several of you have asked me since the content of the draft charter was made public. That is, what is the process by which the bishops' conference moves from draft to final product?

The answer is through a process of amendments. All bishops are invited to propose amendments to the draft prior to the Dallas gathering and up to a certain point shortly after the meeting has begun. The ad

along the way



By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

hoc committee that developed the draft will review all of the amendments and divide them into three categories it will then present to the general assembly.

The first category is those amendments the ad hoc committee recommends to the assembly for approval; the committee will also provide the reasons for its recommendation. The second category is of those amendments the committee recommends that we do not adopt, and the reasons why. The third category contains proposed amendments the fate of which the committee judges is best decided one-by-one by the assembly. This category generally deals with matters of special importance or with matters about which there were notable disagreements within the committee.

We generally vote on amendments in each of the first two categories as a group. But any member is free to ask for separate consideration of any amendment in either one of those categories. A simple request by any member is sufficient for any amendment to be considered alone.

When we have completed the amendment process, we have a full discussion of

the revised draft under the customary rules of procedure. When all have been heard and a matter seems mature, the vote is taken. In this instance a two-thirds majority is needed for passage.

I should add a comment about time limits on those who speak. The chair determines the limit for the meeting or, sometimes, a particular portion of the meeting. Generally this does not exceed five minutes. Whatever the time frame may be, we have what appear to be a couple of miniature traffic lights to guide the speaker. Green tells you that you are on; amber signals that 30 seconds remain; red invites you to return to your seat. On occasions in which the speaker needs the encouragement of the chairman to observe the red light, that encouragement is graciously given and kindly received.

If this gives you some sense of the framework and flow of our meeting, I am glad. You can be sure that what perhaps sounds like a fairly sterile structure will be brought to life by the discussions in Dallas. This is a sensitive matter of great importance. As you might expect, the bishops are much united about the basic values and principles to be honored here. But my guess is that there will be some significant differences about how best to translate those values into concrete action.

Thank you once again for your prayerful support. I renew my request for your prayers for the healing of victims and the guidance of the bishops and our work in Dallas.

Peace to all.



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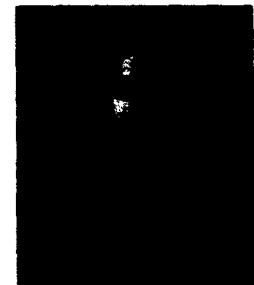
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† Jeanne and her mother immediately went to work to

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