



Bob Roller/CNS

U.S. bishops cast their votes on the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" at their meeting in Dallas June 14.

Bishops OK child-protection plan

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

DALLAS — At a historic meeting in Dallas June 13-15, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops ordered dramatic changes to protect children throughout the U.S. Catholic Church, notably forbidding a second chance in ministry for any priest who has ever sexually abused a minor.

After 11 hours of intense debate over two days, the bishops adopted a "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" that all dioceses must implement.

"For even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor — past, present or future — the offending priest or deacon will not remain in ministry and will not receive a future assignment," the charter states.

To give the charter a binding legal char-

More coverage of
the bishops' meeting,
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acter in all dioceses, the bishops then voted 229-5 to adopt a series of implementing norms which, if approved by the Holy See, will have the character of particular law that must be followed by all U.S. dioceses.

They decided that all the nation's bishops will devote Aug. 14-15 to penance and prayer for their past failures to protect children from priests who molested them. They invited priests and laity to join them in prayer on those days.

When the 239-13 vote adopting the charter was announced, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., USCCB president,

rose to address the bishops briefly. He called their new document "one of the greatest efforts anywhere in addressing sexual abuse of minors."

"From this day forward, no one known to have sexually abused a child will work in the Catholic Church in the United States," he said.

The charter, he added, "ensures that young people are protected, that victims are truly listened to and assisted, that all priests are trustworthy and that all bishops act responsibly."

Rochester's Bishop Matthew H. Clark said in a statement that he believes the diocese's policy in handling issues of priest abuse already is substantially in accord with the charter.

"To ensure that such is the case, I will ask
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Declan Walsh/CNS

Malnourished children receive help at the Nambumba feeding center in Malawi, where the Irish agency Concern is providing food through local Teresian Catholic nuns. A widespread famine is looming in the southern African nation from a chronic shortage of corn.

Famine stalks Africa

While U.S. readers have been dining on a news plate of war, terror and scandal in recent months, some Africans have been dining on sawdust — literally.

That's because hunger is stalking southern African like a starved lion, claiming emaciated bodies and despairing souls. Most at risk are 12.8 million people living in nine countries, including Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, war and other factors have also caused food shortages in several other African nations, including Angola and Kenya. Bad harvests, bad weather, bad governments and bad agricultural policies have all contributed to the situation in degrees that vary from country to country.

Spokesmen for the U.N. World Food Program and the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization paint an ominous picture for many southern Africans if the international community fails to respond

dramatically to the threat of hunger.

"We see this as a crisis of enormous proportions," said Jean-Jacques Graisse, WFP's executive director, in a Web site report. "The situation worsens every day."

Catholic Relief Services, the overseas agency of the U.S. bishops, concurs with the WFP's assessment of the situation. Michael Culligan, senior regional representative for CRS' Africa Group, added that more than 6 million Zimbabweans are in need of emergency food assistance at this moment.

"In terms of the numbers affected, Zimbabwe runs the highest danger of starvation," Culligan said.

Dr. Idumbo Kasele, CRS' agricultural technical adviser for southern Africa, offered this assessment in a report posted on the Web at www.catholicrelief.org.

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