

# WORLD & NATION

## Bishops approve norms by a margin of 229 to 5

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

DALLAS — The U.S. bishops voted 229-5 on June 14 to adopt special legislation for U.S. dioceses to deal swiftly and firmly with allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy or other church personnel. Vatican approval is needed before the norms can become law for the U.S. Catholic Church.

The norms were the second key element in the bishops' effort to end the clergy sex abuse crisis that has embroiled the church across the country since January, when major scandals were uncovered in Boston. Shortly before adopting the norms, the bishops overwhelmingly approved a "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" establishing a national policy of responding quickly to sex abuse victims and permanently ousting from any church ministry any priest who has abused a minor.

The norms outline procedures for removal from all ministry or laicization of priests who have sexually abused minors. These procedures could apply to scores or even hundreds of priests across the nation who currently are in some form of limited ministry despite a past record of admitted or proven sexual abuse.

No hard numbers were available on how many such priests there are around the country, but since January more than 200 priests have resigned, retired or been removed from posts because of sex-abuse allegations or admissions. Many of those were in dioceses that adopted a zero-tolerance policy for past abusers in the

months before the June 13-15 bishops' meeting.

The bishops will ask Rome to approve the norms for a two-year period, after which they may be modified in light of the experience gained during that time.

The norms — titled "Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing With Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests, Deacons or Other Church Personnel" — provide the legislative underpinning to make the policy legally binding on dioceses throughout the country, including those of the Eastern Catholic churches.

The noun "eparchy" and the adjective "eparchial" refer to Eastern-Rite Catholic jurisdictions headed by a bishop — the equivalent of a diocese in the Latin Church.

Besides providing for removal of all priests who have sexually abused minors, the norms set out specific provisions requiring each diocese to have:

- "A written policy on the sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons or other church personnel." Copies of the policy and any revisions are to be placed on file with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

- "A competent assistance coordinator to aid in the immediate pastoral care of persons who claim to have been sexually abused when they were minors" by a church worker.

- "A review board" composed of at least five persons, mostly "lay persons not in the employ of the diocese/eparchy," who will assess allegations, review diocesan/epar-



Bob Roller/CNS

Archbishop John J. Myers of Newark, N.J., and Archbishop James P. Keleher of Kansas City, Kan., applaud the U.S. bishops' vote affirming a strict national policy to handle clergy sexual abuse June 14 in Dallas.

chial policy periodically and make recommendations concerning fitness for ministry in particular cases.

The norms also require each church province in the country — a regional grouping of dioceses under an archdiocese — to establish "an appellate review board, predominantly lay but including at least one bishop and one canon lawyer, to assist in a diocesan review when asked to do so by the bishop, alleged victim or accused."

The norms provide that any church worker named as an offender in a credible abuse allegation is to be "relieved of any ecclesiastical ministry" and advised to retain canonical and civil counsel while the allegation is investigated.

If the accused is a priest or deacon, the

bishop is to "ask him to undergo appropriate medical and psychological evaluation and intervention, if possible."

The norms prohibit transferring a priest to another diocese without notifying the bishop in the new locale of his background "if there is anything in his background to indicate that he would be a danger to children or young people."

If the alleged victim is still a minor when an allegation is made, the norms require the diocese or eparchy to notify civil authorities about the allegation. If the alleged victim is no longer a minor, the norms say the church authorities should "cooperate with public authorities about reporting" and advise and support the right of the alleged victim to report to civil authorities.

## Victims reveal scars of sexual abuse to nation's bishops

By Patricia Zapor  
Catholic News Service

DALLAS — Victims of sexual abuse by priests bared their souls before a hushed room of U.S. bishops in Dallas June 13, laying out their painful stories of molestation and decades of struggles with depression and other aftereffects.

In a later interview, one of the victims said, although nothing can make up for being abused, the experience of speaking to the bishops was difficult but beneficial for the emotional trauma he still experiences and for how his revelations were handled by church authorities.

"Nothing can make it up to me," said Michael Bland, 41, who himself once was a priest of the same religious order as his abuser.

Bland told the bishops of being molested as a teenager and of later leaving the order in frustration with differences in the treatment he and his abuser received from the church. Bland now is a psychologist for the Office of Assistance Ministry for the Chicago Archdiocese.

"The one thing that has made it up to me today is approximately 300 bishops silently sat there and listened," he told a small group of reporters after the session. "And for that I thank them. It's unfortunate that not every victim, survivor, parent, family member, parishioner, faithful can't have that same opportunity. Hopefully in some way the four of us ... spoke for ourselves and touched common themes within others' stories."

Bland said he finally revealed his abuse to superiors in his religious order after he was ordained. When he declined to meet with the order's attorneys and the priest who abused him, as the order requested, things changed for him.

He said he began to feel as if his story wasn't considered to be credible, that the priest who abused him was seen as more important than he was. Although the



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Michael Bland told the U.S. bishops that he was molested as a teen by a priest and that his abuser received treatment from the church while he felt ostracized by it.

priest, whom he declined to name, was removed from his parish and entered a treatment program, the reasons given were that he was "dealing with personal issues and depression."

Bland said the same priest is now considered "cured," has taught in a seminary and is a full professor and vice dean at a pontifical university.

"At my last parish Mass, I revered the altar, placed my stole and chasuble upon the altar and followed the procession out for the last time," Bland told the bishops. "The priesthood lost me, but kept the perpetrator."

"Perhaps he (the perpetrator) is not saying public Mass or allowed to be alone with minors, but he has the privilege of choosing to wear the collar, being called father, or (to) baptize, marry and bury his family,"

he continued. "The church has taken care of him."

Bland declined to say which religious order he was in, but the 1989 Official Catholic Directory lists a Michael M. Bland as having been ordained in 1987 for the Servite order.

Both Bland and another speaker on the opening morning of the bishops' meeting, Paula Gonzales Rohrbacher, told reporters they saw several bishops in the audience wiping tears from their eyes as they listened to them, Craig Martin of St. Cloud, Minn., and David Clohessy, president of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP.

Rohrbacher, of Juneau, Alaska, said she was invited to speak to the bishops just a few days earlier, after she sent an e-mail message to Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of

Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The message thanked him for scheduling time for the bishops to hear from victims at the meeting.

Her own experience with church authorities when she reported being molested as a teen by a seminarian in Oregon was more positive than those of the other speakers. The Archdiocese of Portland and Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary listened and believed her, she said.

Despite that, Rohrbacher said she has been in counseling on and off for 18 years to deal with the effects of being molested by a seminarian who spent vacations with her family.

Rohrbacher told the reporters that many people who are close to her have no idea of the devastation being molested has caused in her life.

"I appear to be a pulled-together person," she said, adding that she hoped her appearance at the meeting would help bishops realize that victims can very effectively hide the pain they feel.

Martin, 46, struggled through tears to read a statement in which he described his own experience of being molested as a "John Doe" story.

"I find it easier to tell my story using the name John Doe," said Martin. "I can revisit my pain and not hurt myself again."

After being abused, Martin said he became sexually active and developed unhealthy attitudes toward women. Alcoholism and sexual compulsion became problems.

"John has shown symptoms of low self-esteem, depression, anger and the need to control," he said of himself.

Clohessy said the trauma he experienced from being abused meant that as recently as the early 1990s he had days when he couldn't muster the courage to leave his apartment, and when his wife would try to comfort him as he sobbed in his bed, curled in a fetal position.