

Order priests to comply with USCCB charter

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

PHILADELPHIA — Heads of men's religious orders meeting in Philadelphia set plans to comply with the U.S. bishops' charter to protect children, but not before their president sharply criticized the "zero tolerance" policy adopted by the bishops as a "war slogan" not suited to church leadership.

At their Aug. 7-10 meeting, members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men said they will abide by the bishops' policy barring priests who have sexually abused minors from any public ministry.

They instructed CMSM leadership to "research and design mechanisms of public accountability," including formation of

an independent national review board to assess the responses of religious orders to sexual abuse.

They also called for other responses by religious orders paralleling the policies the bishops adopted for dioceses, including improving outreach to victims, improving educational programs to protect children and prevent sexual abuse, and providing local mechanisms for response to sexual-abuse allegations comparable to the diocesan outreach coordinator and diocesan review board.

Unlike the bishops, who spelled out laicization as the normal response to a priest who abuses a minor, the CMSM delegates focused on developing "more effective methods of intervention, care, treatment and follow-up supervision of institute

members in need of treatment and continuing supervision for sexual abuse."

Even a priest who has abused "is still our brother in Christ. We must share his burden. He remains a member of our family," they said in a three-page statement adopted Aug. 10.

"But our compassion does not cloud our clarity," they added. "We abhor sexual abuse. We will not tolerate any type of abuse by our members."

Conventual Franciscan Father Canice Connors, CMSM president, and Marist Father Ted Keating, the organization's executive director, repeatedly emphasized to reporters at the meeting that keeping a priest who has committed sexual abuse in religious life does not mean condoning what he did or permitting him to engage

in public ministry.

Father Keating said in most cases the best way to protect children is "to keep these men in religious life and supervise them, not dump them on the street, where the first thing that happens is massive regression and the potential for abuse is very high."

In his presidential address Aug. 7, Father Connors criticized the bishops in Dallas for having surrendered "any wiggle room in discourse or script for a reasoned analysis of the abusive situation; either 'you get it' or 'you didn't get it'; nothing in between."

One-third of the country's 45,000 priests belong to religious orders. Like diocesan priests, they can exercise public

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St. Margaret Mary first-grade teacher Joanne Knorr (right) chats with future pupil Sam Melidona, 6, as his mother, Michel, and sisters Taylor, 9, and Quinn, 4, look on.

Readin', writin', relatives

If parents want to enhance their children's educations, the best thing to do is stop worrying about presents, and start making an effort to give them their presence, according to John Findlater, a nationally known consultant to Catholic schools.

Findlater, a former Catholic school principal from Detroit, has worked with both affluent and poor students, and said there's not much difference between the two groups in the classroom as long as their parents are involved in their schooling. However, their performance suffers when parents eschew spending time with them and work to give them material things instead, he said.

"Which is more important," he asked rhetorically, "spending time with your child, or giving them this jacket?"

He added that some students today are often overscheduled to the point of exhaustion, with homework time taking a back seat to extracurricular activities.

"Maybe the high point of the evening should be washing the dishes and doing the homework," he said. (See related story on page 8).

Tapestry of faith

Findlater made his points during an interview after his talk at the University of Rochester during the 13th annual Institute on Catholic Education July 8-9. Organized by Mercy Sister Edwardine Weaver of the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development, this year's institute focused on "Families and Catholic Schools: Weaving a Tapestry of Faith." Findlater spoke July 9 on the topic "The Home and School Connection: What Kind of Kids Are We Raising Anyway?"

"If we are serious about weaving the tapestry of faith, then you and I have to begin having the conversation about what's most important," Findlater told his audience of about 100 Catholic educators.

And part of what's important, Findlater told the *Courier*, is parents' involvement in their children's educations. That point was seconded by Christian Brother Robert R. Bimonte, the new executive di-

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