

Priests call for changes in sex-abuse charter

WORCESTER, Mass. (CNS)—In a letter to top Vatican officials, 77 Worcester diocesan priests have called for changes in the national sexual abuse policy adopted by the U.S. bishops in June.

One provision of the policy says any priest who has ever sexually abused a minor is to be permanently barred from public ministry.

"We believe that the bishops' conference had the opportunity to rise above the hysteria of media coverage and the anger of some people and proclaim that the church is 'a people set apart,' to boldly say that we strive to live a more perfect law and to reject the values of this pagan world," the letter writers said.

"It saddens us profoundly that the mo-

ment passed and the opportunity was lost. It distresses us greatly that in losing that moment, the bishops placed every priest in the United States in a precarious position, open to any accusation from anyone," they added.

The letter, sent Sept. 9, urged the Vatican to remedy "injustices" toward priests in the policy, said Father John Madden, one of the signers and pastor of Our Lady of Jasna Gora Parish in Clinton.

At their June meeting the bishops spelled out a national policy in a "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and adopted a series of norms which, if approved by the Vatican, would make key elements of the charter legally binding on every diocese in the country.



Father Madden said the letter was sent to Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Clergy, with copies going to the head of the Congregation for Bishops, the apostolic nuncio to the United States and leaders of the USCCB.

In the letter the priests pledge their care and concern for healing for victims of the "particularly horrible and painful and life-altering experience" of sexual abuse by a priest.

But they say they do not believe the char-

ter is "an adequate or appropriate vehicle for this healing or commitment" because it is not consistent with Jesus' teachings or faithful to church tradition, does not recognize distinctions in individual cases of reported abuse and invites false accusations.

The letter says laicizing priest-pedophiles places more children at risk. It says the charter's zero-tolerance policy forges the power of Christian conversion underlined by Pope John Paul II in his address to the U.S. hierarchy in Rome last April. It says priests who molested someone 25 or more years ago and have changed should not be removed from ministry, and it decries the church denying them the forgiveness God freely grants.

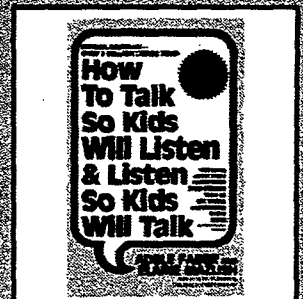


Catholic Courier

DIocese of Rochester, New York ■ VOL. 113 NO. 49 ■ THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2002 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES

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In this Aug. 6, 2000, file photo, an Iraqi boy puts up a poster outside the U.N. office in Baghdad demanding a stop in bombing and an end to U.N. sanctions. Once again, sanctions and a possible U.S. attack on Iraq are being called into question.

To attack or not to attack Iraq

WASHINGTON — Despite President Bush's assertions that the leadership of Iraq is a threat dangerous enough to require a forced change of regime, experts and scholars say they generally have a tough time squaring the idea with Catholic just-war principles.

"Our greatest fear is that terrorists will find a shortcut to their mad ambitions when an outlaw regime supplies them with the technologies to kill on a massive scale," the president told the U.N. General Assembly Sept. 12. "In one place — in one regime — we find all these dangers, in their most lethal and aggressive forms."

"We have been more than patient," he said. "We have tried sanctions. We have tried the carrot of 'oil for food' and the stick of coalition military strikes. But Saddam Hussein has defied all these efforts and continues to develop weapons of mass destruction. The first time we may be completely certain he has nuclear weapons is when, God forbid, he uses one. We owe it to all our citizens to do everything in our power to prevent that day from coming."

Yet some believe a show of force is not the best way to prevent such a day from coming — and if there is to be a show of force, they say,

there needs to be much more justification for such an action.

Local reaction

Rochester's Tom Malthaner is one who believes a U.S. attack on Iraq is unjustified.

"I'm abhorred that we'd be attacking that country again," said Malthaner said in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "They've had sanctions for 12 years, and we expect a fight. I think we're really going to regret someday this aggression on behalf of our country."

Malthaner, who lives at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester, a Catholic Worker house, feels so strongly that attacking Iraq is wrong that he participated in a Sept. 12 protest at the Federal Building in downtown Rochester with members of local activist groups. And in August, he and three other Rochester-area residents took part in four days of a 40-day fast at the United Nations in New York City. Organized by the peace group Voices in the Wilderness, the fast was meant to protest economic sanctions against Iraq that

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