

Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

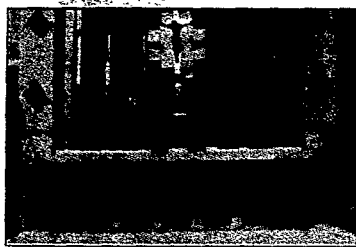
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Rome wants norms revised

ROME — In its long-awaited response to the U.S. bishops' sex-abuse norms, the Vatican has called for a joint commission to study and revise some of the key elements of the bishops' plan before formal Vatican approval is granted.

The Vatican said it was concerned that "ambiguity and confusion" could arise when the norms are applied, because some provisions are "difficult to reconcile with the universal law of the church."

The problematic areas include the definition of such terms as "sexual abuse," the role of diocesan review boards and the canonical procedures for dealing with priests who have abused minors, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in a statement released in Rome Oct. 18.

Bishop Gregory, bishop of Belleville, Ill., said a commission made up of four U.S. bishops and four Vatican officials would meet soon and hoped to finish its work in time for the plenary meeting of U.S. bishops in November.

"We're dealing with a basically sound document that needs modification rather than recasting," Bishop Gregory told reporters at a Rome press conference. He said the commission would be "fine-tuning" the norms, and that the Vatican had not categorically rejected any element of the bishops' sex-abuse plan.

"Nothing (in the charter and norms) has been taken off the table," he said. "Nothing has been ruled out."

He said the commission's review did not mean implementation of the sex-abuse



Vatican/CNS

Pope John Paul II listens to Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, during a private meeting at the Vatican Oct. 17. The pope met with top U.S. church officials the day before the Vatican made public its response to the bishops' norms on clerical sex abuse.

charter was now "frozen" in U.S. dioceses.

"The mixed commission has not asked the bishops to stop pursuing the charter. It simply says let us sit down and talk together about issues that need to be clarified or modified so that 'recognitio' can be granted to the norms," he said.

Bishop Gregory said the joint review did not imply a softening of the bishops' policies.

"We have not stepped back from our compassion for those who have been harmed, nor from our determination to put into place policies that will protect children," he said.

Rochester, N.Y.'s Bishop

Matthew H. Clark also emphasized that the charter revisions should not be cause for immediate concern.

"I think that it is very important to remember that this is not a rejection of our charter and the accompanying norms," Bishop Clark said in an Oct. 18 statement. "Rather, it represents an opportunity for the Holy See and our bishops to work together to ensure that a workable document is in place to address our mutual concerns about the protection of our young and vulnerable."

Neither will this development significantly slow down implementation of policies in the Rochester Diocese, he

said.

"I know that the Holy See shares our view that acts of abuse against minors are reprehensible and a violation of criminal and canon law. We will continue to treat allegations of abuse as such and will continue to report credible allegations to local criminal authorities. The further discussion of the approval of the charter and norms will not change that," Bishop Clark commented.

He noted that "many of the provisions of the charter, such as the establishment of a lay review board and appointment of victims advocates, have been part of our diocese

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