Religious leaders to speak on budget cuts

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester announced Oct. 29 that Bishop Matthew H. Clark and leaders of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities were slated to speak the next day at a news conference about the impact of proposed Monroe County budget cuts on social service programs. The Oct. 30 press conference was scheduled for St. Mary Church in downtown Rochester.

During the summer, Monroe County Executive Jack Doyle proposed massive cuts in funding to social service organizations as part of efforts to close a multi-million dollar budget deficit. Since then, social-service providers have joined in a campaign to lessen the amount of the proposed cuts in order to preserve the services they provide to the community.

USCCB to discuss Hispanic ministry

WASHINGTON (CNS) — With Hispanics poised to assume the majority of U.S. Catholics, new priorities are needed in ministry, Latino participation, and evangelization, a document that seeks to focus the issues will be voted on at the U.S. bishops' November meeting.

"Two central issues arise for Hispanic ministry are: 'what model of leadership will Hispanic Catholics offer as they become the majority group' and 'how will this model strengthen the unity of the body of Christ in increasingly culturally diverse communities,' the document states.

Pope offers prayers for Moscow victims

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II prayed for the victims of the Moscow hostage crisis and said he hoped such tragedies would not be repeated in the future.

The pope had been following the news of the stand-off in a Moscow theater between Chechen guerrillas and Russian security forces. The security forces stormed the theater Oct. 26, using a mysterious toxic gas to subdue the guerrillas. At least 50 rebels and 118 of the nearly 700 hostages were killed, and more than 600 others were hospitalized, 150 in intensive care.

CNS

Four U.S. bishops will join four Vatican officials in revising the U.S. norms for dealing with clergy sex abuse. The U.S. members are, from left, Archbishop William J. Levada of San Francisco, Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, Bishop Thomas G. Doran of Rockford, Ill., and Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn.

Bishops strive for healing

Nancy Frazier O'Brien/CNS

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As the focus moved to Rome for the latest developments in the clergy sex-abuse crisis, some bishops in the United States and elsewhere continued their efforts to help victims heal and to disclose the extent of abuse and its costs.

The creation of a joint U.S.-Vatican commission to revise the U.S. bishops' sex-abuse norms did not signal a rejection of the norms, said several bishops and observers, but represented what one senior Vatican official called an effort toward "improving the language, not rewriting the policy."

When the commission, made up of four U.S. bishops and four Vatican officials, was announced in late October, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said it hoped to finish its work in time for the fall bishops' meeting Nov. 11-14 in Washington.

Meanwhile, bishops in dioceses strongly affected by the sex-abuse scandal got various responses to their attempts to apologize, listen to victims and offer more information about past actions.

In Palm Beach, Fla., Bishop Sean P. O'Malley was welcomed with open arms at his Oct. 19 installation. The diocese's last two bishops resigned amid allegations of sexual misconduct.

Bishop O'Malley urged Palm Beach Catholics not to be "fair-weather friends," but acknowledged that many in the diocese had suffered over the past year because of the sex-abuse scandal.

"To those of you who are upset with the church, I say, do not forget the whole picture," he said. "The storm of crisis and scandal rages about us, but amidst the maelstrom that engulfs us, the Lord is with us."

In Louisville, Ky., Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly said in a report to 68,000 Catholic households that the archdiocese had spent $250,495 on legal fees, counseling for victims and public relations in the last fiscal year.

Archbishop Kelly said he released the figures "to be accountable about how funds have been used to address the problem of clergy sex abuse."

Nine more plaintiffs filed suit Oct. 23 against the Archdiocese of Louisville, bringing to 195 the total number of lawsuits filed since April. Named in the suits are 31 people connected with the Catholic Church, including 26 priests.

U.S. members of the joint commission named Oct. 23 — Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, Archbishop William J. Levada of San Francisco and Bishops Thomas G. Doran of Rockford, Ill., and William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn. — were expected in Rome Oct. 28 to begin several days of talks with the commission's Vatican members.

Representing the Vatican were Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, prefect of the Congregation for Clergy; Archbishop Julian Herranz, president of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts; Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; and Archbishop Francisco Monterisi, secretary of the Congregation for Bishops.

Several U.S. bishops praised the Vatican's decision to set up the commission and said it showed solidarity with the hierarchy's efforts to deal with the issue.

Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston said the decision shows that the Vatican shares the "urgent resolve of the bishops of the U.S. regarding the protection of children."

Cardinal Law, in whose archdiocese the clergy sex abuse scandal first surfaced earlier this year, held closed-door meetings with groups of priests Oct. 22 and 23 for the first time in six months.

A new poll of U.S. priests by the *Los Angeles Times* found that although 91 percent said they were very or somewhat satisfied with their lives today nearly half think their colleagues accused of child sexual abuse have not been treated fairly by the bishops' charter on sex abuse.

Nearly three-quarters categorized the U.S. news media's treatment of the Catholic Church as negative, while 22 percent rated it as fair and 2 percent said it was positive.

Joining in that criticism was *New York Times* columnist Peter Steinfels, who said in an Oct. 18 address to Catholic communicators that imprecise and incomplete reporting of the sex-abuse scandal has prompted "a kind of free-floating outrage" in U.S. Catholics that has left them ill-equipped to fix the problem.

"Most Americans, including most Catholics, have at best a very imprecise understanding of the clerical sex scandal — not of the terrible nature of the misconduct itself but of its exact scope, the time frame when it largely occurred, the legal issues involved, the motives and mentalities that allowed it to happen, and the record of how different bishops handled it at different times," he said.

Steinfels, who is Catholic, made the comments in a talk to the Catholic Academy for Communication Arts Professionals. The group met in Los Angeles Oct. 16-19.