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## Panel revises abuse norms

Leaves intact key actions by bishops

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — All key provisions of the U.S. bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" are left intact by the recently crafted revisions in the proposed legal norms to implement the charter.

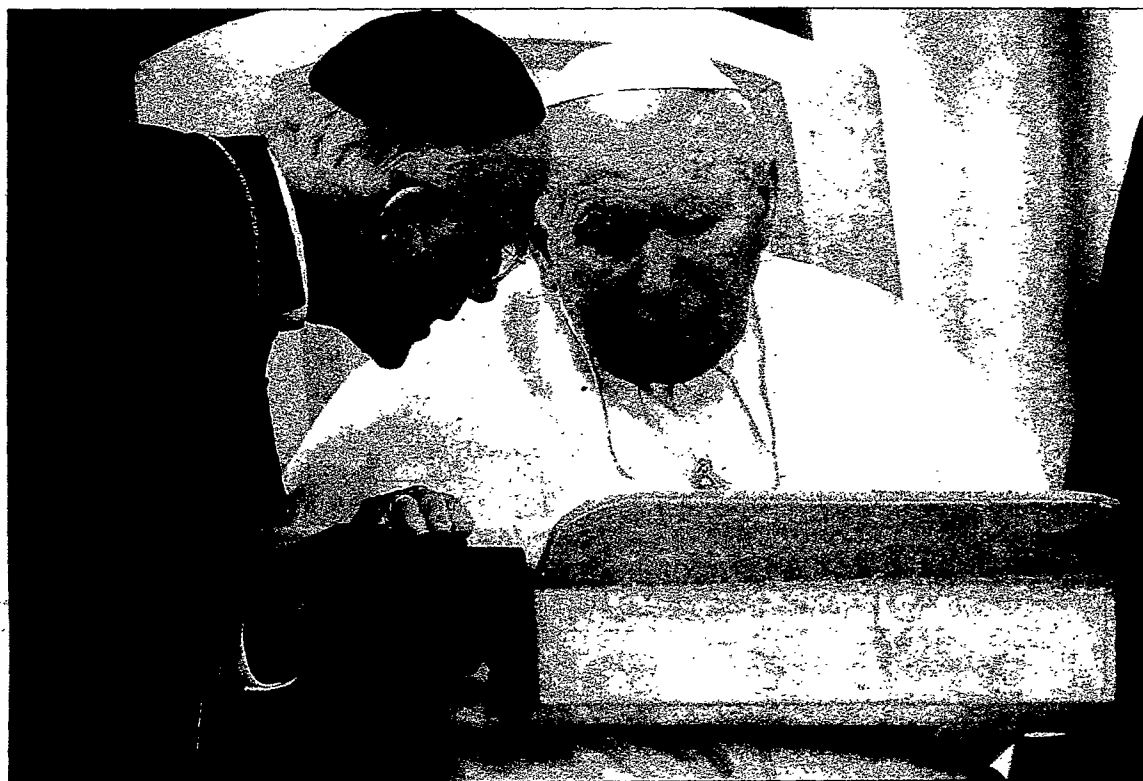
In fact, contrary to widely reported speculation that the revisions would soften or weaken the bishops' actions, the revised version at several points strengthens the hand of a bishop dealing with alleged sexual abuse by one of his priests or deacons.

Especially important in light of controversies this past summer over the applicability of the charter to ordained men in religious orders is a new footnote in the revised document.

"In applying these norms to religious priests and deacons, the term 'religious ordinary' shall be substituted for the term 'bishop/eparch,' *mutatis mutandis* (making the necessary changes), it says." Eparch is the term used for a bishop in the Eastern Catholic churches.

As revised, Norm 12 begins, "No priest or deacon who has committed an act of sexual abuse of a minor may be transferred for ministerial assignment to another diocese/eparch or religious province." The original version made no mention of a prohibition against transfer to another religious province for ministry.

The revised Norm 12 goes on to spell out procedures that must be followed even if such a cleric is simply being



Reuters/CNS

Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago greets Pope John Paul II during the pope's weekly general audience at the Vatican Oct. 30. A Vatican-U.S. joint commission, of which Cardinal George was a member, announced proposed revisions to the norms on clergy sexual abuse that had been adopted by the U.S. bishops during their meeting in Dallas last June.

moved to another diocese or religious province to reside — that is, with no ministerial assignment. The new instructions on procedures to follow in such cases are nearly twice as long as those in the original Norm 11, which it replaces.

The revisions were worked out Oct. 29-30 at a meeting in Rome of four representatives of the U.S. bishops and four top Vatican officials. The U.S. bishops, who approved an earlier version of the norms in June, are to debate and vote on the revised version when they meet in Washington Nov. 11-14.

One of the major contro-

versies swirling in the church since the bishops adopted the charter at their June meeting in Dallas has been how to reconcile the church's statute of limitations on prosecuting crimes with the bishops' commitment to remove permanently from ministry any priest found to have sexually abused a child.

The statute of limitations says a cleric cannot be tried for a sexual crime against a minor unless the case is initiated within 10 years after the victim turns 18. The norms the bishops passed in June did not address that problem directly, although the bishops committed themselves to re-

moving any priest who has been found to have abused a child, regardless of when it occurred.

As revised in late October, language was added to one norm, saying that "because sexual abuse of a minor is a grave offense," a bishop faced with a case "barred by prescription" is to apply to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith "for a derogation from the prescription."

That's church legalese instructing any bishop faced with a statute of limitations obstacle to go to the doctrinal congregation to get the ob-

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Story by Catholic News Service

