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Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, speaks at the USCCB meeting in Washington Nov. 11. He spoke in part on the revised sex-abuse norms put forth by a joint commission of U.S. bishops and Vatican officials.

Bishops discuss abuse norms

WASHINGTON — Responding to an exhortation from their conference president that the sex-abuse scandal not “destroy our communion with one another in the Lord,” members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops opened their fall meeting Nov. 11 with preliminary discussion of revised sex-abuse norms and nearly a dozen other documents.

In his presidential address, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., said the disunity in the church caused by the scandals must be overcome.

But he said the bishops “must never allow the particular positions that we have taken on such a serious issue or even the mistakes that we have made in understanding and addressing it to destroy our communion with one another

in the Lord.”

Repeating the bishops' commitment to victims of clergy sex abuse, he said, “We will not step back from our compassion for those who have been harmed, or from our determination to put into place policies that will protect children.”

In addition to Bishop Gregory's talk, the first morning of the Nov. 11-14 meeting was devoted to first looks at documents on domestic violence, abortion, Hispanic ministry, stewardship, poverty, liturgical and financial matters, and border concerns with Mexico.

Various aspects of the sex-abuse crisis dominated the first afternoon, with Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago reporting on the work of a joint Vatican-U.S. commission that revised the

canonical sexual-abuse norms approved by the bishops last June in Dallas when they adopted a national “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.”

Archbishop Harry J. Flynn of St. Paul-Minneapolis reported on the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, which he heads, and Bishop Robert H. Brom of San Diego, who heads a task force on episcopal oversight regarding sex abuse, presented a plan to improve the accountability of bishops in this area. The bishops agreed to vote on the plan later in the meeting.

Saying the proposed norms were strengthened during the Vatican-U.S. consultation, Cardinal George said “the

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