

# Unity is topic for bishops

## Meeting to address sex abuse, poverty, domestic violence

Agostino Bono/CNS



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**U.S. bishops gather in Washington, D.C., for their fall general meeting Nov. 11. The four-day meeting draws bishops from around the country to discuss issues facing the church. Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the USCCB, addressed the opening session. New bishops and the members of the National Review Board for clergy sex abuse were introduced.**

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As the U.S. bishops opened their fall general meeting, the president of the bishops' conference said disunity in the church caused by the clergy sex-abuse scandal needs to be overcome.

Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, criticized "some church leaders" for mismanaging the scandal but said the resulting discord should not destroy the church's unity in facing the crisis.

He also praised the work of the vast majority of U.S. priests and said that their image should not be tarnished by the actions of a few.

Bishop Gregory, head of the Diocese of Belleville, Ill., spoke at the opening session of the bishops' Nov. 11-14 meeting in Washington. A main agenda item was discussion of revised sex-abuse norms drafted in October by a mixed commission of U.S. bishops and Vatican officials. The original norms were approved by the U.S. bishops in June.

The sex-abuse scandals have contributed to a climate of "fear and uncertainty," said Bishop Gregory.

"We have had to face the criminal and sinful sexual abuse of children and the mismanagement of those violations by some church leaders," he said.

"We have witnessed greater fracture and discord than unity," he said.

"We have experienced serious fractures between bishops and the faithful, as well as between bishops and priests," he added.

"We bishops have not been immune from disagreement and discord on this matter," the bishop said.

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," he said.

Bishop Gregory praised the revisions by the mixed commission and said "we look forward to strengthening that work."

He repeated the bishops' commitment to victims of clergy sex abuse.

"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," he said.

Since the revised norms were made public, several victims' advocacy groups have criticized them as a step backward from the bishops' June pledge of zero tolerance.

Bishop Gregory emphasized the ministerial commitment of the vast majority of priests, citing those who responded immediately to the terrorist tragedies of Sept. 11, 2001.

"Priests today too often are being unfairly judged by the misdeeds of other priests, men often long departed from ministry or even deceased," he said.

"The overwhelming majority of priests are faithful servants of the Lord," he said.

Some groups inside and outside the church are using the scandals to push their own agendas that are at odds with church teachings and practices, the bishop said.

"One cannot fail to hear in the distance — and sometimes very nearby — the call of the false prophet," he said.

Bishop Gregory praised the work of the National Review Board of lay

people set up to monitor diocesan compliance with the bishops' national policy and encouraged greater lay participation in the church's mission.

Regarding other topics on the bishops' agenda, Bishop Gregory said consideration was to be given to a statement on the impact of the Supreme Court decision *Roe vs. Wade* that legalized abortion. He reiterated the bishops' call to overturn the ruling.

Another statement deals with pastoral approaches to domestic violence.

"Violence against women can never be justified," he said.

Another statement is being drafted in conjunction with the Mexican bishops to spotlight immigration problems along the border.

"We highlight the need for pastoral accompaniment of those who migrate; and we call for greater advocacy on their behalf," he said.

Another document discusses the "scandal of poverty" and the need for the church "to bring God's comfort and relief to the poor," he said.

## FBI VETERAN NAMED TO CHILD PROTECTION POST

WASHINGTON (CNS) — FBI veteran Kathleen L. McChesney was appointed Nov. 7 as executive director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' new Office for Child and Youth Protection.

McChesney has set as goal-oriented, she said. "We have very specific goals to get safe environment programs (for children and youths) created throughout the dioceses, to get the auditing (of diocesan sexual abuse policies and practices) in place, to get the first annual (diocesan policy and practice) report done and to set up a continued reporting mechanism."

McChesney, 51, is the FBI's third-ranked official and highest-ranking woman in bureau history. She'll take over the bishops' child protection office Dec. 2.

## RELIGIOUS TO HELP RESPOND TO ABUSE

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Sister Andree Fries, executive director of the bishops' National Religious Retirement Office, has been named to handle the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' response to the sex-abuse crisis.

Sister Fries, a member of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in O'Fallon, Mo., will continue as head of the religious retirement office. As deputy she succeeds Father J. Cleus Kiley, a Chicago priest who will return to working full time as executive director of the bishops' Secretariat for Priestly Life and Ministry.

## KURSI BELIEVED TO BE EARLY PILGRIMAGE SITE

JERUSALEM (CNS) — Archaeologists at the Kursi excavation in Galilee believe they have found evidence indicating that Kursi was the site of the earliest Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Archaeologists also believe they have found evidence of the slaughter of those pilgrims in 614 by the invading Persian army. In addition to uncovering a Roman bathhouse near the previously excavated fourth-century Byzantine church, the excavation team uncovered about three dozen women's rings and other pieces of jewelry.

## Lafayette, La., bishop resigns

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Pope John Paul II has accepted the resignation of Bishop Edward J. O'Donnell of Lafayette, La., and named Bishop Michael Jarrell of Houma-Thibodaux, La., to succeed him. Bishop O'Donnell, 71, is a St.

Louis native who was named auxiliary bishop of St. Louis in 1983 and installed as bishop of Lafayette in 1994. Bishop Jarrell, 62, is a native of Opelousas, La. He was ordained a priest of the Lafayette Diocese in 1967 and was ordained bishop of Houma-Thibodaux in 1993.