

USCCB

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Holy See shared our goals" — to protect minors from abuse in the church, to reach out to victims of abuse and to remove permanently from ministry any priest who has ever admitted or been found guilty of sexually abusing a minor.

Among strengthening factors in the revised norms, he said, were the explicit inclusion of priests and deacons in religious orders and the opening up of the possibility of church trials to remove priests even if the church's statute of limitations for trying the crime has run out. The Vatican told the bishops to apply for a waiver of the statute for those cases otherwise too old to prosecute under the law.

Cardinal George was the ranking American prelate on the mixed commission of four U.S. bishops and four top Vatican officials who met in Rome Oct. 29-30 to work out revisions of the norms in time for the bishops to review and vote on the revisions during their Nov. 11-15 meeting.

In presenting the revised text to the bishops, he advised them that "the norms are not a conference document" anymore, but a proposed "particular law" worked out with the Holy See.

"If we pass this," he said, "the Holy See has said, 'What you have in front of you is acceptable,'" and it will receive Vatican approval.

The bishops were advised that green sheets made available to them for observations on the revised norms were not amendment forms, but only forms for making observations or seeking clarification.

The bishops were scheduled to take a final vote on the revised norms Nov. 13.

Two other U.S. members of the mixed commission — Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., and Bishop Thomas G. Doran of Rockford, Ill. — answered media questions about the revised norms in a 45-minute press briefing before the bishops' afternoon business session began.

"We have not backed off in any way" from what the bishops decided in Dallas, Bishop Lori said. "Anyone who abuses a minor will be removed permanently from ministry. ... A priest or deacon, for the single act of sexual abuse, will be removed permanently."

Bishop Lori, who gave an introductory overview of the changes, said the revisions "make explicit what was implicit in the Dallas charter and the norms."

Concerning the introduction of language about the use of church tribunals to try priests and deacons



Nancy Wiechec/CNS

Cardinal Adam J. Maida, archbishop of Detroit, concentrates during the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' general meeting in Washington Nov. 11. Among topics discussed was the revised norms for clergy sexual abuse.

who have sexually abused minors, he said, "The tribunals do not replace the (diocesan) review boards. The tribunals are concerned with levying canonical penalties."

Bishop Doran said that in church teaching, sexual abuse of a child "is always a serious sin," but over and above that in church law, "when it is done by a priest or deacon, it is a crime."

He reminded reporters of the Gospel passage in which Jesus warned that if anyone scandalizes a child, "it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Bishops Doran and Lori agreed that where the norms say a bishop "shall" apply to Rome for a waiver of the statute of limitations if it has run out in a case that should be brought to trial, the meaning of "shall" is "must."

The revised norms replaced language requiring a diocese or eparchy — an Eastern-rite diocese — to report any case of alleged abuse to public authorities if the victim is still a minor, substituting language that says the diocese will comply with applicable civil law on reporting. More than half the states make religious authorities mandatory reporters of abuse of minors, but many do not.

Bishop Lori referred reporters to the proposed revisions of the charter, however. As revised, the charter still retained the statement, "Dioceses/eparchies will report an allegation of sexual abuse of a person who is a minor to the public authorities."

"The norms represent the minimum. The charter represents the full expanse of our commitment,"

he said.

In an afternoon report to the bishops on the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, Archbishop Flynn explained that later in the week they would be asked to amend the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" to reflect the revisions in the "Essential Norms."

No other changes to the charter except those necessary to accommodate the revisions would be considered, he said.

The ad hoc committee also has suggested the bishops adopt a policy of deleting from the Official Catholic Directory the names of priests who have been removed from their posts because of sexual-abuse charges, Archbishop Flynn

said.

He also said the committee has recommended provisions for helping victims to heal.

The ad hoc committee will have a representative at meetings of the National Review Board, he said.

At a press conference following the afternoon session, Archbishop Flynn responded to questions about how bishops would be held accountable for enacting provisions of the charter and the norms.

"I would not want to be the bishop to ignore the advice of a local review board," he said.

Bishop Lori said because the norms are on the verge of becoming church law, "it's not a matter of discretion" for a bishop to follow or ignore the advice of a review board.

In other matters, by a unanimous voice vote, the bishops authorized their Committee on Education to update a 1990 statement in support of Catholic elementary and secondary schools. The committee plans to bring a new statement on the topic to the bishops at their November 2004 meeting.

Also approved on the first day were a \$53.1 million USCCB budget for 2003 and a 3.5 percent increase for 2004 in the assessment on dioceses to support the conference's work. The bishops also approved 2003 plans for USCCB committees, offices and support units; goals and objectives for 2004-2006; and requests for budgetary exceptions in 2003.

The exceptions included more than \$3 million in spending from the bishops' General Reserve Fund for costs associated with the National Child Protection Office, National Review Board and two studies mandated by the charter.

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