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USCCB OKs abuse norms

Also approved were statements on Iraq, migration, violence

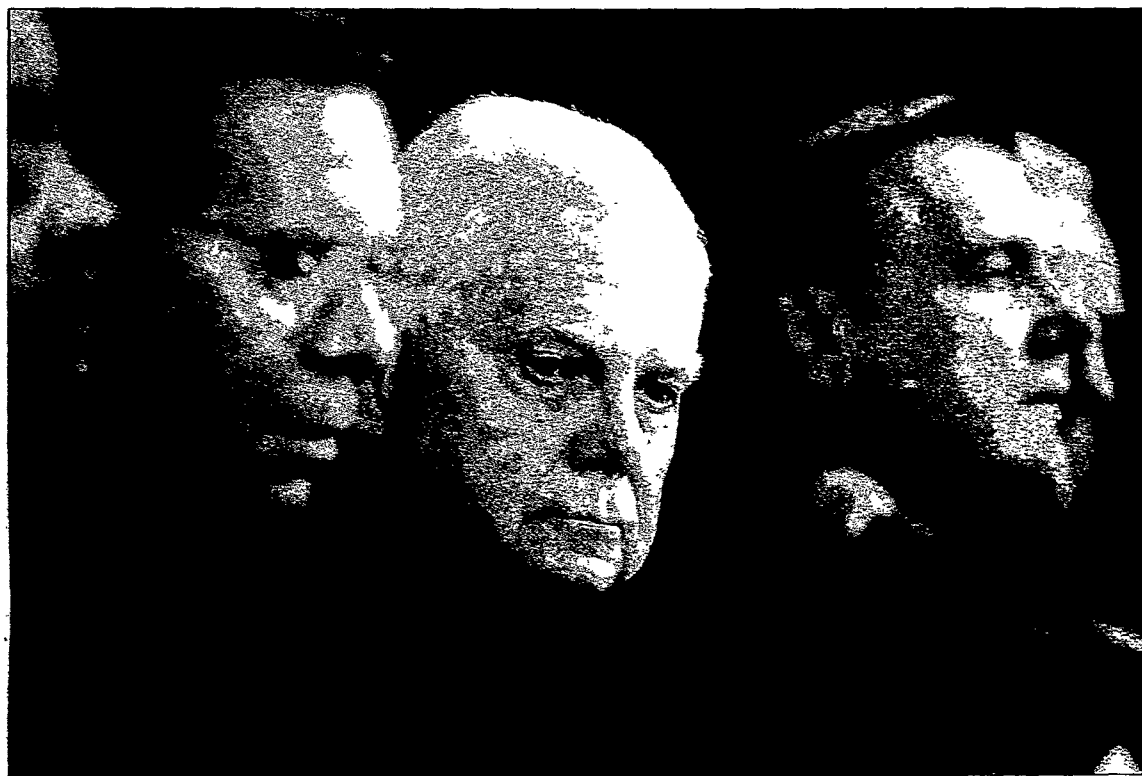
WASHINGTON — Although the U.S. bishops' Nov. 11-14 meeting in Washington featured votes on a historic joint pastoral letter with the bishops of Mexico and a dozen other action items, the fall 2002 assembly will be best remembered for its approval of the revised norms on clergy sex abuse that emerged from a joint Vatican-U.S. commission in October.

At the meeting, which closed with an unusual second executive session, the bishops also held an extended discussion on the just-war ramifications of a possible war with Iraq but made quick work of documents on domestic violence, poverty in the United States and abroad, abortion, Hispanic ministry, several liturgical and canonical matters, stewardship, Catholic schools and border concerns with Mexico.

But the focus for much of the week was on the bishops' response to the clergy sex-abuse crisis.

Opening the meeting Nov. 11, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, vowed, "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."

Two days later, the USCCB gave overwhelming approval, 246-7, to the revised norms which Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, the senior U.S. member of the joint commission, said were intended



Boston Cardinal Bernard F. Law, center, joins other U.S. bishops at a final press conference wrapping up their annual fall meeting in Washington Nov. 13.

both to protect minors and protect bishops' relationships with their priests.

Although many people — from victims' advocates to canon lawyers — say the bishops cannot do both, "the bishops, being men of unity, want to do both," the cardinal said.

During a press conference at Rochester International Airport upon his return from the meeting, Bishop Matthew H. Clark of the Diocese of Rochester said he was not surprised by the overwhelming approval of the revised norms.

"I think this is another significant, solid step in the right direction," he said.

The bishop said the revised norms are structured so that the rights of all involved — including the accused — are

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protected in clergy sexual-abuse cases. "We want to be very careful that justice is done in all cases," he said.

He said he expects quick Vatican approval of the U.S. bishops' revisions, though he did not name a specific time frame. "I anticipate that the Holy See will give recognition in the very near future because Vatican officials were involved in the reshaping," he said.

One local change as a result of the revised norms, he said, will be the addition of "an experienced and respected pas-

tor" to the diocesan task force on clergy sexual abuse. Bishop Clark said he will make that appointment as soon as a willing candidate can be identified.

The bishop said the revised norms won't cause drastic revision of existing diocesan procedures on clergy sexual abuse, which he described as "a sound policy already in place."

The bishops also approved on Nov. 13 slight changes in the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" to conform with the norms; a deliberative process that may lead the bishops to call for a plenary council of the U.S. church; and a statement committing the bishops to "fraternal support, frater-

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