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ROME OKS USCCB'S SEX-ABUSE NORMS

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican has approved the U.S. bishops' revised norms for dealing with clerical sex abuse, saying it is "fully supportive of the bishops' efforts to combat and prevent such evil."

The formal "recognitio" or decree of recognition was signed Dec. 8 by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops.

The decree, released Dec. 16 at the Vatican, was accompanied by a letter from Cardinal Re to Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Approval of the norms makes them binding on all dioceses in the United States, including those of the Eastern Catholic Churches and on members of religious orders.

ANTI-WAR ACTIVIST PHILIP BERRIGAN DIES

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Philip Berrigan, a former Jesuit priest who was a leading figure in the Catholic anti-war movement over the past 40 years, died of liver and kidney cancer Dec. 6 at Jonah House in Baltimore. He was 79.

Best known as the leader of the Catonsville Nine, peace activists who burned 500 draft files at a Selective Service office in Catonsville, Md., in May 1968, Berrigan had estimated that he spent more than 11 years in jail for actions against war and nuclear weapons.

His funeral took place Dec. 9 at St. Peter Claver Church in Baltimore, where he had once served as a priest. Among those attending were George J. and Suzanne McVey of Rochester. George attended Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass., with Berrigan, and his wife went to Marymount College in Tarrytown, N.Y., with Elizabeth McAlister, Berrigan's widow.

In a phone interview, George McVey, who serves at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester, a Catholic Worker facility, noted that he did public relations work for Berrigan in the aftermath of the Catonsville incident.

"He was a beacon for all of us for his commitment to peace, nonviolence, and the poor," McVey said.

Cardinal Law steps down

John Norton/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Following a yearlong scandal over the handling of priestly misconduct cases in the Archdiocese of Boston, Pope John Paul II accepted the resignation of Cardinal Bernard F. Law and named a temporary administrator to head the archdiocese.

In a brief Dec. 13 statement, the Vatican said the pope accepted the resignation of Cardinal Law, Boston's archbishop since 1984, under a church law provision for "illness or other serious reason."

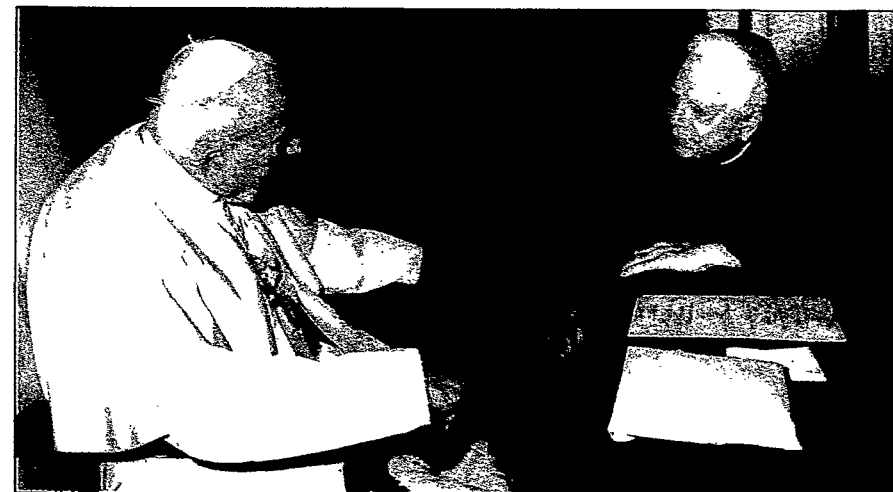
It said the pope appointed Boston's Auxiliary Bishop Richard G. Lennon, 55, to serve as the archdiocese's apostolic administrator, or interim leader. Bishop Lennon served two years as rector of the archdiocese's seminary until being appointed auxiliary bishop last year.

In a statement released by the Vatican, Cardinal Law, 71, said he was "profoundly grateful" to the pope for accepting his resignation, which he said he hoped would help the archdiocese "experience the healing, reconciliation and unity which are so desperately needed."

"To all those who have suffered from my shortcomings and mistakes, I both apologize and from them beg forgiveness," he said.

"The particular circumstances of this time suggest a quiet departure. Please keep me in your prayers," he added.

Cardinal Law's resignation was announced less than an hour after he met privately with the pope at



Catholic Press Photo/CNS

Cardinal Bernard F. Law meets with Pope John Paul II Dec. 13. Following the meeting his resignation as archbishop of Boston was announced. A Vatican press official said the pope was "deeply saddened" by the resignation.

the end of a weeklong unannounced visit to the Vatican. The cardinal was in Rome for consultations amid further disclosures of cases of priestly misconduct in Boston and the specter of a potential archdiocesan bankruptcy filing.

The pope was "deeply saddened" by the resignation, a Vatican press official said.

The Vatican's statement did not mention the question of a potential bankruptcy filing for the archdiocese.

It was also unclear what public role, if any, Cardinal Law would continue to play in the church. As a cardinal, he retains his right to vote in a papal conclave until he turns 80 in November 2011. A Vatican press official said the cardinal also

would remain a member of the various Vatican congregations and commissions on which he serves.

Born in Mexico and ordained in 1961 for the Diocese of Jackson, Miss., Cardinal Law served 11 years as bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo., before being named archbishop of Boston in January 1984. He was made a cardinal by the pope in 1985.

Cardinal Law's resignation makes him the first U.S. prelate to step down over the handling of priestly sex-abuse cases, although several other U.S. bishops have resigned amid allegations that they committed abuse.

Contributing to this story was Cindy Wooden in Rome.

Justice throws out lawsuit against former priest

A state Supreme Court justice has approved a motion to dismiss a sexual-abuse lawsuit against Robert O'Neill, a former diocesan priest.

Justice Robert Lunn dismissed the lawsuit against O'Neill Dec. 12, agreeing with the motion brought by O'Neill's attorney, Richard Curtis. The same suit is still pending against the Diocese of Rochester, which was named as a codefendant.

The diocese also is seeking dismissal of the suit. Paul J. Yesawich III, an attorney representing the diocese, had originally filed a motion to dismiss on Nov. 11. He said he must now refile because two plaintiffs since have been added to the suit and the plaintiffs' complaint had been amended, thereby nullifying his previous motion.

Adding the two new plaintiffs brings the total number of plaintiffs in the case to 10, all adult males. Three men filed the original suit in June against O'Neill and the Rochester Diocese, and five additional men were added in August.

Yesawich said he will refile his motion by mid-January, and that his original rebuttals to the suit will remain unchanged. Yesawich maintains that the applicable statute of limitations has expired; this ultimately was the basis for Justice Lunn's decision to dismiss the charges against O'Neill. The suit claims that the alleged acts of sexual misconduct by O'Neill took place in the 1970s and 1980s, when all of the plaintiffs were minors.

Yesawich also disputes the suit's charge that the diocese made false

statements, intentionally concealed information and failed to prevent or discover O'Neill's alleged sexual misconduct.

Yesawich, noting "the pending nature" of the case, declined to comment on whether Justice Lunn's dismissal with respect to O'Neill weighs favorably toward the diocese receiving a dismissal as well.

Neither Curtis nor John Bansbach, an attorney representing the plaintiffs, could be reached for comment.

O'Neill, 66, was a diocesan priest for nearly 40 years before retiring in 2001. Bishop Matthew H. Clark removed him from all ministry on May 2, 2002, due to allegations that O'Neill had committed sexual abuse in the past.

— Mike Latona