

Catechism, election on bishops' agenda

Marriage, abuse crisis will also be discussed

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — When the U.S. Catholic bishops meet in Washington Nov. 15-18, they will be asked to approve a first-ever U.S. national catechism for adults and elect a new president to lead them for the next three years.

They will be asked to vote on joining a new national ecumenical association, Christian Churches Together in the USA, which will be known by the acronyms CCT or CCTUSA.

One of the most controversial public issues they have faced over the past year will come up on the floor in the form of a report by their task force on how bishops should deal with Catholic public officials whose policy stands contradict Catholic teachings on fundamental issues such as abortion.

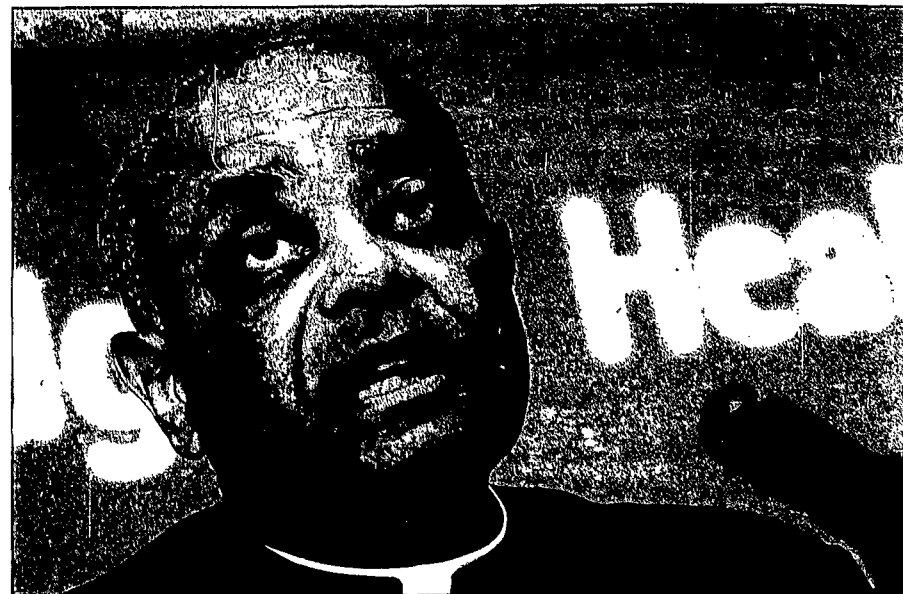
Same-sex marriage has been another hot-button issue this year with

more than a dozen states debating state constitutional amendments to protect the traditional definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman following the court-ordered legalization of same-sex marriages in Massachusetts.

The bishops, who have called for protection of marriage's traditional definition by amending federal and state constitutions, will be asked to approve the writing of a pastoral letter on marriage making it the centerpiece for a multiyear National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage.

The clergy sexual-abuse crisis that emerged in 2002 will have a place on the November agenda as the bishops are asked to approve the inclusion, in the annual diocesan child-protection compliance audits, of yearly data on new reports of alleged abuse in their diocese, how many cases were resolved during the year and associated costs.

They will also be asked to adopt a contingency plan to assure a 2005 compliance audit of dioceses in case the review and revision of the bish-



Paul Haring/CNS

Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, addresses a press conference Feb. 27 in Washington. His three-year term as president of the conference will end in mid-November.

ops' child-protection charter, which calls for such audits, is not completed by June 2005 as planned.

The bishops have received proposed revisions of the charter, but voting on a revised charter is not on the November agenda. Instead, they are being asked to hold structured consultations on the proposed revisions in diocesan and regional meetings around the country and to mail in the results of those consultations by mid-January so that a final revised draft can be presented for debate and a vote when the bishops meet in June 2005.

The Committee on Liturgy will ask the bishops to approve three Spanish texts for liturgical use in the United States. They are a revised rite for the baptism of children, a revised rite of matrimony and a blessing for girls on their 15th birthday, which is to be included in future editions of the Spanish-language book of blessings.

As another step to increase U.S. Catholic collaboration with and assistance to the church in Africa, they will be asked to form a new Ad Hoc Committee to Aid the Church in Africa. One of its functions will be to collect and distribute voluntary contributions for the church in Africa, which is young and rapidly growing but financially poor.

The proposed "United States Catholic Catechism for Adults" is a 456-page document in draft form sent to the bishops before the meeting.

It follows the four-part general structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* issued by Pope John Paul II in 1992 — creed, sacraments, moral life, prayer. But it is adapted in many ways to address specific issues, concerns and questions arising from the context in which U.S. Catholics must try to understand and practice their faith.

If the proposal to participate in Christian Churches Together is approved, it will mark the first time the U.S. Catholic Church becomes a member of such a national ecumenical association of churches.

CCT's purpose is to enable churches and national Christian organizations to grow closer together in Christ, in order to strengthen their Christian witness in the world.

At the end of the November meeting Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., completes his three-year term as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop William S. Skylstad of Spokane, Wash., ends his term as vice president. Their successors will be elected during the meeting.

This year's 10-nominee list for the presidential and vice presidential elections includes cardinals for the first time since 1992.

The nominees, in alphabetical order, are: Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein of Indianapolis; Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Denver; Bishop Blase J. Cupich of Rapid City, S.D.; Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of Milwaukee; Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago; Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz.; Archbishop William J. Levada of San Francisco; Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia; Bishop Skylstad; and Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh.

After electing a president the bishops will elect a new vice president from among the remaining nine nominees — or remaining eight if Bishop Skylstad is not elected president, since USCCB rules bar a bishop from holding the same office for two consecutive terms.

The bishops will also be asked to approve a consolidated USCCB budget of \$129.4 million for 2005, about \$2.3 million more than the 2004 budget.

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