

BISHOPS ADOPT PRINCIPLED POLICY

On November 13, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) passed a policy on priestly sexual abuse that the Catholic League hailed as “principled” and “a model of fairness.” The policy reflected the work of the mixed U.S.-Vatican commission that was done a week earlier.

Francis Cardinal George, who was one of four panel members from the U.S. who drafted the revisions, said the new norms are “fairer overall.” That was the league’s conclusion as well. William Donohue commented that “Cardinal George, Archbishop William Levada, Bishop Thomas Doran and Bishop William Lori, along with the Vatican contingent, did a magnificent job.” He added that “Bishop Wilton Gregory, who heads the USCCB, also deserves great praise.”

In many respects, the new norms are stronger than the Dallas ones. First of all, they apply to all priests: the Dallas charter applied only to diocesan priests, leaving religious order priests—fully a third of the clergy—exempt from coverage. Second, the new norms explicitly say that when “even a single act of sexual abuse” is either admitted or established, the “priest or deacon will be removed permanently from ecclesiastical ministry, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state, if the case warrants.”

This is a no-nonsense approach. So is the new emphasis on putting an end to the practice of transferring a guilty priest to another parish for ministerial assignment: it is specifically prohibited.

The central message of the new approach is this: There will be no more tolerance for intolerable behavior. The kids come first. At the same time, however, the bishops made it clear that this will not be done at the expense of tossing overboard

the rights of the accused.

Every chance we had on TV we emphasized that this policy applies only to the two-thirds of one percent of priests who have been accused of sexual abuse. The other 99.3 percent are wholly unaffected.

We also released a statement urging the bishops to “ignore rogue Catholics.” To be specific, we mentioned the 22 reform groups who comprise Catholic Organizations for Renewal. “As anyone who has tracked these disaffected Catholics knows,” said Donohue, “their goal is to reconstruct the Church from top to bottom.”

In short, there can be no dialogue with those who reject the Church’s teachings on sexuality. Dialogue is predicated on listening and all this crowd wants to do is dictate.