

BISHOPS ASSEMBLE IN DALLAS; REFORMS FORTHCOMING

All eyes will be on Dallas when the U.S. bishops meet June 13-15 to discuss the sex abuse scandal that has rocked the Church. National guidelines are expected though the details are still in dispute.

Virtually every media outlet in the nation will cover the event. Indeed, every room in every hotel will be booked as thousands descend upon Dallas. Amid high expectations, some are worried that the meeting has been oversold, thus setting the stage for disappointment. At stake is the credibility of the hierarchy to settle this matter once and for all.

On the table for discussion are policies governing “zero tolerance,” a “one-strike-and-you’re out” rule and what to do about old cases. Some, like Cardinal George, have expressed reservations over what is meant by zero tolerance. Others, like Cardinal Bevilacqua, have been pressing for very strict measures. It remains to be seen how tightly written the guidelines will be.

The meeting in Dallas follows the events of Rome. In April, 12 U.S. cardinals met with the Holy Father regarding the sex abuse scandal in the U.S. When the meeting was concluded, William Donohue issued the following comment to the media:

“The meeting of the U.S. cardinals in Rome proved to be fruitful if incomplete. No one realistically thought that this serious matter would be resolved in a few days, and that is why Bishop Wilton Gregory was right to dub the letters ‘skeletal’ in nature. It was reassuring to hear Bishop Gregory say that there was a growing consensus towards a

zero tolerance policy for sexual abuse."

Donohue also said he was glad that the cardinals drew a distinction between the Church's proposed response to child molesters and to cases that are less egregious. "There is a profound difference," Donohue said, "between a predatory priest who victimizes minors and a priest who, straight or gay, drops his guard one evening with an adult. While the latter is patently wrong and inexcusable it would smack of an obscene moral equivalency to treat both instances the same."

In what was perhaps the most significant statement made by the cardinals was the recognition that the Pastors of the Church must "promote the correct moral teaching of the Church"; it also called for bishops to publicly "reprimand individuals who spread dissent and groups which advance ambiguous approaches to pastoral care."