

BISHOPS DRAFT REASONABLE DOCUMENT

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on the proposed document by the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse that will be voted on when the bishops meet in Dallas next week:

"The draft is a reasonable document that should allay the worst fears of a skeptical laity. It is thoughtful, pointed and fair to all parties. Those who worked on the draft have won the support of the Catholic League.

"There will be the effect of 'zero tolerance' for all future cases involving the sexual abuse of minors and for all previous instances involving more than one transgression. This means that there will be an appeal to the Vatican to defrock the priest and return him to lay status.

"In past instances where one incident occurred, the offender will have to satisfy several criteria for him to remain a priest in good standing: a) he must be diagnosed as not being a pedophile b) he must be able to demonstrate to a review board that he is free of criminal and civil claims c) he has to agree to counseling and d) he must accept public disclosure of his offense. If he does not meet these and other criteria, he cannot return to public ministry, he cannot wear the priest's collar and he cannot celebrate Mass in public.

"Gone is the secrecy that has colored past incidents of sexual abuse. There will be no more confidentiality agreements 'except for grave and substantial reasons brought forward by the victim.' Moreover, when a priest is transferred to another diocese, the secrecy that has marked the past will also end: before he is assigned, his personnel records will be turned over to the receiving bishop or major superior.

“There will be time in Dallas to fine-tune this proposal. Surely there is a difference between someone who had one encounter with a minor thirty-five years ago—and has been clean ever since—and someone who offended thirty-five days ago. This is something that can be worked out. But for right now, the draft is an excellent beginning.”