

CLARIFICATION OF DRAFT ON SEXUAL ABUSE NEEDED

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on reactions to the proposed document by the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse and the need for greater clarification:

"The Catholic League said yesterday that the proposed document on sexual abuse was 'thoughtful, pointed and fair to all parties.' We stand by that assessment and question the motives of those who have flown off the handle condemning the bishops. Nonetheless, the document needs clarification.

"The sticking point in the draft is the section that says that in cases where a priest was guilty of one previous incident, and was diagnosed as not being a pedophile, it should be up to a lay board to decide what to do. It is not entirely clear what is meant by this. Indeed, we share the position of Cardinal Adam Maida that this part of the document is confusing. That is why it would be better to simply adopt the stance outlined by Cardinal Roger Mahony, Cardinal William Keeler, Bishop Wilton Gregory, Bishop William Skylstad and Bishop Joseph Galante and make no exceptions for even one incident of sexual abuse.

"It is understandable that some bishops want to leave a window open for those priests who are not pedophiles yet have committed one act of sexual misconduct. Their intent is noble. But in the interest of clarity, and in the interest of settling this issue once and for all, it makes no sense at this late date to allow any exceptions for past cases. Lay Catholics, as every survey shows, want unambiguous language when it comes to the sexual abuse of minors. In this regard, the newspaper advertisement that will be run in three Los Angeles newspapers tomorrow by Cardinal Roger Mahony is

exemplary. It is our hope that it will serve as a workable model for the Dallas meeting."