

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.”

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."