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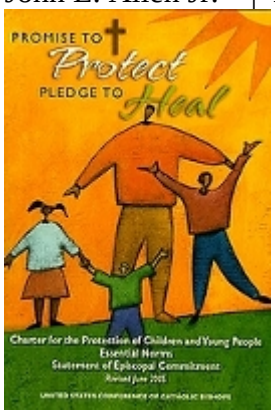
Vatican guidelines seek consistency on sex abuse

John L. Allen Jr. | May. 16, 2011



The cover of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," the U.S. Bishops' directives to dioceses in dealing with clergy sexual abuse, which was approved in 2002 and revised in 2005. (CNS photo) (May 16, 2011)

In an effort to promote a uniform global standard in response to the clerical sexual abuse crisis, the Vatican today issued a set of ?guidelines? for bishops? conferences around the world, and instructed conferences which don?t yet have policies on sex abuse to draft them by May 2012.

Critics of the Vatican?s response to the crisis have long pointed to what they regard as a serious lack of global consistency. Priests are subject to a tough ?zero tolerance? policy in the United States, for instance, meaning permanent removal from ministry for even one act of sexual abuse of a minor, but that?s often not the case in other parts of the world.

While the new guidelines do not impose ?zero tolerance? around the world, they do aim to promote a more coordinated global approach.

The Vatican guidelines do not, however, impose a single global rule for cooperation with civil authorities, they do not clarify what should happen in the case of a priest who commits abuse in one jurisdiction but relocates to another, and they insist that independent lay review boards "cannot substitute" for the authority of individual bishops.

The Vatican today claimed that the guidelines represent a ?very important new step? towards regaining ?full credibility,? while a statement from the Survivors? Network of those Abused by Priests denounced them as a PR exercise which ?will change little? ? in part, according to SNAP, because the guidelines do nothing to curb ?the virtually limitless power of bishops.?

?This isn?t decisive action,? the SNAP statement said. ?This is yet another unenforceable ?recommendation? that gives untrustworthy bishops continued power to abuse their power.?

Read John Allen's full report here: **Vatican guidelines seek consistency on sex abuse** [1]

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