

Most bishops support lay review board, Cardinal Mahony says
Kerry can receive communion in Los Angeles, says cardinal
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Amid tensions between the lay-led body created to investigate the sexual abuse crisis and some U.S. bishops, an American cardinal has said any attempt to eliminate the National Review Board would be "short-sighted," and represents only a minority view among the bishops.

In the same interview with NCR in Rome May 13, Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles also said he would not withhold Communion from pro-choice Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry. The full text of the interview can be found in the Special Documents section at NCRonline.org: Mahony Interview.

The 68-year-old cardinal, generally seen as on the church's moderate-to-progressive wing, said some bishops were never comfortable with the National Review Board and the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

"In Dallas, [some bishops] voted for this reluctantly, and never did like this involvement of any review board or a national office or anything else," Mahony said. "They feel, we got a report out of them, we got John Jay, now let's get rid of the whole thing."

"I personally think that's a very short-sighted approach," Mahony said. Reflecting on his experience with a lay review board in Los Angeles, he said, "The involvement of our wonderful lay leaders has been a real grace."

On Kerry, Mahony said he was not comfortable with talk from some of his fellow bishops about denying Communion.

"I'm puzzled by people rattling sanctions at the moment. That has not been our tradition over the years," Mahony said.

He said Kerry could receive Communion in Los Angeles.

"Our priests know that," said Mahony, who had a brief private meeting with Kerry May 5.

As NCR reported May 11, the interim chair of the National Review Board, Illinois Justice Anne Burke, has charged that the board was "manipulated" because it had not been informed that some bishops want to delay a second round of audits to monitor compliance with the bishops' sex abuse policy.

In turn, some bishops have complained about the tone of Burke's criticism.

Mahony called the anti-review board sentiment a "minority view," and predicted that at their June meeting the bishops will vote to move ahead with a second round of audits. The Los Angeles archdiocese, he said, has already offered a date in September for its audit.

"I have had to remind some of my brothers," Mahony said, "that we are the ones who asked for this. ... We voted it in."

NCR's report revealed that a group of more than a dozen Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania bishops wrote to Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, to warn against the autonomy with which the National Review Board is operating.

Mahony also did not share that concern.

"I understand, especially in the first year or two, their desire to be [independent], and to be seen as independent," he said. "We bishops got ourselves and the church into this problem, so I can understand that, and I have no problem with that whatsoever. None."

At the same time, Mahony had his own criticisms of the National Review Board, especially the report on the sex abuse crisis it released in tandem with the separate study prepared by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

"I thought it was very unfortunate that they decided to release it the same day as the John Jay study, having not seen the John Jay study," he said. "I thought that was very unhelpful to all of us, and I thought their report reflects the lack of that context. ... Their report was greatly diminished in its importance and meaning because of that."

He called on the National Review Board to seek better communication with the bishops.

"I think the board needs to have regular meetings for the next two or three years, maybe at a regional level," he said.

Mahony said he had brought up the sexual abuse crisis in his private meeting with John Paul II on May 11.

"He said he knew this is a difficult time for us, and he wanted to reemphasize his prayers for the church in the United States, especially people who have suffered," Mahony said of the pope's response.

"He mentioned priests, especially good priests whose reputations have been caught up in the shadow of all of this and who have found it difficult."

On the subject of denying Communion to Catholic politicians, Mahony said canon law envisions the imposition of sanctions only after a judicial process, except in very grave cases of public sin.

"With respect to holy Communion, it is up to the communicant to decide whether they are in a state of grace and worthy to receive the Eucharist. Each one of us makes that decision. The church never has the minister of Communion make that decision, except in that rare case," he said.

"I also believe we will do far better in changing hearts and minds to sit down with our Catholics who are running for office ... meet with them informally and dialogue," he said.