



Cardinal John Carberry (l.) stands in prayer at the opening session of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops with Bishop James Rausch, Archbishop Joseph Bernardin and Henry Robert, parliamentarian.

Social Justice Themes Mark Bishops' Meeting

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — In an atmosphere of prayer the leaders of the nation's 48 million Roman Catholics presented a strong social justice posture as they ended four days of deliberations here, taking stands on issues ranging from housing to farm labor to the nation's economic crisis.

At the same time, the U.S. bishops took action to launch their broadest anti-abortion thrust, revised norms for the training of seminarians, set guidelines for the training of deacons in religious communities and endorsed the forthcoming 1976 Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia.

The bishops also approved a statement on Catholic-Jewish relations that stressed the "Jewish origins" of Christianity and called for continuing studies of the relationship between the Jewish people and the people of the New Covenant.

Unofficially, the meeting of some 300 members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) served to open up for continued attention and debate such thorny questions as the ordination of women to the priesthood, the "restructuring" of Catholic parishes, the pastoral problems of divorced and remarried Catholics, and the role of homosexual Catholics in the life of the Church.

The four-day bishops' meeting (Nov. 17-20), operated under a new format which included workshop sessions on the implementation of the new Penance rite, the evangelization of black Catholics, and human values. The meeting also reflected a heavier public emphasis on prayer as the bishops approached the more pressing and controversial problems of the U.S. Catholic Church.

Besides gathering for their annual mid-meeting Mass at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception — this year honoring the nation's newest saint, Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton — the bishops began their deliberations with a celebrated Mass at the hotel where they met.

They also began each daily session with a lengthy prayer period that included Scripture readings, hymns and calls for God's blessing on the discussions.

In his opening address to the bishops, Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin of Cincinnati, NCCB president, acknowledged that ordination of women to the priesthood and the question of divorced and remarried Catholics are major pastoral problems for the Church. He urged the bishops

to be "sensitive" to all those seeking help.

Although he stressed in a closing statement that he reaffirmed Church teaching that "women are not to be ordained" and that sacramental marriage is "indissoluble," the matters were brought before the bishops in other reports and pastoral responses to the questions were urged.

The bishops were also told that homosexual Catholics — principally represented by an organization called Dignity — were especially anxious to have the bishops support them in the area of "gay civil rights."

Archbishop Bernardin, in his opening talk, said the bishops must "apply the teaching of Christ to all difficult situations that confront us." But, he added, "we must never write off anyone; we must remain in dialogue."

In a major action during the meeting, the bishops unanimously approved a long-range, multi-faceted "pastoral plan of action" aimed at the passage of a Constitutional amendment to protect unborn human life.

The plan calls for action against abortion on the state, diocesan and parish levels, and for concerted efforts in "Congressional districts" to influence legislators on the abortion issue.

While the latter efforts are not to be specifically identified with the Church's "pastoral efforts," the plan said that a comprehensive pro-life legislative program must include efforts to pass a Constitutional amendment providing "maximum protection" to the unborn.

The bishops unanimously approved statements on housing and on the economic situation in the U.S. In them, they called for improvements in employment, a decent living wage, and "a decent home for every American family."

They advocated broad education and action programs on "economic justice" and strongly rejected any attempts by government or industry to control inflation by maintaining high levels of unemployment.

In a resolution on farm labor legislation in California, the bishops commended the development and passage of the law providing secret-ballot elections to farm workers for union representation. They called for continued implementation of the law and said, "it would be a

tragedy" if the law's purposes were thwarted.

In their statement on Catholic-Jewish relations, the bishops noted that the document marked the tenth anniversary of the Vatican II statement on the Jews and urged Catholics to look upon Judaism "as rich in religious values and worthy of our sincere respect and esteem."

The statement did not address the current Middle East conflicts or the controversial United Nations resolution on Zionism. It did treat of the "peoplehood" of the Jews and their ties to the land of Israel.

During the annual four-day meeting a variety of proposals were made during the general sessions and workshops. Among them were:

- * A proposal to establish an office for "women's concerns" within the U.S. Catholic Conference, the bishops' secretariat, to provide a focus on women's issues

- * A call for fuller participation by black Catholics in the life of the Church as a "black" community, and a plea for greater cooperation by bishops in allowing black Catholics to be responsible for the Church in their communities

- * A proposal that Catholics in dialogue with other Christians should return to the theological basics of "faith and justification" if they want, realistically, to assess such world problems as human development, justice and peace.

- * An exhortation to the bishops to respond to "attacks" on the teaching authority of the Church through their own Doctrinal Committee and to counteract dissent and denial of basic Church teachings on papal infallibility, extra-marital sex, and other issues causing "scandal, confusion, and consternation" among Catholics

- * A plea to the bishops to express their concern over growing interference by governmental agencies in the operation of Catholic colleges and universities

- * A request that the bishops study the current parish structure "to find a model more adaptable to our times" and to the vision of Vatican II.

The bishops will reinstitute their former practice of holding Spring general meetings in 1976, and will meet again in May in Chicago. Some regional groups of bishops also will conduct regional meetings in the Spring.



Discussing plans for the upcoming Bishop Kearney High School Parents' Clubs Tureen supper are (from left) co-chairmen Thomas and Marty Hussey and Marge and Ken Waehner.

Tureen Supper at BK

One of the highlights of the Christmas Season at Bishop Kearney High School is the annual tureen supper sponsored by the Parents' Clubs. Thursday, Dec. 11, is the date set for the event which will begin with an evening Mass at 6:30 p.m. at the school cafeteria. For the supper, following the Mass, each couple is asked to bring a favorite meat, vegetable, or salad dish and \$1

per person. Entertainment for the evening will be provided by the Bishop Kearney Singers under the direction of Sister Joseph Mary.

Co-chairmen for this event are Thomas and Marty Hussey and Marge and Ken Waehner. The Brothers and Sisters at Bishop Kearney will be guests for the evening.



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