

# Bishops Inaugurate 5-Year 'Action' Plan

Chicago (RNS) — A package of reform proposals that grew out of the Detroit Call to Action conference will become the basis for a five-year social action plan of the U.S. Roman Catholic Church.

The bishops voted to refer all 182 recommendations of the conference to committees but indicated opposition to some of them as contrary to Church discipline and teaching.

However, consideration is to be given even to those recommendations which the bishops opposed, such as calling for ordination of women, an end to priestly celibacy, more freedom of choice in contraception and removal of strictures against divorced and remarried Catholics.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops voted 179-7 to approve a 4,500-word document that was intended as its "preliminary and partial response" to the Call to Action proposals.

As for the women's ordination question, the document, as approved, says the bishops "affirm the conclusion of the Holy See's recent 'Declaration on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood' — that the Church 'does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.'"

The bishops approved an amendment which declares: "We invite theologians to join us in a serious study of the issues to which the document addresses itself. The further study and clarification of these issues may allay some of the anguish by many whose love for the Church is unquestioned."

The section on women's ordination concludes, "There is a pressing need to identify, formally authenticate, and expand ministries performed by women in the Church. Efforts to open up new and

greater opportunities for leadership by women are imperative..."

Concerning recommendations on birth control made by the Call to Action conference, the bishops' response document says, "We have frequently expressed our fidelity to the Church's teaching on birth control. As pastors and teachers we too are concerned over 'conflict and anguish' with respect to this issue. In rejecting contraception as a morally legitimate means of limiting births, the Church is proclaiming and defending the value of procreation itself, a value attacked, though in different ways, by both the ideology of contraception and by contraceptive acts. For this reason, we have urged, and urge again, prayerful reflection concerning the necessity to live according to this teaching, so that the grace of God will give to all couples the power to be faithful to this mission of expressing in their lives the

life-giving love of Christ for His people."

Regarding recommendations on priestly celibacy and the ordination of married men as priests, the bishops' reply was: "We concur instead with the longstanding view of the Church, as expressed overwhelmingly by the 1971 Synod of Bishops. Priestly celibacy has great value as an eschatological sign and an instrument for pastoral service, and the 'law of priestly celibacy existing in the Latin Church is to be kept in its entirety.' Also, 'excepting always the right of the Supreme Pontiff, the priestly ordination of married men is not permitted, even in particular cases.'"

The bishops noted that participants in the Detroit consultation "spoke out forcefully of their concern for many issues of justice and peace in our country and the world."

"Recognizing that only

with sacrifice will this nation be able to provide meaningful jobs, decent housing, quality education and equal opportunity for all its people, while furthering the cause of peace, development, and human rights internationally, the recommendations express a clear commitment, which we share to continue to work for these goals."

The bishops noted that the consultation had proposed a large agenda for national policy on many issues.

"We wish in particular," they said, "to state our recognition of 'the dangers and evils of the arms race and an aggressive military posture' and to acknowledge our responsibility, in collaboration with others, to encourage 'peace education programs' which will illuminate the moral dimensions of this urgent issue and foster responsible efforts on behalf of arms control and

disarmament.

The bishops noted that there was conflict between "a few" of the Detroit conference recommendations "and what the Church teaches." This, they said, "underlines our responsibility to express this teaching more clearly and effectively. As bishops we cannot compromise Catholic teachings. Yet we have the responsibility to do whatever we can, with God's grace, to clarify the evangelical principles which lie behind these teachings, as we strive to improve our efforts to catechize on these matters."

An ad hoc committee, to be chaired by a bishop and to be composed of members of the NCCB and of members drawn from the advisory council, will establish deadlines for its work. It will report on the implementation process at NCCB general meetings in November for the next five years.

## Bishops ... More to Come

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Eleven pages of amendments were worked through for 2 1/2 hours.

Archbishop Bernardin described the documents as supportive of the Bicentennial consultation results and a solid indication that "we are beginning to address these issues."

**2. Repeal of the penalty of excommunication for divorced Catholics** was done in a closed session. While not substantive in its practical effects, it symbolizes the desire of the Church to bring about reconciliation with those who have undergone divorce and separation or remarriage.

**3. Communion in the hand.** This resolution, which the bishops have now

considered three times in seven years, failed to receive the necessary two thirds vote (181 of 274 de jure members) of the total membership of the NCCB — a requirement for all canonical questions established by Rome. Because the number favoring this change fell short of the required votes by a very small number, the president next week will send out ballots to those absent. No bishop was willing to speculate on the outcome.

**4. Laity secretariat.** The bishops passed a resolution establishing a national office to gather resources and develop models for involving the laity in more ways in the life of the Church.

**5. Statement on American Indians.** The result of five

years of preparation this document was approved by the bishops and gives solid support for native Americans in the quest for just and humane treatment in our land, and leadership to the dioceses in what they should do as their ministry to Indian people. Vote was 254-8-3.

**6. Human rights in Eastern Europe.** The bishops approved, 252-2-0, a statement deploring the denial of the "human right" to religious liberty in Eastern Europe. The position supports statements already made by the bishops of West Germany and Poland.

**7. Resolution on TV's 'Jesus of Nazareth.'** The NCCB unanimously approved a resolution of support to NBC for "the recent television dramatization of the life of our Lord" calling it a "profoundly spiritual experience for millions of viewers." They further commended Franco Zeffirelli and all associated with the program, noting that a "large audience attracted by (it) demonstrates conclusively that, when treated with sensitive professionalism, religious themes are capable of winning widespread viewer acceptance in prime time television."

**8. Campaign for Human Development.** The future of the campaign was not determined due to lack of time. The resolution to continue the campaign for the poor in the United States for five years will be voted on by mail ballot in the next two or three weeks. Archbishop Bernardin stated afterwards that "I fully expect the campaign will continue."

More than 20 official observers were chosen to audit the three-day meeting, including laity from various organizations, religious men and women and diocesan priests.

All the meetings were open to the press with the exception of a special session on Wednesday afternoon. The highlights were broadcast on cable television for the first time on two-hour programs each evening to more than 60 dioceses having facilities to receive and distribute the beam, courtesy of Chicago's Catholic Television Studio.

## 'Yes' Vote Shy of 2/3 Communion in Hand Still Not Settled

Chicago (RNS)—After a lengthy and spirited debate, the nation's Roman Catholic bishops — on their third try moved within striking distance of approving a proposal that would allow individual bishops to provide Catholics with the option of receiving Holy Communion in the hand.

But the vote fell just short of a two-thirds majority needed, and absentee "de jure" members of the bishops' conference will have to be polled by mail to determine whether the necessary majority can be reached.

The recommendation by the bishops liturgy committee, headed by Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco, was debated publicly by the bishops in 1970 and in 1973 and rejected both times. It has already been put into practice in 53 countries, with Vatican approval.

The debate on the issue, which originally was slated to be carried out in executive session during the Chicago meeting, was opened to the press and observers. More than 15 prelates, including several cardinals, addressed the question, the majority of them favoring adoption.

In its proposal, the bishops' liturgy committee asked that the Vatican approve a recommendation that individual U.S. bishops be authorized to allow Communion in the hand, preceded by thorough catechesis. The committee noted that the "earlier usage" of receiving Communion in the hand should be a free option" for each individual at Mass and said it was "dignified and becoming" and a sign of the mature, baptized Christian.

Among the dozen bishops who spoke in favor of the recommendation was Cardinal Timothy Manning of Los Angeles, who said the Irish hierarchy had recently gone through the same anguish but once permission was granted by the Vatican a "tremendous tranquility"

was achieved on the question.

Cardinal Lawrence Sheehan, retired Archbishop of Baltimore, said that since the last debate on the question in 1973 there have been "significant changes" in peoples' attitudes toward Communion in the hand. He added that it is becoming almost impossible for the existing law (prescribing Communion on the tongue) to be effectively enforced.

Bishop William McManus of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., chairman of the bishops' education committee, said his pastoral experience with young people indicates that youth wants a choice, an exercise of options. "Young people are looking for a Church where there is freedom — an opportunity to make choices."

Several bishops from states bordering Mexico and Canada — where the practice of Communion in the hand is approved — said their priests are having difficulty responding to the needs of Catholics who cross the border. They urged that the option of Communion in the hand be made available.

Among the prelates arguing against Communion in the hand was Cardinal John Carberry of St. Louis. At one point, he warned against the sacred host being taken from the churches and used in "devil worship" or Black Masses.

He said he had received more than 1,000 letters rejecting any change in the current practice of receiving the Eucharist. "We are living in an irreverent age" and this is a "profound decision because it will reverse the tradition of 1,000 years."

Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia said that because the practice of receiving Communion in the hand is becoming more widespread in this country that does not mean "we should legalize an abuse." He urged the bishops to draw the line and reject the proposal.

Among those who backed the request were Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan of Worcester, Mass., and Bishop Roger Mahony of Fresno, who noted that many Mexicans live in California and bring their cultural practices along with them. In Mexico they had the option in receiving Communion.

Bishop Elden Curtiss of Helena, Mont., said conservatives have been after him because he has not tried to force Communion on the tongue on Canadians who come to his diocese.

Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York noted that the Holy See has approved Communion in the hand for 53 countries, including Canada and Mexico, and indicated that if the option were available everyone would be encouraged to receive the Eucharist, regardless of the method followed.

Bishop Odore Gendron of Manchester, noted that the northeast has large numbers of Canadians and parishes have great difficulty responding to these people. "If we are listening to people we should give them this option," he said.

## Hospital Fetes Its Volunteers

Adult volunteers have worked a total of 25,533 hours at St. Mary's Hospital, service directors reported at a recent awards luncheon. Special recognition was accorded Miss Esther Foley, who has served for 40 years.

Also cited for long service were Mrs. Walter Brayer and Mrs. William Maxcy, 30 years; Mrs. Raymond Hosenauer, 25 years; Mrs. Raymond Cugel, 20 years.

The following women received ten-year awards: Mrs. Raymond Creedon, Mrs. James Maher, Miss Geraldine Lochner, Mrs. Mary Kiess and Mrs. Harold Nunn.

## Excommunication Vote 'Can Foster Healing'

Bishop Cletus O'Donnell, chairman of the NCCB Committee for Canonical Affairs, issued a statement explaining the action of the bishops at their meeting in Chicago to seek to remove the church penalties of excommunication from those divorced and remarried.

Bishop O'Donnell noted that "Most violations of church law and certainly most moral transgressions are not punished by church law... in 1884 the bishops of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore judged that remarriage after divorce prohibited then as it is now should have the added sanction of excommunication."

"After study and reflections," the statement explains "the bishops of the United States have concluded that the removal of this particular excommunication, which is not in effect in other countries, can foster healing and reconciliation for many Catholics remarried after divorce."

The effect of the bishops' decision Bishop O'Donnell states is that, "It welcomes back to the community of believers in Christ all who may have been separated by

excommunication. It offers them a share in all the public prayers of the church and community. It restores their right to take part in church services... perhaps above all it is a gesture of love and reconciliation from the other members of the church."

"The church cannot recognize as valid and sacramental those second marriages after divorce" without proper church approval, the statement explained; "The lifting of the burden of excommunication does not of itself permit those who have remarried after divorce to receive the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist."

The decision the statement concludes, "Will not answer all questions by any means. It is only a single step but it offers encouragement and hope to disaffected or alienated Catholics. Pastoral counseling, resolution of problems of conscience, evaluation of first marriages by diocesan tribunals, all are needed. For the thorough preparation for marriage and support for marriage and family life by the whole community of the church are the only genuine solutions."