



Confidence

A confident little boy reached up to shake hands with Pope Paul during a relaxed moment in the pontiff's weekly audience on Nov. 23, at the Vatican. (RNS)

USCC Issues Guidance On Sterilizations

Washington (RNS) - The U.S. Catholic Conference's top policy-making body declared here that Catholic hospitals can never approve "any sterilization procedure" meant to prevent birth, except when a "more serious evil" is threatened.

According to a commentary on a 1975 Vatican statement, issued by the 48-bishop USCC Administrative Board, "direct sterilization is a grave evil" and in rare cases when a Catholic health facility may allow a sterilization "it should be made clear that the hospital disapproves of direct sterilization and that material cooperation in no way implies approval."

Catholic organizations operate 730 hospitals in the United States - 649 general hospitals, 81 special hospitals.

Originally prepared by a subcommittee of the USCC Committee on Health Affairs in cooperation with the Doctrine Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the commentary was recently revised at the request of the Administrative Board. It focuses on the question of "material cooperation" and its application to the case of Catholic hospitals which are under "some kind of duress or pressure" to tolerate sterilizations.

Both the commentary and the Vatican document upon which it is based stress that they are not laying down a policy on sterilization in Catholic hospitals but providing guidance for handling exceptional cases. Final responsibility in these cases resides in the bishop of the diocese in which the hospital is located.

The USCC commentary stressed that Catholic hospitals cannot approve sterilizations performed as a means of preventing future pregnancy that "one fears might aggravate a serious cardiac, renal, circulatory or other disorder."

Freely approving direct sterilization constitutes formal cooperation in evil and would be "totally unbecoming the mission" of the hospital as well as "contrary to the necessary proclamation of moral order," it said.

Observing that there will not ordinarily be any need

for "objectively immoral procedures," the commentary said "material cooperation (as opposed to formal cooperation) will be justified only where the hospital because of some kind of duress ... cannot reasonably exercise the autonomy it has."

The commentary said that in judging the morality of cooperation in sterilization "a clear distinction should be made between the reason for the sterilization and the reason for the cooperation."

"If the cooperation is to remain material, the reason for the cooperation must be something over and above the reason for the sterilization," it stressed. "The hospital has to be able to point to some kind of ... pressure apart from the reason of the sterilization itself." The commentary noted that the allowing of material cooperation would have to be based on "the danger of an even more serious evil" such as the closing of the hospital.

World and National

Father Andrew Greeley, sociologist and author of more than 50 books and two syndicated newspaper columns, was named winner of the 24th Thomas More Medal, an award made annually by the Thomas More Association in Chicago "for the most distinguished contribution to Catholic literature." The award was given specifically for Father Greeley's book, "The American Catholic: A Social Portrait" ... A third international symposium on natural family planning will take place at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., June 16-22 to mark the 10th anniversary of Pope Paul's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* ... A survey of Church of God members found that they consider Little House on the Prairie and The Waltons the most acceptable television shows in prime time. The least acceptable were Maude and Soap.

Edward Gierek, the Polish Communist Party chief, visited Rome and Pope Paul VI last week. He is the first leader of Poland's Communist regime to meet with a pope, although 92 per cent of Poland's 34 million population are Roman Catholics ... The National Assembly of Women Religious, an organization of Roman Catholic nuns dedicated to justice ministries in the Church and society, has opened its membership to "all women who share our justice goals; and called for a two-year focus on two areas - women in the Church and the economic system.

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