

General Absolution 'Hot Potato' for Synod of Bishops

By NC News Service

General absolution has emerged as the "hot potato" of the sixth world Synod of Bishops, but it has not been the assembly's only focus of discussion.

Several synod delegates have stressed the importance of linking social justice to the synod's theme of reconciliation and penance.

In fact, as the month-long synod moved toward its close, speakers had covered a vast spectrum of topics as diverse as venial sin and

reconciliation with the Jews.

The 1983 synod began at the Vatican Sept. 29 to consider "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church." The synod is an advisory body to Pope John Paul II.

The 221 delegates have expressed such strongly differing

opinions on general absolution during the meeting's first two weeks that Auxiliary Bishop Stephen Naidoo of Cape Town, South Africa, termed general absolution the synod's "hot potato."

During the synod's first seven working days, general absolution came up a number of times in 176 oral and 57 written interventions presented to the synod's full assembly.

"It is physically impossible for most of the faithful to confess their sins individually once a year to a priest whom they can see only once or twice a year," Archbishop Gabriel Wako of Khartoum, Sudan, told the synod. His sentiments reflected concerns expressed by other bishops from mission countries having a shortage of priests.

But Archbishop Dermot Ryan of Dublin, Ireland, warned the synod that if general absolution continues, private confession could fall into disuse.

Current church norms

allow for general absolution under special circumstances and only with the understanding that a penitent will, as soon as possible, individually confess serious sins to a priest.

In the synod's opening days the four elected bishops representing the U.S. hierarchy submitted a carefully worded joint-intervention asking for clarifications regarding the relationship between general absolution and individual confession.

While strongly upholding the need for individual confession, the four Americans asked: How can the obligation of subsequent confession of mortal sins already forgiven through general absolution be shown to have grounds in human needs as well as the structure of the sacrament of penance?

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, addressed the issue raised by the U.S. delegation. He said

in a subsequent synod intervention that the penitent who receives general absolution must confess mortal sins as soon as possible within one year and that priests cannot grant general absolution simply because they have a large number of penitents.

The four elected members of the U.S. delegation are Cardinal Bernardin; Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis; Archbishop Patrick Flores of San Antonio, Texas; and Auxiliary Bishop Austin Vaughan of New York.

Support for general absolution and individual confession was voiced during the synod's second phase, which was devoted primarily to small group discussions among delegates to discuss concrete proposals based on the synod interventions.

Beginning Oct. 24, the synod is scheduled to resume plenary sessions for further discussion and to vote on proposals.

More than three dozen

bishops exhorted the synod to call nations to account for the world's social injustices.

"Denunciation, conversion and reconciliation are inseparable," said Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila, Philippines, who has been a human rights critic of Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos. It is necessary, the cardinal said, to maintain relations with the wealthy as well as the impoverished peasants because a prophetic call should not cause hatred of the rich nor permit the poor to be trampled.

Bishop Joseph Thumma of Vijayawada, India, said discrimination was inherent in India's caste system, in which the people of the lowest social class are called and treated as "untouchable."

"The church must change its social orientation," Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider of Fortaleza, Brazil, said. "It must put itself decisively next to the poor, victims of a structural, anti-evangelical system."

Open House Scheduled

St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing has scheduled an open house from 2-4 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 23, at the Dunn Memorial Building.

Prospective students and their families are invited to attend the event which will include career information and tours of the school and facilities.

Faculty members and students will be present to answer questions and information will also be available for persons considering nursing as a second or mid-life career.

Deadline

Parish correspondents are reminded that items for At Your Parish must be typed and in the Courier-Journal offices before noon on Thursday preceding Wednesday publication. The address is 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

NFP Info Sessions Scheduled

Three Natural Family Planning information sessions will be offered from 7:30 to 9 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 7, at St. Mary's Hospital; Thursday, Nov. 10, at Lakeside Hospital, Brockport; and Friday, Nov. 11, at Rochester General Hospital.

Sponsored by Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester, the sessions are free and open to the public. Pre-registration is required by calling the NFP office at 716/464-8705.



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