

U.S. Bishops to Grapple with Busy Agenda

Washington (NC) -- The U.S. bishops will face a packed agenda when they have their annual general meeting in Washington Nov. 14-17.

They also will discuss whether to begin preparing a pastoral letter on women in the church and society.

Several items, including a discussion of the number of holy days, are on the agenda because the bishops must take action before the church's revised Code of Canon Law goes into effect Nov. 27.

But the agenda also includes other items more typical of the bishops' annual meetings. Besides the discussion of a possible pastoral letter on women, the bishops also will vote on a proposed 7,500-word pastoral letter on Hispanic ministry.

They also will elect a new president to succeed Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis, whose three-year term expires at the end of the meeting. The term of the bishops' vice president, Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, also is expiring.

Another item is a proposal to resume meeting twice a year, a practice which was abandoned in 1980 in favor of one annual meeting each November in Washington.

The proposal to cut the number of holy days of obligation comes up this time -- it was briefly considered in 1980 -- because without action by the bishops 10 holy days listed in the revised Code of Canon Law automatically will go into effect. Only six currently are observed in the United States.

The four new holy days would be Epiphany (Jan. 6), the Feast of St. Joseph (March 19), Corpus Christi (the second Thursday after Pentecost), and the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29).

The proposal to be considered by the bishops, with subsequent approval by the Vatican, would cut those 10 holy days to three by:

- Abolishing the obligation to attend Mass on the feasts of St. Joseph, Sts. Peter and Paul, Mary the Mother of God (Jan. 1), and Assumption (Aug. 15);

- Transferring to "the appropriate Sundays" the observances of Epiphany, the Ascension of the Lord, and Corpus Christi, and

- Retaining holy days of obligation for Christmas, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8) and All Saints' Day (Nov. 1).

The proposal to begin preparing a pastoral letter on women is being made by the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Women in Society and in the Church, headed by Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill. In a report to the bishops the committee said it unanimously voted last July to seek approval for the preparation of such a letter.

The letter, according to the committee report, could show the bishops' pastoral concern for women in the church and "would offer new hope to those women who have experienced rejection or alienation." The report also proposed a consultation process with women in the church, including hearings similar to those held when the bishops were preparing their recent pastoral on war and peace.

The proposal for a pastoral letter on women comes at a time of increased attention to the issue of women in the church. Speaking to a group of U.S. bishops in early September, Pope John Paul II said that the idea of women priests must be rejected and that support must be withdrawn from any group or individual advocating a female priesthood.

Bishop Imesch's committee, meanwhile, has scheduled a two-day workshop on women in the church for bishops and representatives of 11 U.S. Catholic women's organizations immediately prior to the bishops' general meeting. Topics will include "Women in Scripture," "Origins in Ministry," and "Patriarchy in Society and the Church."

The proposed pastoral letter on Hispanic ministry, slightly revised from an earlier version released last summer, calls for more thorough efforts to meet the spiritual needs of the Hispanic population.

Among other things the pastoral urges greater use of Spanish in liturgies, more Spanish language classes for priests, parish and diocesan assistance to migrant workers, and integration of Hispanic ministry with social justice efforts.

It also urges Catholic schools to offer bilingual education programs and to give scholarships to Hispanic students who might not otherwise be able to take advantage of a Catholic education.

One statement that is not expected to be discussed in depth at this meeting is a proposed pastoral letter on capitalism and Christianity.

Originally the committee preparing the pastoral, headed by Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, had

planned to have a first draft ready for discussion at this year's meeting. But last May the committee announced that it would delay issuance of its first draft until mid-1984.

In addition to the question of U.S. holy days, five other items are on the bishops' agenda this year because of the upcoming effective date of the revised Code of Canon Law:

- A proposal to allow bishops to continue giving the sacrament of confirmation at the age customary in their dioceses until a national study suggests another age (the new code calls for confirmation at approximately age seven unless the conference of bishops determines differently);

- A proposal to allow individual bishops to establish limited tenure for pastors in their dioceses (the new code gives pastors indefinite tenure unless the entire conference of bishops votes to permit local limits on tenure);

- Two proposals dealing with diocesan marriage tribunals, one to permit a single judge to handle cases in courts of "first instance," the other to permit a lay judge on a tribunal with more than one judge, and

- A proposal to ask the Vatican to permit auxiliary bishops to vote on changes in the statutes of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Other items include:

- The proposed resumption of twice-a-year meetings.

Another proposal by the committee calls for alternating the November meetings each year between Washington, where they are held now, and Chicago, where the spring meetings took place until 1980.

- A 1984 budget for the NCCB and its public policy arm, the U.S. Catholic Conference. The bishops' Budget and Finance Committee is proposing a 1984 budget of \$23.9 million, up slightly from the current \$22.9 million.

The budget funds the various NCCB-USCC departments, such as education, social development and world peace, communication, migration and refugee services, the general secretary's office, and other staff offices.

The bishops also will consider a proposal to ask the Vatican to allow a priest rather than a bishop to perform the sacrament of confirmation regularly in certain cases where adults are being received into the church. The proposal is an effort to clear up confusion over interpretation of a church norm involving adults who were baptized as Catholics in infancy but were not raised as Catholics in their youth.

Holy Days ... Could Be 3 Could Be 10 ... Bishops Will Decide at Meeting

Washington (NC) -- American Catholics could have only three holy days of obligation a year after November. Or they could have four, five or six -- or theoretically even 10.

A debate by the nation's Catholic bishops about what to do with the Mass obligation attached to 10 holy days under the church's new Code of Canon Law is likely to attract considerable attention during their meeting in Washington Nov. 14-17.

Of the church legal issues they confront before the new code takes effect on Nov. 27, it is the one that will have the most direct impact on Catholic life.

The code, a collection of general laws governing the whole Western church, lists 10 solemn feasts on which Catholics must attend Mass each year. But it also says a local bishops' conference can decide, with the prior approval of the Holy See, to remove the obligation of Mass or to transfer the observance of the feast to a nearby Sunday.

Currently a separate Mass obligation is in force for only six of those feasts in the United States: Christmas, Dec. 25; Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8; All Saints Day, Nov. 1; the Ascension (sixth Thursday after Easter); Mary Mother of God, Jan. 1; and the Assumption, Aug. 15. The other feasts listed in the canons are St. Joseph, March 19; Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29; Corpus Christi (the second Thursday after Pentecost); and the Epiphany, Jan. 6.

But the bishops' Committee for Canonical Affairs says that the Mass obligation for all 10 days listed in the code "will become the norm" in the United States "if no action is taken by the time the revised code goes into effect on Nov. 27."

In the proposed agenda for the bishops' meeting, the committee recommends retaining the Mass precept for only three of those days -- Christmas on Dec. 25, the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 8, and All Saints Day on Nov. 1.

Of holy days on which U.S. Catholics currently are under an obligation to attend Mass, the committee recommends eliminating a distinct precept of Mass for three -- the Ascension and two Marian feasts: Mary Mother of God and the Assumption.

Finally, the committee recommends that the bishops vote anew to dispense Catholics from the separate precept of Mass for the four universal holy days on which U.S. Catholics currently are not required to attend Mass: St. Joseph, Sts. Peter and Paul, Corpus Christi and the Epiphany.

The Committee on Canonical Affairs took a straw poll of the nation's bishops and consulted with their liturgy and pastoral research and practices committees before making its recommendations.

The recommendation to retain the separate Mass obligation for Christmas, the Immaculate Conception and All Saints is essentially the

same proposal that was developed in 1980 by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. The liturgy committee first proposed retaining only Christmas and Immaculate Conception but added All Saints after a straw poll of the nation's bishops showed fewer than two thirds of them in favor of dropping that feast. For a variety of reasons the committee's final proposal was withdrawn before it came to a formal vote, but the committee said that more than two thirds of the nation's bishops who had answered the straw poll supported the change to three holy days of obligation.

There are two ways to remove the separate precept of Mass attendance on a holy day. One is to observe the feast on the date set for it but remove the Mass obligation for that day. The other is to transfer the observance of the feast to a nearby Sunday -- thus retaining the obligation to attend Mass but making it coincide with the regular Sunday obligation.

Of the four feasts on which U.S. Catholics currently are not obliged to attend Mass, two -- St. Joseph and Sts. Peter and Paul -- are observed on the appointed days but without obligation.

Observance of the other two feasts is transferred to Sunday. U.S. Catholics currently observe the Epiphany on the first Sunday after Jan. 1 instead of on Jan. 6. They observe Corpus Christi on the second Sunday after Pentecost instead of the second Thursday after Pentecost.

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