

# What Lies Ahead for U.S. Church?

By Liz Armstrong  
NC News Service

"The times, they are a-changing" in the church in the United States.

The major U.S. sees of New York and Boston await new archbishops. Within five years, 23 ordinaries out of 175 sees are scheduled to retire.

The New York and Boston appointments "are going to be very critical ones," said Father Robert Johnson, president of the National Federation of Priests' Councils. They will "have a profound impact on the church in this country," he said.

James Robert Henderson, executive director of the National Office for Black Catholics, agreed. "If the cardinals appointed are statesmen, visionaries, broad-minded and sensitive to the needs of the worshipping community...those appointments will be very important to growth of the church in America."

Church historians, theologians and leaders of Religious and lay groups said that the choices the pope makes will reveal his attitudes toward the church in America. They agreed that the selections will help shape the Catholic Church of the United States for years to come but they also cited other phenomena, such as the increasing participation of laity in the church, a vocations crisis and disputes over the roles of Religious, as influencing the church in America as it approaches the 21st century.

As of Nov. 11, no successors to the late Cardinals Terence Cooke of New York and Humberto Medeiros of Boston had been named. In addition, Springfield, Ill., and Harrisburg, Pa., were anticipating bishops to replace the late Bishop Joseph A. McNicholas and Bishop Joseph T. Daley, respectively. The See of Dubuque, Iowa, whose Archbishop James Byrne retired, also was vacant.

Other retirements also were pending, including those of Cardinals Timothy Manning of Los Angeles (in 1984) and John Krol of Philadelphia (in 1985), and

Archbishops Peter L. Gerety of Newark (in 1987), William D. Borders of Baltimore (in 1988) and Philip M. Hannan of New Orleans (1988).

What will that mean for Catholicism in the United States?

"The obvious thing is that you're going to have that much new leadership coming up. It's a new generation," said Father Charles Curran, professor of moral theology at the Catholic University of America.

"The holy father apparently is turning his attention to the United States more than he has in the past," said William Sockey, executive director of Catholics United for the Faith. If the pontiff is displeased by anything in America, "this would be a way to begin to influence things," he said.

Salvatorian Father Keith Brennan, administrative assistant for the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, noted that likely candidates for New York and Boston, and other cities, include many men named to the episcopacy under the tenure of Archbishop Jean Jadot as apostolic delegate in the United States. Archbishop Jadot "chose a lot of very good men. It will be interesting to see whether he (Pope John Paul) is putting his stamp of approval on that group of men or whether he isn't," the CSM official said. He suggested the pope may wish to start fresh in order to build personal loyalty.

Various sources cited diverse qualities they think an ordinary should have: Intelligence, openness toward Vatican II reforms, adherence to church teaching as explicated in Vatican II documents, a spirit of collegiality, advocacy of the church's social justice principles, the ability to both praise and criticize as needed, and the courage to stand up for what the bishop believes is right -- even, some suggested, if that sometimes means disagreeing with the Vatican.

"The man must be unafraid," said Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, professorial lecturer in church history at the Catholic

University of America. "He must not tremble every time there is a decision from Rome that runs counter" to the U.S. experience. He must also be "unafraid of change," the historian said. "There are ultra-conservative churchmen who are seemingly frightened to death of it."

Msgr. Ellis, like others, suggested the U.S. bishops will have to explain developments in the total U.S. church to church officials at the Vatican, which he thinks sometimes gets misleading information. "I've the impression that certain Curia officials are listening too much to one side -- and that side is usually the far-right," he said.

Msgr. Ellis and other sources said that the Vatican seems worried about the church in America.

"There is an uneasiness about certain trends in the American church," he said. "There's been a kind of steady criticism, no doubt about it," and the pope himself seems to regard as unsettling "certain things going on in our country and in the church in our country," he said. Irritants include many American Catholics' practice of artificial birth control, openness toward divorce, and other ideas which may differ from official church positions, Msgr. Ellis said.

Regarded as open demonstrations of Vatican concern -- whether positive or negative is not yet clear, sources said -- are the call for studies of religious life and seminaries.

Sister Rita Hofbauer, assistant to the director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and member of the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, said some Vatican apprehensions "stem from a real lack of understanding of American culture." She suggested the rising participation of the laity in the church is one important aspect of American Catholic practice that should be further developed, to the extent possible under canon law, by the bishops.

In the view of Father Brennan, "We

are different from some of the other churches (Catholic churches in other nations)" and have something to offer the rest of the world. He attributed the difference to "the total effect of our living and our culture within the democratic system. That total product has formed an openness and a consultative process," he said.

Sources said the consultative spirit has been characterized by establishment of priests' senates, parish and pastoral councils; parental involvement with Catholic schools; and collaboration by the bishops collectively and as individuals with lay people and other advisers on important issues.

"The era of someone just making all these decisions on his own is at its death," Father Brennan said.

He said this spirit of consultation and openness is important and that the only thing that could thwart it (but probably not kill it) would be "a lot of official discouragement, strong objections or repression" from high church levels.

"Most of us look at this very seriously as the work of the Spirit and sometimes the Spirit works in ways officialdom can't appreciate, doesn't understand, or, quite honestly, doesn't yet see as the work of the Spirit," he said.

Despite their comments over Vatican concern about the United States, several sources also cited positive developments in relations with Rome recently. They described these as Vatican officials' apparent willingness to listen during the U.S. bishops' autumn ad limina visits, the interest in the war and peace pastoral, and, the appointment of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin to Chicago.

Msgr. Ellis pointed out as well "aspects of our church that are very bright indeed," including high Mass attendance rates (compared to other nations) and an underlying loyalty to the church which means "there is not even a remote danger of a schism or of a national church" because of disagreements with Rome. "The faith is not dead here," he said.

## Take Risks

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sponsibilities if it did not continue to do so.

The bishops' planned pastoral letter on "Catholic Social Teachings and the American Economy," begun in 1981 and now scheduled for completion in the fall of 1985, is following a course parallel to the drafting of the war and peace pastoral.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, chairman of the committee drafting the letter on economic issues, reported Nov. 16 that his committee had so far listened to some 50 experts from various fields in the course of 11 meetings over the past two years. The thrust of the projected letter, as he described it to the bishops, is remarkably similar to that of the war and peace pastoral: an application of Catholic moral teachings to specific issues of U.S. economic policy.

In recognition of the fact that the economic pastoral, like the war and peace pastoral, will have far-reaching political implications, Archbishop Weakland announced that issuance of the first draft will be delayed from May 1984 as originally planned until November 1984, after the national elections. This will be done "to avoid false possible partisan implications...during a presidential campaign," he said.

The more consultative, dialogical style of exercising pastoral authority among the nation's bishops was even more evident in their unanimous decision Nov. 17 to go ahead with a pastoral letter on the role of women in the church and in society -- another pastoral that is expected to be three to four years in the making because of the consultation that will go into it. "I emphasize that this issue is one of the

most serious we face," commented Cardinal Bernardin in support of the proposed pastoral.

Before their annual meeting, about 100 of the bishops attended a two-day workshop on women's concerns, discussing them with representatives from a number of Catholic women's groups.

In discussing the planned pastoral, several bishops noted an honest concern about an exclusively male group writing a pastoral on women as well as concern that the pastoral affirm church teaching on the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Despite the criticisms of the bishops that those two issues have already provoked, and will almost certainly provoke with greater intensity in the course of the pastoral letter's development, the bishops clearly felt that they would have to weather such criticisms in order to exercise their moral and pastoral authority to speak out on a wide range of issues affecting women in the church and in society.

If the two pastoral letter projects were indicative of a new pastoral style among the nation's bishops, their treatment of a third issue -- the study of U.S. Religious mandated by Pope John Paul II -- was even more explicitly so.

Archbishop Quinn, head of the papally appointed commission to guide the study, gave the bishops a stirring 45-minute speech in which he stressed that what they were being called to was first and foremost a "special pastoral service" to Religious.

The most essential element of that service, he said, was "dialogue." The starting process that he asked the bishops to undertake in their

own dioceses was to meet with Religious and listen to their experiences, concerns and self-understanding.

He emphasized that exercise of pastoral responsibility by bishops toward Religious called for by the pope does not mean "control by the bishop" and an infringement on the traditional autonomy of religious institutes. It goes beyond the old dichotomy of control-autonomy, he said, and instead invokes a mutual partnership, "a dialogue of salvation."

At a news conference after his Nov. 16 speech, Archbishop Quinn said that collegiality with Religious did not mark the beginning of the Vatican study, but that dialogue with them is now its keystone.

The study of Religious is but one of several areas in which recent statements or actions from Rome have been widely perceived as Vatican attempts to clamp down on the U.S. church. Many Religious who said they were disturbed by overtones of an authoritarian crackdown when the papal study was first announced have since said they are heartened by the way the Quinn commission has apparently turned it into a dialogue that could help both bishops and Religious to understand one another better and work together more effectively.

Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis, outgoing president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, cast other tensions between the Vatican and the U.S. church in a similar light, suggesting strongly in his presidential speech at the start of the November meeting that the U.S. bishops are comfortable with their emergent role as pastoral

leaders not only at home but internationally.

He said the time when critics "accused us of servility or worse" to Rome has passed, but what is emerging is not the alternative some have suggested, of "a rebellious American church."

"It is the emergence of a new, important, and -- I believe -- ultimately positive chapter in our relationship with the Holy See," he said.

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