

That Pastoral ... One Year Later

U.S. Catholicism Not the Same

By Jerry Filteau and Liz Armstrong
NC News Service

WASHINGTON -- With a 238-9 vote May 3, 1983, the U.S. Catholic bishops endorsed a 42,000-word pastoral letter whose challenge reverberated around the world.

A powerful and controversial document titled "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," the letter addressed one of the most difficult problems confronting humanity today: the morality of nuclear deterrence.

As the first year of the pastoral comes to an end, it is clear that it has affected U.S. Catholicism.

No other action by the American hierarchy has been given so much attention or generated so much discussion, not only within the U.S. Catholic community but among other Americans. The debate over the pastoral also has spread around the world, particularly to Europe, considered one of the most likely theaters for a nuclear conflagration.

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, who chaired the committee that drafted it, received some 8,000 letters on the pastoral shortly after its completion. Groups inside and outside America are still inviting him to discuss the document.

"It has sensitized the Catholic population, as well as society generally, to the moral dimension of various war and peace issues," the cardinal said. "That was basically our intent."

Those "sensitized" to the issue include members of the Reagan administration, he suggested.

"Their rhetoric has moderated," he told reporters at the White House April 18 following a meeting between the bishops, President Reagan and other administration officials. Nonetheless, he added, the bishops would like to see the administration take firmer steps toward arms control.

The debate still taking place over the pastoral and the bishops' ability to address such an issue is comparable in recent Catholic history only to that which followed "Humanae Vitae," the 1968 encyclical by Pope Paul VI in which he reaffirmed church teaching against artificial means of birth control.

In addition, not since the Second Vatican Council has so much attention been devoted to implementing a church document in the United States.

Just as in the wake of Vatican II, with its myriad parish study groups, seminars, speeches and books, the year since the bishops' pastoral has brought parish and diocesan study days, lectures, workshops and seminars all over the country devoted to understanding the pastoral. Catholic educators have incorporated it into curricula from grade schools to postgraduate courses in universities.

Millions of copies of the pastoral itself were printed -- most of them by diocesan newspapers sent directly into Catholic homes. In addition, within the first year combined direct sales of the text by Origins, the NC News Service documentary service, and the Office of Publishing Services of the U.S. Catholic Conference, went over 300,000.

One would have to go back to 1966, when "The Documents of Vatican II" sold some 500,000 copies here and abroad in its first year of publication, to find any church documents that reached a comparable general readership in the United States.

Catholic newspapers and magazines have devoted uncounted pages of print, and sometimes whole issues, to commentary and analysis on the pastoral. Books about it have already appeared. Audiovisual program resources for studying the pastoral have proliferated. The Xavier Society for the Blind in New York is making the text available in Braille and on cassette.

Diverse Catholic organizations have made implementation of the peace pastoral a major part of their agenda. Among these have been the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, numerous individual Religious orders, the National Federation of Priests' Councils, the National Catholic Educational Association.

In addition, leaders of other major Christian churches have urged their people to study the Catholic document and use it as a resource in forming their own consciences on issues of war and peace. As a focus of interfaith interest, the pastoral is unrivaled among Catholic documents since Vatican II.

"They (other denominations) know about it; they're concerned about the issues that confront us as a society," said Cardinal Bernardin.

Another demonstration of widespread interest in the pastoral is its translation in the past year into Spanish, French, Italian, Dutch, Flemish, Portuguese and Swedish.

But with all those signs of widespread interest, the bottom-line questions remain: What impact has the pastoral had or is it likely to have on American Catholic thinking and

action?

Msgr. John Egan, director of ecumenism and human relations for the Archdiocese of Chicago and one of the leading national figures in Catholic social action for decades, said the pastoral will have notable effects "down the pike" on Catholic political attitudes. But he doubted that it would have any discernible impact on this fall's national elections.

One of the effects of the pastoral has been the encouragement it has given to Catholics in the peace movement, providing them a new sense of identity with and support from the institutional church.

But David O'Brien, history professor at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass., and a specialist in the history of American Catholic social reform, sees that as a two-edged sword.

Unless there is "an effective diocesan approach" to implementing the pastoral, O'Brien said, the way Catholics learn about and understand the pastoral "will be left to the peace people." This kind of approach is "very vulnerable to right-wing attack," he said.

Cardinal Bernardin, discussing criticism of the pastoral from both liberal and conservative camps, said, "I counsel them not to read into the pastoral what's not there, whether they're on the left or right."

Similarly, he said he regards as "inevitable" efforts by either right or left-wing groups to use the pastoral for their own causes. The response is to "keep drawing attention to what the document really says," he advised.

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'WE ARE CALLED TO BE PEACEMAKERS'

U.S. Bishops Pass Anti-Nuke Pastoral

The Courier-Journal Page 1 headline of last May 11 signaled the story of the release of the historic peace pastoral which some feel has had more effect on

American Catholics than any other Church document of recent history, with the exception of Humanae Vitae.

How the Letter Was Implemented Last Year

The diocese has been a hub of activity over the past year since the introduction of the American bishops' pastoral letter, "A Challenge of Peace." The following are some of the key activities sponsored across the diocese in discussing and implementing the pastoral:

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

● General forums giving an overview of the pastoral were sponsored by the diocese for:

- the Diocesan Pastoral Council at St. Thomas More, Rochester.
- religious education personnel at St. Thomas More, Rochester, and St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads.
- high school students and religious education personnel at St. Francis, Catatonk.
- the parish council at St. Rita, Webster.
- Chemung and Schuyler counties at St. John, Elmira.
- Catholic school teachers at St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads.
- Livingston County at St. Mary, Geneseo.
- the Seneca-Cayuga Region at St. Mary, Auburn.
- the Yates-Ontario-Wayne Region at St. Mary, Canandaigua.
- the Northwest Region at St. Anthony of Padua, Rochester.
- parishioners at St. Louis, Pittsford.
- the Southwest Region at St. Mary's Hospital.
- the Chemung Region at St. Charles, Elmira Heights.
- the Northeast Region at St. Ambrose, Rochester.
- school faculty at Annunciation, Rochester.
- parishioners and junior and senior high school students at St. Ann, Palmyra.
- the Rochester Sisters of Mercy Prayer Center staff.
- parishioners at Resurrection, Fairport.
- parishioners at Guardian Angels, Rochester.

—the staff of Mercy High School.

● Workshops for diocesan and parish staff (about 600 participated) were offered to:

- all diocesan parish staffs at St. Charles, Elmira Heights, and at Sacred Heart Cathedral.
- Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry board members.
- Catholic Charities board members.
- Pastoral Center staff.
- parish staff at Mother of Sorrows, Rochester.
- the Human Development Committees at Annunciation, Fairport, and St. Helen, Rochester.

—leadership persons from parochial schools on the Infusion Method to teach Peace and Justice concepts, including the pastoral.

—CERT presenters on the impact of the pastoral on catechist training.

● Education and Pastoral approaches around participation in the Oct. 22 peace rally (about 200 participated) were discussed by the following groups and parishes:

- Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry (FLOSM) board.
- a meeting of FLOSM staff with parish staffs in the Seneca Army Depot region.
- a meeting of Bishop Clark with parish staffs in the Seneca Army Depot region.
- St. Patrick, Seneca Falls; St. Michael, Lyons; Guardian Angels, Rochester; St. Gregory, Marion; St. Stephen, Geneva; St. Francis deSales, Geneva; Sacred Heart, Auburn; St. Alphonse, Auburn; St. Theresa, Stanley; St. Mary, Rushville; St. Mary, Canandaigua; and St. John, Clyde.
- Priests Council; Sisters Council; Diocesan Pastoral Council.
- women religious at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse.

● Discussion group leadership training was offered to:

- 120 leaders in depth training at three diocesan locations: Rochester, Geneva and Elmira.
- discussion groups throughout Lent in 40 parishes across the diocese.

PRAYER VIGILS

● Some 2,000 people participated in prayer vigils at:

- Annunciation, Rochester, previous to the Bishops' meeting in Chicago.
- St. Mary, Auburn; St. Patrick, Seneca Falls; St. Catherine, Ithaca; St. Margaret Mary, Appalachia; Our Lady of Lourdes, Elmira; St. Mary, Corning; St. Mary, Geneseo; Sacred Heart Cathedral, Rochester; St. Helen, Rochester; St. Stanislaus, Rochester; St. Joseph, Penfield; Good Shepherd, Henrietta; St. Michael, Newark; St. Francis deSales, Geneva; and St. Michael, Penn Yan.

ECUMENICAL GROUPS

● Presentations were also made to a some 200 people representing the following groups:

- Schuyler Interfaith Peace Group.
- Women's Resource Center, Ithaca.
- Pax Christi, Ithaca.
- Owego Methodist Church.
- an ecumenical study group in United Church, Aurora.
- Episcopal Peace Fellowship.
- an ecumenical meeting at St. Patrick, Elmira.
- Geneva Ecumenical Council.
- Penfield Presbyterian Church.
- Panel of American Women, Rochester.
- Elmira Nuclear Freeze Group.