

# Bishops' fall meeting: Collegiality and social ministry

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — Despite one of the largest and most varied agendas in years, much of this fall's meeting of the U.S. bishops could be summed up under one heading: collegiality and social ministry in the service of the gospel.

Collegiality serving the bishops' role as teachers appeared to be surfacing at the meeting as one of the major developments ahead on the U.S. Catholic scene.

Some 300 members of the U.S. hierarchy gathered at the Washington Hilton Nov. 11-15 for the meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference.

Whether it was farms dying in the Midwest or families dying in Ethiopia, lack of economic rights in the United States or lack of religious rights in Lithuania, legal protection for the unborn or legalizing the illegal alien, the bishops had it on their agenda.

They also voiced their concern about U.S. hostages held in Lebanon, continuing racism in America, the morality of U.S. nuclear policy, an "unjust, discriminatory" Supreme Court decision against aid to disadvantaged children in parochial schools, and the need for the church to be exemplary in its treatment of women and of church employees.

The array of social justice issues they addressed could be brought together under the "consistent-ethic-of-life" banner pressed so strongly by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago and spelled out explicitly in the new Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities that he shepherded through to unanimous approval by the bishops Nov. 14.

How they as a bishops' conference handled such issues also presented an interesting case study of what Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal pronuncio to the United States, called "a collegial body in action."

Collegiality is not a thing that people, even bishops, usually talk about much. But in recent months U.S. bishops and hierarchies of other nations, preparing for a world Synod of Bishops, began to speak about collegiality a lot as one of the key issues facing the church 20 years after the end of the Second Vatican Council.

In its strict sense, Archbishop Laghi said, collegiality "refers to bishops only, all the bishops, in communion with the Roman pontiff." But he noted that Vatican II also spoke of "affective collegiality," or a collegial style and manner of acting which expresses a "spirit of communion" among bishops.

Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, NCCB-USCC president, also focused on collegiality in his presidential address Nov. 11, shortly before Archbishop Laghi's talk.

"It is clear that collegiality — its content, limits and consequences — may be a major topic in the extraordinary synod," Bishop Malone said. He said that Vatican II — the general topic of the synod — presented "a

relational view of the church," the heart of which is "the principle of collegiality and a new collegial style."

Besides two speeches about collegiality by Bishop Malone and one by Archbishop Laghi during the course of the meeting, the bishops ran directly up against the issue at one point when they narrowly passed an amendment to their pro-life activities plan but reversed themselves after Cardinal Bernardin expressed concern about the "eclesiology" the amendment implied.

As originally worded, the amendment would have placed the pro-life activities committee in almost a "big brother" role of coordinating nationally and reporting back yearly on each diocese's anti-abortion activities.

The concern of ecclesiology that Cardinal Bernardin referred to was a question of how episcopal collegiality is to be exercised: Is it the proper role of the bishops' conference or its committees, or the role of the local bishop, to coordinate and monitor the activities of a diocesan agency?

The bishops replaced the original amendment with one that simply called for the committee to report back periodically to the rest of the bishops on progress being made in implementing the plan.

The 10 black bishops over the past two years have become increasingly active in the conference, exemplifying another aspect of collegiality: the role that bishops with special insights or concerns can play as prophets or educators, sensitizing their fellow bishops to those issues.

Hispanic bishops in the conference have played a similar role for more than a decade, with the result that much greater attention is now paid to the pastoral concerns of the large Hispanic minority in the U.S. church.

Some critics of the NCCB-USCC in recent years have protested the strong emphasis on social justice issues within the conference, questioning how well that emphasis reflects the church's essential mission of evangelization, or preaching the Gospel.

The linkage that the bishops see between the two was expressed frequently in the meeting.

A national pastoral letter on campus ministry that the bishops adopted saw formation in social justice as an integral part of formation in faith in the church's ministry on the nation's college and university campuses.

A brief statement on evangelization issued by the bishops, primarily for internal planning, called "the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ" the essence of evangelization. But it added that this "must include a response in justice to the needs of suffering human beings."

In a similar vein, in a report to the bishops on Catholic Relief Services activities, Bishop Daniel Reilly of Norwich, Conn., CRS board chairman, said that if the bishops would have to invent CRS if it did not already exist,

because the agency is "indispensable to carry out the Gospel mandate to serve the least of our brothers."

Jesuit Father William Byron, an economist and president of The Catholic University of America, keynoting a half-day of recollection for the bishops midway through their meeting, told them that their developing economic pastoral has helped create "an evangelical moment" because "if you want the kingdom of God then you have to have kingdom values" such as those preached in the pastoral.

While NCCB-USCC statements on a wide range of justice issues represent a teaching role as well as an advocacy role by the bishops on a national level, they are usually perceived mainly in terms of their advocacy dimension.

The same could not be said, however, of several topics raised at the meeting which appeared to indicate a growing concern for

the bishops as a national body to exercise a much stronger role in assuring the teaching of sound Catholic doctrine.

Five different bishops submitted requests, discussed at the meeting, for development of some form of national catechism or catechetical syllabus, or for the formation of a new bishops' committee responsible just for catechetical matters, which currently is a part of the education committee's responsibility.

Another bishop, Auxiliary Bishop Eugene Marino of Washington, urged development of national guidelines to assure that the mentally retarded receive appropriate religious formation and gain their rightful access to the sacraments.

Still another, Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles, called for the conference to sponsor publication of a new translation of the documents of Vatican II, one of the basic resources for Catholic teaching today.

## Summary of action at the bishop's meeting

Washington (NC) — Here are the main results of the fall meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops-U.S. Catholic Conference Nov. 11-15 in Washington, D.C.

**Key Statements:**  
 • Showed overwhelming approval of a pastoral letter on campus ministry, voting for it 176-4. A mail vote will be needed to complete the legal requirement of two-thirds approval (201 or more votes) of total conference membership.

• Issued a statement urging Congress to pass a farm bill that will help protect family farms.

• Called for an immigration bill containing liberal legalization provisions for illegal aliens and excluding expansion of foreign worker programs.

• Protested the "unjust, discriminatory and narrow" Supreme Court decision last summer striking down publicly funded remedial aid in parochial school classrooms.

• Approved "A Vision of Evangelization" reaffirming the church mission of preaching the Gospel and linking it with the church's social justice ministry.

**Key Decisions:**  
 • Approved a new Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, updating anti-abortion strategy and other pro-life efforts since the first plan was issued 10 years ago.

• Established an ad hoc committee to monitor U.S. government defense activity to see whether it still meets the conditions described in the bishops'

1983 peace pastoral for a morally acceptable nuclear deterrence policy.

• Elected as NCCB-USCC secretary Auxiliary Bishop Eugene Marino of Washington, the first black to hold one of the four top offices in the NCCB-USCC.

**Key Discussions:**  
 • Discussed pastoral letter on the U.S. economy, asking further refinements but indicating strong agreement with overall thrust of the second draft.

• Heard a special report on Catholic Relief Services by Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia, head of a special committee investigating allegations of CRS wrongdoing in Ethiopia. All serious allegations proved false, the cardinal said, but his committee found some weaknesses in CRS policies and structures and recommended several changes to prevent future problems.

• With the world Synod of Bishops less than two weeks away, trends in the church since the Second Vatican Council and important issues in the church today — especially collegiality — were topics of both the opening address and a special report by Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, NCCB president. Collegiality and the synod was also the main topic of the address by Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal pronuncio to United States.

• Heard a blunt report by black bishops warning of an explosive threat of racial strife in America. Black bishops gave the report in a session closed to the press, but it was made public at the request of the rest of the bishops.

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