

National/International Report

Seattle archbishop lacked 'firmness,' says Holy See

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — The Holy See told Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle to relinquish part of his authority because "the Holy See considered him lacking the firmness necessary to govern the archdiocese," said a document from the Vatican Embassy in Washington sent to all U.S. bishops.

The archbishop did not seem to understand the "importance" of the issues of general absolution, Catholic-Protestant inter-Communion and other abuses going on in his archdiocese, the document suggested.

In a statement issued in Seattle Oct. 28, Archbishop Hunthausen disagreed with the embassy version of events, saying his own understanding on a number of points "differs significantly" from what was stated in the document.

He declined "at the present time or in this particular forum" to spell out his disagreements. He said respect for the author of the chronology, Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal pronuncio to the United States, prompted him to reserve his "specific comments and judgments to other more appropriate forums."

The nation's bishops are to discuss Archbishop Hunthausen's case and the new document at a closed-door session during their annual meeting Nov. 40-13. The archbishop indicated that might be one forum at which he will spell out his problems with the document.

The embassy's four-page document, dated Oct. 24 and made public Oct. 28, was titled "A Chronology of Recent Events in the Archdiocese of Seattle." It was distributed to the bishops and the press by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops at the request of the embassy.

The document, defending the Vatican's conduct in the case, said the Holy See had corresponded "at least since 1978" with Archbishop Hunthausen about "the high volume of complaints" it received regarding the governance of his archdiocese.

The decision in 1983 to conduct an apostolic visitation to investigate the situation "was primarily provoked by the documented responses of the archbishop himself" to the complaints, the chronology said.

On Oct. 9-10, 1985, Archbishop Hunthausen was given the results of that visitation "in extensive consultation" at the Vatican Embassy, the chronology said.

It said he was then given an opportunity "to offer a response and seek clarification... It was his interpretation of the importance of these matters and the inadequacy of his response that were the (Holy See's) principal concerns."

In a cover letter accompanying the chronology, Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, NCCB president, said he hoped that the chronology and a response from Archbishop Hunthausen "will prove to be helpful background material for a discussion we will have at the executive session" of the bishops' November meeting.

Usually one afternoon of the fall NCCB meeting is devoted to an executive session. The press is barred and all matters discussed are under a rule of confidentiality.

The chronology said Archbishop Hunthausen was given an auxiliary, Bishop Donald Wuerl, and asked to delegate full authority to him over certain problem areas as a "compromise."

Other alternatives that were considered, it

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