

National/International Report

Bishops approve pastoral letter, consider Hunthausen case

Washington (NC) — The bishops of the United States passed a major pastoral letter on the economy during their Nov. 10-13 general meeting, which also featured lengthy discussion of the case of Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle, whose authority was curtailed by the Vatican.

They also elected a new president, Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, for a three-year term.

The pastoral letter, "Economic Justice for All," was six years in the making. It calls on people to judge all aspects of economic life by three questions:

- What does the economy do for people?
- What does it do to people?
- And how do people participate in it?

The pastoral letter praises the success of the U.S. economy in providing "an unprecedented standard of living for most of its people."

But, it says, "There is unfinished business in the American experiment in freedom and justice for all."

The bishops spent more than five hours in executive session discussing the Hunthausen situation. No report from the meeting itself was given, but afterward, Bishop James W. Malone, president of the bishops' conference, said that Church rules and procedures had been followed in the Vatican's dealings with the archbishop and that the bishops had no authority to intervene.

He said that Archbishop Hunthausen has the "respect and confidence" of his fellow bishops.

The archbishop himself, in statements released Nov. 12, said he had urged the Vatican not to release a chronology of events issued before the meeting because it would "reflect unfavorably on the Holy See." He said the chronology contained errors and misleading statements.

Last September, Archbishop Hunthausen was ordered by the Vatican to cede authority in some areas to his auxiliary, Bishop Donald Wuerl. Included were authority in the archdiocese over liturgy, the church court, seminarians, clergy education, laicized priests, and moral issues involving homosexuality and contraceptive sterilization.

Bishop Malone, of Youngstown, Ohio, had opened the meeting Nov. 10 by warning about a "dangerous disaffection" between some U.S. Catholics and the Vatican.

Bishop Malone's term as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference expired at the end of the meeting. In an election Nov. 11, Archbishop May was elected president and Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, vice president.

Other notable events in the first two days of the bishops' meeting included:

- A letter from Pope John Paul II stressing cooperation between the Holy See



Bishops listen to a speaker at a session of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops annual meeting in Washington. Nearly 300 bishops are attending the conference.

and the bishops' conference.

- Announcement of plans to send a delegation of U.S. bishops to meet with the pope this winter or spring to discuss the pope's 1987 visit to the United States.
- A summation of the state of the church in the United States by Bishop Malone.

In his last major address as NCCB president, Bishop Malone said that during the three years he presided over the conference he had seen growing signs of lay vitality and a "rebirth" of collegiality, or sharing of authority, among the bishops.

He also warned, however, of a "growing and dangerous disaffection" and a "developing estrangement" between some parts of the U.S. Church and the Vatican.

"Some people feel that the local church needs more freedom. Others believe that more control is in order," he said.

As challenges confronting the U.S. Church Bishop Malone also cited the role of women in the Church, Church teaching and theological dissent, vocations, and maintaining the centrality of the Eucharist in Church life as the number of priests dwindles.

Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal pronuncio to the United States, who usually delivers a brief talk to the bishops on the opening day of their fall meeting, this year devoted almost his whole address to reading a long papal letter urging Church unity.

"You are, and must always be, in full communion with the successor of Peter," the letter from Pope John Paul said. The pope added that the purpose of his September 1987 visit to the United States would be "to celebrate with you our unity in Jesus Christ and in His Church."

Archbishop Laghi said that "one of the great hallmarks of the Church in the United States" was its "constant union with the See of Peter's successor."

Aside from U.S.-Rome relations that were largely discussed behind the scenes, the main business item facing the bishops was their pastoral letter on the U.S. economy, along with the accompanying pastoral message and follow-up plan to help bishops implement the letter.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, chairman of the pastoral's writing committee, told the bishops in his initial presentation of the letter that preaching economic justice is a "vital part" of preaching the Gospel.

The bishops' work does not end with approval of the pastoral, he said, because the pastoral challenges them to preach and teach a series of messages that are not currently very popular in American society. Among those messages he cited "a special concern for the poor... the sacredness of human life... global interdependence... the special dignity of human work" and criticism of

"extreme inequalities in the distribution of wealth."

The pastoral was approved by a vote of 225-9. In their vote the bishops simultaneously approved the 5,000-word pastoral, "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," and an accompanying pastoral message urging Catholics and all Americans to work to achieve economic rights for everyone.

They said this involves both personal commitment and active efforts to change laws and structures to protect the rights especially of the poor.

Enhancing the economic power and participation of the poor in society increases the rights and freedom of all members of society, the bishops declared.

Other major business items that the bishops dealt with in their first two days were:

- A report on Catholic Relief Services by Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Norwich, Conn., defending the agency against accusations that it handled some U.S. government funds improperly.

- Introduction to the bishops of Servite Father Lawrence Jenco, former CRS director in Lebanon, who was freed in July after being held hostage nearly 19 months by Islamic Holy War, a group of religious extremists.

On Hunthausen case:

Retiring NCCB president states Vatican decision deserves respect

By Liz Schevtchuk

Washington (NC) — The Vatican's decision stripping Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle of authority in key areas of his archdiocese deserves the "respect and confidence" of his fellow bishops, said Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Bishop Malone expressed his conviction that the "general principles of Church law and procedures" had been applied in the case.

Bishop Malone, in a statement issued Nov. 12, after the NCCB concluded a closed-door executive session on the Hunthausen case, also urged support for both Archbishop Hunthausen and Auxiliary Bishop Donald Wuerl of Seattle. The Vatican has given Bishop Wuerl responsibility for the areas of Church life removed from Archbishop Hunthausen.

"With specific reference to Seattle, while we are not authorized to judge the facts of the case, I believe it is clear that the process employed by the Holy See was in accord with general principles of Church law and procedures," Bishop Malone said.

"The decision ... was made by proper Church authorities. As such it deserves our respect and confidence," he said.

"Archbishop Hunthausen and Bishop

Wuerl have been given a job to do by the Holy See," he added. "We are prepared to offer any assistance judged helpful and appropriate by the parties involved."

"The conference of bishops has no authority to intervene in the internal affairs of a diocese or in the unique relationship between the pope and individual bishops," he said.

"On this occasion," he said, "the bishops of the United States wish to affirm unreservedly their loyalty to and unity with the Holy Father."

Bishop Malone noted the anguish felt by Catholics across the country in regard to the Hunthausen case.

"The pain of Archbishop Hunthausen and Bishop Wuerl, our brothers in the episcopacy, the abuse directed at the Holy Father and the Holy See, the dismay and confusion experienced by many good people — these things are deeply troubling," he said.

Yet, he said, it is time to move ahead.

"While there appear to have been misunderstandings at one point or another along the way, the need now is to look to the future, not the past, and carry out the decision (of the Vatican)," he continued. "The best assistance I or anyone can give is to offer precisely this counsel."

He pointed out that "not only is there

suffering in the Church in Seattle" but that the controversy also "has spread via the media and in other ways and has affected Catholics throughout the country."

The bishops themselves, he said, "could address the issues involved in this situation all week, but we would deceive ourselves if we thought that such discussion would solve all the problems, heal all the hurt."

He described the traumatic situation as comparable to "the kind of pain that can only be felt by members of a family," a parallel that suggests "some of the directions in which we must go. There are certain things that a family must do when it wants to resolve a problem," he said.

"A family comes together" and "support is expressed, for the persons as persons, and for the responsibilities they must bear."

"This we bishops have done together in these days," he added.

"A family also takes steps to see that, insofar as possible, a painful situation does not happen again," he said. "In our case, that means working to find creative ways of presenting the Church's teaching in the best light possible, but also seeking mechanisms of responding when confusion or error occurs. We must be seen as committed to hearing and solving the problems."

The NCCB leader also said the controversy involves the relationship of local churches

and the pope. "Bishops exercise their office in communion with him and under his authority," he said.

"Based on experience bishops are conscious that in such matters the Holy See proceeds carefully and charitably, employing procedures developed over many years to protect the rights of individuals and promote the common good of the Church," Bishop Malone said.

He reminded his colleagues that "by universal Church law and the (bishops') conference's norms, the conference is not able to review, much less judge, a case involving a diocesan bishop and the Holy See."

In a brief statement a few hours later, Archbishop Hunthausen praised Bishop Malone's statement as a "very hopeful sign."

He said it "indicates a genuine readiness on the part of the conference to offer any assistance judged helpful and appropriate by me and by the other parties involved."

This, he said, "is the kind of assurance I was seeking when I accepted the invitation to make a presentation to the conference in the first place."

He said Bishop Malone's statement "will probably not please everyone, but it was 'a good statement ... that has emerged from a very honest exchange of many different points of view.'"