

# National/International Report



**DACCA ARRIVAL**-Pope John Paul II puts his arms around a group of young Bangladesh dancers on his arrival at Dacca airport to start his two-week, six-nation tour. The 31,000-mile trip will be the longest of his eight-year papacy.

## Pope downplays talk of divisions, is willing to meet with U.S. bishops

By John Thavis  
**Aboard the papal plane (NC)** — On his way to Bangladesh Nov. 19, Pope John Paul II downplayed talk of divisions between the Vatican and U.S. Catholics and indicated he would be willing to meet with a delegation of U.S. bishops to discuss Church issues in the country.

Bishop James Malone, outgoing president of the U.S. bishops' conference, recently suggested a meeting to prepare for the pope's expected trip to the United States next year.

"I suppose this is a normal proceeding among us, among the United States bishops and the pope," the pope said of the idea.

The pope spoke to reporters aboard a flight from Rome to Dacca, Bangladesh, his first stop on a Nov. 19-Dec 1 trip to Asia, the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

Asked about a possible rift between some U.S. Catholics and the Vatican, the pope refused to comment at length, saying that "sometimes one creates divisions that do not exist" by "talking and writing."

"Our task — that of myself and the bishops of the United States — is the same, the good of the Church. It is our common ministry," he said.

The pope said it was clear that the "American Church is part of the universal Church and still wants to be a part of the universal Church."

Asked about the case of Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, the pope said: "I know only the statement by the (bishops' conference) president, and it was correct."

During the U.S. bishops' meeting earlier this month, Bishop Malone read a statement saying the Vatican's decision limiting Archbishop Hunthausen's powers deserved the "respect and confidence" of his fellow bishops. He said that the "general principles of Church law and procedures" had been applied in the case.

During the plane trip, the pope also said it was his pastoral "duty" to visit Catholics in the Soviet Union, but ruled out what he termed a "political trip" to the country.

A Vatican spokesman said the remarks meant that the pope, if invited, would not travel to the Soviet Union unless he could visit the faithful in the republics of Lithuania and the Ukraine. Asked whether he might visit the Soviet Union in 1988 for the celebration of 1,000 years of Russian Christianity, the pope answered: "I never speak of a trip to Russia. For me, a trip to Lithuania would be part of my duty."

He summed up the Soviet trip possibilities by saying: "A spiritual trip, yes; a pastoral trip, I don't know how it would be done; and a political trip, I exclude."

Vatican press spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said afterward that the pope is very clear in implying that he can go to Moscow without seeing his flock in Lithuania and in the Ukraine. Polish Soviet republicans have sizable Catholic populations.

Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev is expected to visit Italy soon, and the Vatican has said it is open to his meeting with the pope at the Vatican.

## U.S. bishops approve new rites, rules for entering Church

By Jerry Filteau  
**Washington (NC)** — By overwhelming margins the U.S. Catholic bishops approved a new set of rites and rules for the entry of converts into the Church.

In five related votes, the nation's prelates set in motion a five-year plan to expand, develop and refine the revived Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, or RCIA as it candidates, culminating in celebration at Easter of the three sacraments of Christian initiation: baptism, confirmation and first Eucharist.

The RCIA was the result of a mandate by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s to

revive the ancient custom of the catechumenate. Catechumens are unbaptized adults learning Christian beliefs and practices as they prepare to join the church.

Following up on the council's directives, the Holy See in 1972 produced a Latin text of the RCIA, covering the basic rules and liturgical aspects of the initiation process for catechumens. Two years later the U.S. bishops adopted a provisional English translation and began to implement the rite in the United States.

In their actions Nov. 11 the bishops:

- Approved, 245-16, a more refined translation of the original liturgical texts.
- Revised some of the ritual actions to reflect their 12 years of experience with the rite. In a series of separate ballots, all revisions were approved by well over 200 bishops.
- Approved, 245-13, new texts adapting the rite to various pastoral and cultural situations in the United States.
- Approved, 240-10, a set of national statutes spelling out the rights of catechumens and the Church's expectations

from them. Most of these statutes simply spelled out existing Church law as it applies to catechumens, but one provision expanded the nine-month catechumenate period now common in a number of dioceses to a full year or more.

● Passed, 238-18, a detailed national plan for implementing the RCIA throughout the country. The five-year plan included month-by-month plans for training RCIA leaders, introducing new parts of the total program, and reporting, reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of various aspects of the new, expanded rite.

The first four decisions, involving Church liturgy and law, required a two-thirds affirmative vote from the members of the bishops' conference plus confirmation of the Holy See.

The national implementation plan, essentially a pastoral and administrative decision on practical steps to help make the expanded

RCIA more uniform and effective throughout the country, required only a simple majority vote by the bishops and no Vatican confirmation.

The bishops began their examination of the RCIA with a two-hour workshop on the rite during the opening day of their meeting. Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles, one of the workshop leaders, called the catechumenate "an essential element for the life of the Church."

Archbishop Mahony said bishops should not underestimate "the power of the catechumenate for the life of the Church."

As they go through the process of preparing to join the Church as adult Catholics, he said, "the catechumens themselves become evangelizers of the parish community."

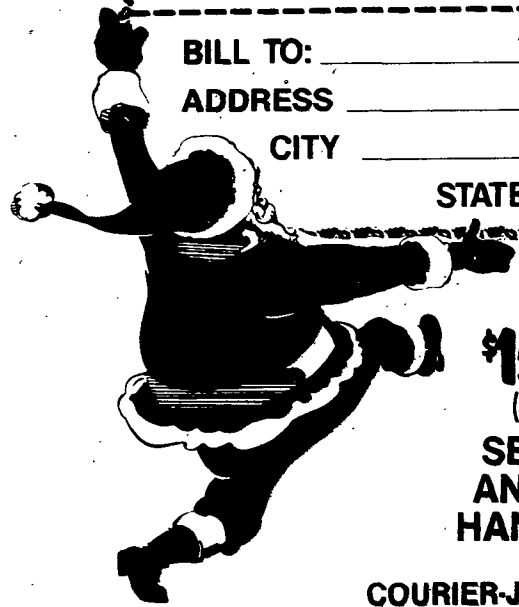
Several bishops at the workshop expressed enthusiasm for the revived catechumenate but concern about unevenness in development.

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