

U.S. hierarchy played larger role in making decisions for 1987 visit

By Agostino Bono
Vatican City (NC) — When Pope John Paul II first visited the United States in 1979, he did not give Communion in the hand, although it was a common practice in many of the U.S. dioceses he visited.

Nor were female ministers of the Eucharist allowed to distribute Communion at papal Masses.

Yet plans for the pope's second major pastoral visit Sept. 10-19 call for both practices in places where they are permitted by the local bishop.

The change demonstrates a lesson in applied collegiality.

The 1979 trip involved little consultation with the local bishops. At the time, papal trips outside Italy were still something new. Also, the Vatican did not confirm until July that year the pope's plan to visit in October — leaving little time for consultation with the U.S. bishops.

The result was a trip planned mostly by the Vatican.

In the intervening years, papal trip planning

has evolved to allow increasing input from local bishops. The 1987 papal trip is the result of numerous cross-Atlantic contacts. It involved a major meeting in March of U.S. bishops and Vatican officials to establish itineraries, themes and the general framework for the visit.

The result is a trip in which a lot of decision making was done by the local hierarchy. The decisions about Communion in the hand, and women distributing the Eucharist are examples.

Another example of local decision making is the thematic emphasis on the positive accomplishments of U.S. Catholicism.

Also, each of the nine dioceses the pope will visit has a subtheme within the trip's overall theme of "Unity in the Work of Service, Building up the Body of Christ."

The subthemes range from the contributions minority groups have made in the Church to the impact of Catholic social services on national life. They include the U.S. Church's work in fostering ecumenism, Catholic education and the permanent

diaconate.
 The pre-trip planning is part of a series of major collegial events Vatican and U.S. Church officials hope will improve their sometimes tense relations.

The series began with the March 18-21 meetings at which the pope and Vatican and U.S. officials were able to exchange information and impressions about Catholic life in the United States.

The immediate aim of the meeting was to set the stage so that the papal visit would be a success. But the meeting also established the framework for a longer process of improving relations between Vatican and U.S. Church officials.

This longer process includes the papal trip, the 1988 "ad limina" meetings between the pope and the individual U.S. bishops heading dioceses, and a follow-up summit meeting between a delegation of U.S. bishops, the pope and Vatican officials. Vatican officials said that the summit, proposed by the pope during the March sessions, is likely to take place in 1989.

U.S. and Vatican officials expect the pope's visit this September to foster unity because it will give Catholics of diverse views a central figure around which they can rally.

Vatican officials also note that the United States is not the only country in which Catholics are sharply divided. They say papal travels have given the pope ample experience in honing his image as the visible sign of Church unity.

He does it through his meetings with diverse Catholic organizations and by visiting a regional cross-section of the countries he visits. His approach also has a strong collegial dimension. The local bishop is always at the pope's side in each jurisdiction the pontiff travels to — a sign of Church unity and ministry in the diocese.

Pope John Paul also holds a substantial issue-oriented meeting in each country with the bishops' conference and concelebrates Mass with the national hierarchy.

During the U.S. trip, those events will take place on Sept. 16 in Los Angeles.



1987 Wedding Guide

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