

World & Nation

Capsules

Home for AIDS babies to open

Washington (NC) — A home for babies with AIDS will be opened by the Diocese of Albany, N.Y., Oct. 30 in a residential neighborhood of Albany.

Six babies who have acquired immune deficiency syndrome or who have been diagnosed as carrying AIDS antibodies but not showing signs of the disease will live in the residence, the first of its kind in New York state, said Mercy Sister Maureen Joyce.

The new home has been named Farano Center for Children after Albany diocesan chancellor Father Michael A. Farano, "an advocate for the poor and powerless," said Sister Joyce, director of the home. It eventually will be home for up to 11 children under the age of 4.

Homeless document due out

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II expressed concern for the world's homeless, and the Vatican announced a new document on the issue to be released by the end of November.

In a telegram to Peter Florin, president of the 42nd U.N. General Assembly, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli said the pope expressed support for the United Nations' International Day for the Homeless Oct. 12.

Homelessness is a "vast problem of insufficient and inadequate housing in many countries of the world," the message said.

Vocation shortage assessed

Boston (NC) — The vocations shortage of the 1980s results in part from insufficient contact between clergy and laity and a growing alienation of women in the church, said speakers at the Oct. 4-9 meeting of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocations Directors in Boston.

Other causes cited include lack of parental encouragement and changes in family and social structures.

Dolores Curran, homemaker and syndicated columnist, said the church and family are victims of changes which have fractured the traditional two-parent family and led to fewer vocations to the religious life.

But she warned vocations personnel not to blame lack of vocations on today's family alone.

Surrogacy opponents lash out

Washington (NC) — Opponents of surrogate motherhood, including Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., and Mary Beth Whitehead, mother of "Baby M," acknowledged the pain of infertility for many couples but urged in testimony Oct. 15 that surrogacy be banned as a solution.

But an infertile Montana couple unable to adopt testified that surrogate motherhood was their only option and said it would be unfair to a growing minority of childless couples to limit parenting to adoptive parents and "those biologically able to have children."

The testimony came at a subcommittee hearing of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Official denies statement

Rome (NC) — An official of the Synod of Bishops has denied he told an Italian magazine that he believes the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on the economy is incompetent.

"I have much respect for what the U.S. bishops have done," said Jean-Loup Dherse, synod assistant special secretary and a former vice president of the World Bank.

Dherse told National Catholic News Service that an interview he had with 30 Giorni (30 Days), an Italian Catholic monthly magazine, "does not represent what I think" regarding the 1986 pastoral letter on the economy.

"I totally deny to have spoken of incompetency," he said Oct. 15.



SYNOD SESSION — Pope John Paul II addresses a session of the world Synod of Bishops on the laity.

NC News

African bishops talk of specifics at synod

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — Using grass-roots terms that marked a change from many other synod speeches, African bishops last week reflected on the successes and difficulties of their young churches.

Among some 200 synod speeches Oct. 3-13, which have frequently focused on abstract theological concepts, the African delegates were specific, treating everything from the dowry system and witchcraft to lay educational courses in Catholic universities.

They also revealed a number of common concerns: a desire for more lay formation, a call for family-centered worship and the need for the universal Church to learn more from local cultures.

On a main synod subject, lay ministries, a number of Africans reported that lay people have run local church communities for years because of a chronic priest shortage.

Cardinal Joseph Malula of Kinshasa, Zaire, described the 10-year history of the "mokambi," or lay parish administrator, who is chosen by the bishop to organize parish activities. Cardinal Malula said the "mokambi" counts on the "assistance" of visiting priests in liturgy and preaching.

To help ease the effects of the priest shortage, Archbishop Elias Mutale of Kasama, Zambia, proposed allowing selected lay people to take the priest's place as regular ministers in baptism, the anointing of the sick and marriage.

Bishop Anthony Ilonu of Okigwe, Nigeria, said Nigerian Catholics want to move beyond the missionary-era concept of "father's church" to churches that are "of the people."

He suggested that a "home-liturgy" be devised, "to demonstrate in practice that the family is truly the domestic Church." The liturgy would be led by the husband in a family chapel, and it would build on the traditional Nigerian belief that marriage brings with it a "household deity" with peculiar rights and rituals.

Most Africans had little to say about one of the major synod topics, lay spiritual movements — a largely European phenomenon. Instead, they related local success stories with basic Christian communities.

Archbishop Mutale said in these groups "the faithful gather together in their own neighborhood for Bible sharing, reflection and prayer" challenging themselves on "what it means to be a Christian."

Many African Catholics lack religious formation or education, one Tanzanian bishop said. But African delegates said that situation is being improved.

In Zaire, said Bishop Ignace Matondo Kwa Nzambi of Basankusu, lay people now study theology and philosophy at the national theological university. Additionally, centers for formation, spiritual leadership workshops and catechetical schools have been set up "all across the country," he said.

Bishops from Gabon, Tanzania and Cameroon gave similar accounts.

Several bishops said the Church should recognize the "essential" figure of the catechist. In Africa, they said, the catechist has acted as founder and pastoral leader in many church communities.

In an appeal for local educational control, Archbishop Peter Dery of Tamale, Ghana, said each church should "map out its own formation programs for the laity" to reflect local culture.

Formation must also work in the direction of the clergy, the Africans suggested. Archbishop Dery said seminarians should be required to take courses in forming basic Christian communities.

They also need better general training in collaborating with lay people, said Bishop Michael Cleary of Banjul, Gambia.

During the synod's first 10 days, participants witnessed strong calls for greater social and political involvement by lay Catholics. Africans echoed this, but with different local perspectives. For example, the synod was told of a Catholic Professionals Association formed in Tanzania to fight corruption and bribery in government offices.

In Malawi, said Bishop Gervase Chisendera of Deya, Catholics help build schools,

plant trees for timber and soil conservation and dig wells for clean water.

In Zaire, bishops prohibited the formation of a Catholic political party after independence, encouraging Catholics to become politically involved "in their own name," said Bishop Andre Kaseba of Kalemie-Kirungu. This has proven to be a "healthy decision," he said, because "lay Catholics" are now more integrated into the national community.

Social issues identified by African synod participants reflected local issues.

Zambian bishops listed "witchcraft and beer-drinking" next to family planning and abortion legislation as challenges to lay Catholics. Another bishop said the Church must find a way to Christianize the traditional African dowry system.

The synod's emphasis on women and liturgical and ministerial roles was also raised in some African talks.

In Zambia, for example, said Archbishop Mutale, women in such roles would flout traditional attitudes. But the Zambian bishops have taken a stand for "liberation of women" as a matter of pastoral urgency and for promoting women in Church positions.

Synod preserves a dying language

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Latin is pretty much a dead language, except in the Catholic Church, which has been giving the lingo a good workout at this October's Synod of Bishops on the laity.

During the first two weeks of the synod, about 25 percent of the 230 speakers delivered their talks in Latin — more than were given in any other language.

Although the Second Vatican Council set in motion the widespread use of vernacular in the liturgy, thus removing Catholics in the pew from regular contact with the ancient tongue, Latin is still the church's official language.

Among the Latin-speaking crowd in the synod assembly hall were Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation, and Cardinal Jaime L. Sin of Manila, Philippines.

Although Latin is the official synod language, five modern languages are allowed: Italian, English, French, Spanish and German. This means that delegates from Brazil, the country with the largest Catholic population, cannot speak their native Portuguese on the synod floor.

Most of the Latin speakers are Vatican officials, Third World bishops whose native languages stem from Latin, and bishops from countries not speaking one of the five modern tongues.

As the official language, Latin has a way of spreading itself among all synod participants.

Pivotal reports intended to help the delegates focus on specific issues and themes

are written in Latin. There are two of these: one at the beginning of the synod and another at the midway point. The second summarizes synod speeches as a means of helping delegates formulate concrete proposals when they break into small working groups.

Most of the words spoken at the synod, in whatever language, fall under the secrecy rule. But that rule is often broken.

Officially, full texts of synod speeches are not to be made public, and contact with the press is limited. All information is channeled through an information committee which prepares daily press bulletins containing summaries of speeches written by the speakers. The committee also arranges periodic press conferences at which selected participants field questions.

Vatican officials say the secrecy rule is needed so that bishops — especially those from countries with repressive governments where their views would get them in trouble — can speak more freely.

But the rule is adhered to mainly by Vatican officials, Italians, delegates from communist-ruled countries and those from Spanish-speaking countries.

Many bishops — especially those from countries with a tradition of a free and independent press — make their speeches available upon request. Some even translate their talks into other languages for the convenience of the press.

Others get around the secrecy rules by stripping their texts of some non-substantive phrases and issuing the rest as a summary.

Latin, or otherwise, the word gets out of the synod hall.