

World & Nation

Priests violate bishop's ban with Masses at Medjugorje

By John Thavis

Rome (NC) — Yugoslavian Bishop Pavao Zanic has announced that many priests are disobeying his ban on pilgrimage Masses at the alleged Marian apparition site of Medjugorje, but he plans no action against them.

Priests at Medjugorje confirmed that Masses were continuing, but said they don't believe the ban applies to the priests who come there.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Frane Franic of Split-Makarska, a defender of the alleged apparitions, issued his own directive that said priests could accompany but not organize pilgrimages to Medjugorje.

Bishop Zanic, head of the Mostar-Duvno Diocese that includes Medjugorje, said October 28 that foreign pilgrims have continued to bring groups of pilgrims to the site. A local pastor put up a sign noting the ban on Masses, but it "hasn't done much good," Bishop Zanic said in an interview in Rome.

The bishop said he didn't like the situation, but was being realistic and accepting it for the time being.

In July, Bishop Zanic banned Masses in his diocese by priests who either lead pilgrimages to Medjugorje or attribute a "supernatural character" to the events there. Masses involving as many as 70 concelebrating priests are frequently said at Medjugorje.

Cardinal Franjo Kuharic of Zagreb, president of the Yugoslavian bishops' conference, said in a telephone interview November 2 that Bishop Zanic had every right to ban such Masses because "no one has respected" previous directives against church-organized pilgrimages.

A Vatican official who asked not to be named said in September that Bishop Zanic's banning of Masses fell within his rights and

responsibilities as bishop. But according to priests at Medjugorje, interviewed by telephone in October, the decree is being taken "lightly" by many. Some see it as unenforceable.

"No one is obliged to question every priest" on his beliefs, said Father Philip Pavich, a U.S. Franciscan who assists pilgrims at Medjugorje. "We can't police actions on or off the altar," he said.

The problem is "how to find out what these priests believe," said Father Paul Maslech, head of the Croatian monastery in Chicago. Father Maslech concelebrated a Mass in Medjugorje in August, but did not lead a pilgrim group.

The Church has not passed judgment on the vision claims, which first surfaced in 1981 when six local youths said the Virgin appeared to them. A commission established by Bishop Zanic concluded its work last year. The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith requested that a broader study be undertaken by a new commission named by the Yugoslavian bishops' conference.

In a statement announcing the new commission last January, Bishop Zanic and Cardinal Kuharic said "it is not permitted to organize pilgrimages and other demonstrations which are motivated by the attribution of a supernatural character to the facts of Medjugorje." Previously the Yugoslavian bishops' conference had asked an end to "official organized pilgrimages" to the site.

The doctrinal congregation, in a letter to Italian bishops in 1985, also urged that organized pilgrimages to Medjugorje be discouraged. Bishop Zanic said he took the step in July of prohibiting Masses because the pilgrimages have continued.

Those who defended the Masses said the

word "pilgrimage" is an inaccurate description of the visits that bring several thousand people to Medjugorje daily. Father Pavich said people come in "private, personal visits" or in "group travel." Added Father Slavko Barbaric, spiritual director of the young visionaries at Medjugorje: "All the pilgrimages are private."

In late September, Archbishop Franic issued his own guidelines for visitors to Medjugorje. He said:

● Priests may go to Medjugorje but not as organizers of pilgrimages.

● If anyone asks a priest whether he believes in the supernatural character of Medjugorje events, he can say, "I cannot believe" until the Church makes an official declaration on the events.

The faithful may travel individually or in privately organized pilgrimages to Medjugorje, but not in those organized by the Church or Church institutions, or by indi-

vidual bishops and pastors.

● Visitors can form their own "opinion" about Medjugorje but not hold a "belief" in those events, until a Church judgment is issued.

Archbishop Franic said his directive represented the conclusions of a three-hour discussion on Medjugorje among Croatian-speaking Yugoslavian bishops.

Archbishop Franic said the fact of numerous pilgrimages to Medjugorje requires the pastoral assistance of priests. Sources at Medjugorje estimate that about 9,000 priests have visited since the alleged visions were first reported.

Archbishop Franic also said every bishop should refrain from issuing a personal judgment about the events.

In 1984, Bishop Zanic characterized the visions as a "collective hallucination."

Shortly afterward, Archbishop Franic said he believed the alleged apparitions were real.

'Choose Life' theme for Dietz profession

Sister Karen Marie Dietz will make her first profession of vows to the Sisters of St. Joseph on Saturday, Nov. 7, at 2 p.m. in the congregation's motherhouse.

Sister Dietz has selected "Choose Life" as the theme for her profession. As a symbol of her commitment, she will receive a Christ Candle. Monsignor Gerald Krieg and Father Paul Tomasso will concelebrate the



liturgy. Afterward, family and friends will gather for a reception at St. Joseph's Convent and Infirmary, where Sister Dietz served during her novitiate.

The daughter of Richard and Patricia Dietz of Acton, Mass., she earned a bachelor's degree from Allegheny College in 1982, and a master's degree from Fordham University in 1983.

Prior to entering the novitiate, Sister Dietz served as director of religious education at St. Stephen's Parish in Geneva. Following her profession, she plans to work as director of religious education at St. Ann's/St. Gregory's parish cluster.

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