

World & Nation

Bishops back peace efforts, oppose contraceptive clinics

Washington (NC) — U.S. bishops at their fall general meeting approved a Central America policy statement opposing U.S. military aid to the contra rebels in Nicaragua and expressed their opposition to school-based health clinics which distribute contraceptives.

Meeting at the Capital Hilton Hotel in Washington November 16-19, the approximately 300 bishops attending the meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference also approved:

- A new national collection to ease the retirement burdens of religious orders.

- A national pastoral plan for Hispanic ministry.

- A new rite for use in celebrations of marriage between persons of different faiths. The rite still needs approval of the Vatican before it can be used.

- Establishment of December 12, the date Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared in Mexico in 1531, as a feast day — but not a holy day of obligation — in the United States.

- Norms for priests' retirement years that call on bishops to recognize the "value and dignity" of aging priests and their retirement.

The bishops delayed action on proposed guidelines for bishop-theologian relations when they ran out of time on the final day of the meeting.

They also heard glowing accounts of the success of Pope John Paul II's September pastoral visit and received reports on such varied items as the progress of a committee examining the morality of nuclear deterrence and the status of their investment portfolio in the wake of October's stock market drop.

The bishops' new Central America statement, updating a statement issued in 1981, calls military aid to the contras "legally doubtful and morally wrong." It also repudiates human rights abuses by any side in the Central American conflict and endorses regional peace initiatives.

Their statement on school-based health clinics expresses what the bishops say are both moral and practical reasons why such clinics should not distribute contraceptives. The statement said federal and state laws as well as local school board policies should be amended to exclude contraceptive services from public schools.

In approving their pastoral plan for Hispanic ministry, the bishops sought to respond to what one of them warned was the potential loss of up to 50 percent of Hispanic Catholics to other denominations or to no religion at all. The plan calls for small parish-based communities, youth ministry,

promotion of family life and leadership formation adapted to the Hispanic culture.

The new national collection approved by the bishops to meet the rising retirement costs for religious orders — particularly orders of nuns — will be conducted annually for 10 years "unless the need is met before then." The retirement need, estimated at \$2.5 billion, includes the cost of meeting health care and living expenses of current and future retirees.

Delayed until their next meeting were the bishops' proposed guidelines for improving relations with theologians and resolving disputes over theological or doctrinal matters.

Although the guidelines had been criticized by some bishops for being theologically "lacking," a motion to send them back to committee failed. But further action was suspended with amendments still pending when departures of bishops at the end of the meeting led to the lack of a quorum.

Information reports to the bishops also made up a large part of the meeting.

In one report, the bishops were told the NCCB-USCC suffered paper losses of \$6.7 million in the October stock market drop. The conferences' total portfolio at the end of the month — \$69.7 million — was still worth more than their original investment, but most of the profits they would have gained were eaten up when stocks fell.

They also were told November 18 by Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia, a member of a special council advising the pope on Vatican finances, that the financially strapped Vatican for the first time will soon release an annual statement on its budget and finances.

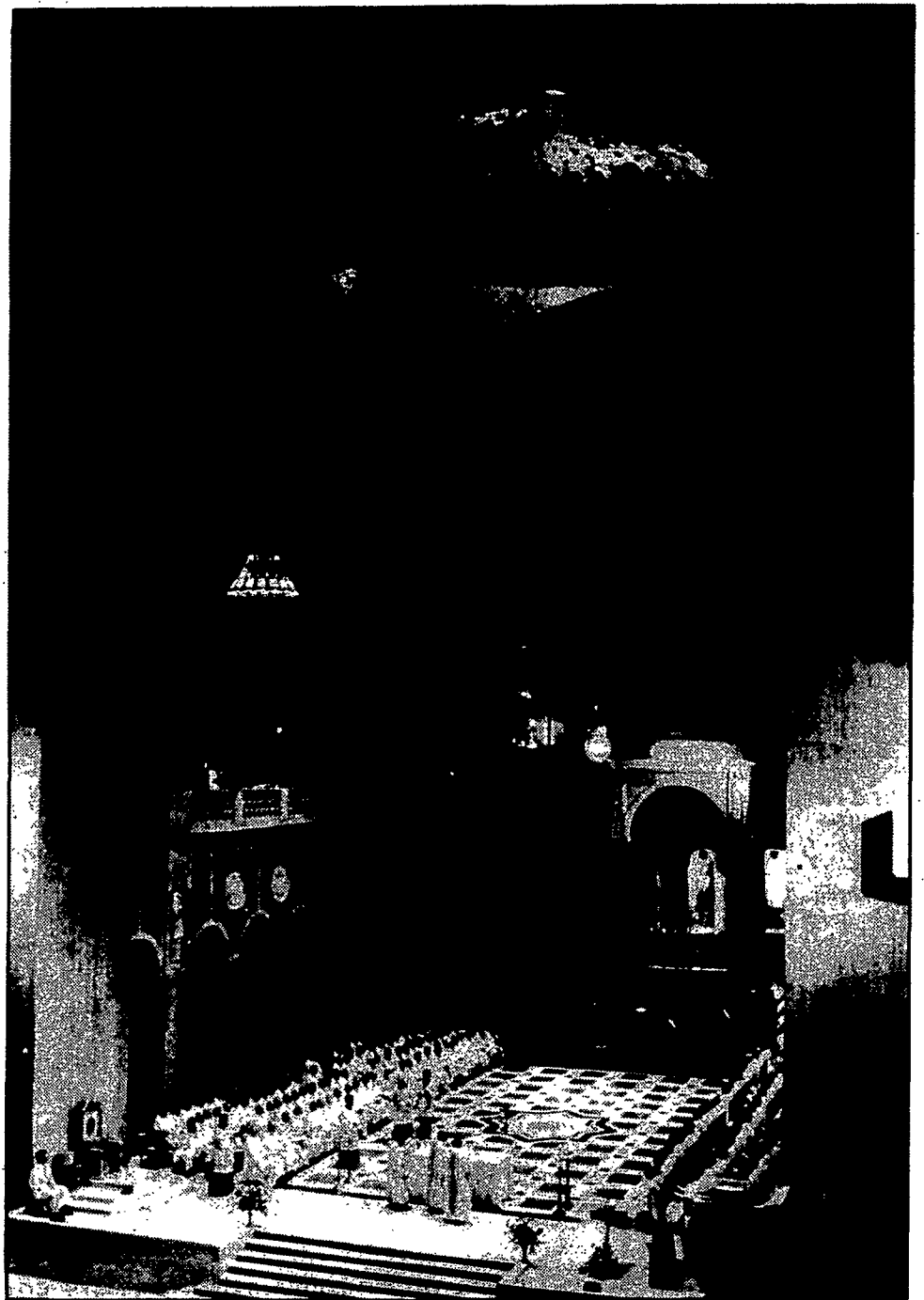
Reporting on the progress of the bishops' ad hoc committee examining the morality of nuclear deterrence policies, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago said November 17 that his committee's report next spring also will deal with the morality of modern defense systems, such as President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative.

He said the committee also is examining the effect of spiraling arms costs on programs to alleviate poverty.

The bishops heard two separate reports on Pope John Paul's U.S. visit. Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, NCCB-USCC president, opened the meeting November 16 by saying that those who thought the pope was coming to scold the U.S. Church were proven wrong.

And Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly of Louisville, Ky., who headed a committee which coordinated the trip, said that as a result people are returning to the sacraments.

Archbishop May also reported on



The National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., was the site for a Marian-Year Mass concelebrated during the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' meeting last week.

October's world Synod of Bishops in Rome on the role of the laity, which he attended as one of four delegates of the NCCB. He said the need to address the role of women in the Church "forthrightly and now" quickly became a major concern at the synod.

In other actions the bishops:

- Approved formation of a joint commission made up of bishops and female and male members of religious orders, and a

separate bishops' Committee on Religious Life and Ministry.

- Elected Archbishop Daniel W. Kucera of Dubuque, Iowa, as NCCB treasurer for the next three years.

- Approved a \$29.5 million budget for 1988 for the NCCB-USCC and an increase in the 1989 assessment on U.S. dioceses to help pay for NCCB-USCC activities.

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