

World & Nation

Pope praises U.S. bishops' draft pastoral on women

Castel Gandolfo, Italy (NC) — Pope John Paul II praised the U.S. bishops' draft pastoral on women, endorsing its opposition to sex discrimination and its presentation of women as "partners" in redemption.

The pope said his own document on women, expected soon, will make clear that the Church wants to clarify women's rights and duties and defend their "feminine dignity."

He said the Church needs to promote a "true Christian feminism," defending women's "vocation and dignity" and emphasizing the "complementarity" of men and women.

The pope spoke September 2 as he met

with 22 bishops from the western United States at his summer residence outside Rome. Among the group was Archbishop William J. Levada of Portland, Ore., a member of the committee that prepared the statement on women.

The pope said the first draft of the U.S. document had shown "sensitivity" in dealing with the women's issues.

"You are rightly striving to eliminate discrimination based on sex," the pope said. The bishops' statement called sexism a pervasive sin that should be eliminated in the Church and in society.

The pope also lauded the bishops' statement for presenting Mary as "a special

symbol and model for women in their partnership with God in the ministry of the Church." He did not refer to the statement's more specific recommendations that all liturgical ministries not requiring ordination be opened to women, and that the possibility of ordaining women deacons be studied.

The pope said the complementary nature of men and women was an essential concept in dealing with the specific rights of women.

"Whatever violates the complementarity of women and men, whatever impedes the true communion of persons according to the complementarity of the sexes offends the dignity of both women and men," he said.

The U.S. bishops' statement, he added, makes "real efforts to respond with sensitivity to these greatly varying concerns, by presenting women as partners in the mystery of the redemption as this mystery is lived out in our day."

The pope said the whole Church needs to make a "great prayerful reflection" on the Church's teaching about women's dignity and vocation. His own forthcoming document, he said, reflects the seriousness of the Church's commitment.

"The Church is determined to place her

full teaching, with all the power with which divine truth is invested, at the service of the cause of women in the modern world — to help clarify their correlative rights and duties, while defending their feminine dignity and vocation," the pope said.

"The importance of true Christian feminism is so great that every effort must be made to present the principles on which this cause is based," he added.

In more general remarks to the bishops, the pope said the church's concern for human dignity was opposed today by a decline in fundamental values — such as respect for human life "from the moment of conception" and respect for the indissolubility of marriage.

Human rights, he said, must be defended not only through organizations but through personal relationships that recognize the divine image in people.

He said the modern decline in values was "a phenomenon which militates against this whole structure of personal relationships and therefore against human rights."

The pope also reminded bishops that Catholic parents have a duty to educate their children "according to their moral and religious convictions, and to supervise closely and to control their sex education."

"The Church must continue to present human sexuality as linked to God's plan of creation and constantly proclaim the ... dignity of sex," he said.

Among other current threats to the family, the pope named "lucrative drug trafficking and pornography."

The U.S. bishops were on their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican, made every five years by heads of dioceses. Included were bishops from Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Wyoming.

Missing from the group were Seattle's Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen and Coadjutor Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy. A Vatican official said the "ad limina" visits of the Seattle prelates were rescheduled for later in the year so that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation, and Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, head of the Congregation for Bishops, could meet with them. Neither cardinal was available in early September.

RCIA rite becomes mandatory in U.S.

Washington (NC) — The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, mandatory in all U.S. dioceses, should renew parishes as it nurtures the faith of new Catholics, said a priest involved in the nationwide implementation of the Vatican-approved rite.

Father James B. Dunning, president of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate, said the RCIA "raises the most fundamental issues of conversion and faith" for those wishing to join the Catholic community.

By involving the community in the candidate's preparation period, through liturgies and other activities, the example and enthusiasm of new-found faith can "renew the parish," Father Dunning said.

The English translation of the RCIA, approved by the U.S. bishops in 1986, was confirmed for use in the United States by the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship last March.

The U.S. bishops voted to make implementation of the rite's final form mandatory as of Sept. 1, 1988. As such, "it is the only rite for reception of an adult into the church," said Msgr. Alan Detscher, an associate in the U.S. bishops' secretariat for liturgy.

The Latin text of the rite, called for by the Second Vatican Council, was released by the Holy See in 1972 and a provisional English translation was approved by the U.S. bishops in 1974.

The RCIA is based on ancient church customs of catechetical formation and reception of adult converts to the faith. It includes a series of liturgical rites for candidates, culminating in the celebration at the Easter Vigil of the three sacraments of Christian initiation: baptism, confirmation and first Eucharist.

The rite also includes similar methods of preparation and liturgical celebrations for baptized Christians seeking full membership in the Catholic Church.

In preparation for the implementation of the new rite, the North American Forum and the bishops' liturgy secretariat sponsored four regional workshops last spring for bishops and diocesan leaders.

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