

World and Nation

Pope issues paper on laity, urges stronger witness

By Greg Erlanson

VATICAN CITY (NC) — Pope John Paul II's new document on the laity calls for improved religious formation of Catholics, a greater role for women in the church, and a stronger Christian witness at all levels of society.

In his long-awaited apostolic exhortation on "the vocation and mission of the lay faithful," the pope urged a marshaling of the laity to evangelize a world which he said is increasingly indifferent or hostile to Christianity.

The pope warned of a "new state of affairs" in both church and society that "calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful."

"It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle," he said.

As recommended by the 1987 world Synod of Bishops, two hotly debated issues — lay movements and ministries — continue to be the subjects of separate Vatican studies, the pope said.

The 200-page post-synodal apostolic exhortation is titled *Christifideles Laici: The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*.

Signed by the pope Dec. 30, the feast of the Holy Family, the document was made public by the Vatican Jan. 30.

The exhortation draws heavily on the documents of Vatican II and the 54 final propositions voted on by delegates to the October, 1987, synod at the end of their monthlong discussion of the laity's vocation and mission.

The document also raises concerns the pope has often voiced:

• With increasing threats to human dignity and Christian belief, and on the eve of third millennium of Christianity, Catholics should renew themselves and their societies.

• In the face of religious indifference and secularism, the "responsibility" of Catholic laity "is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only valid response ... to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society."

The exhortation consists of five chapters, an introduction and a final appeal:

- Chapter 1 defines the laity and their Christian mission in the secular world.
- Chapter 2 discusses lay participation in the church, including ministries and charisms, the local church and new lay movements.
- Chapter 3 appeals for the re-evangelization of society to promote human dignity, the

church's social teachings and Christian participation in public life and culture.

• Chapter 4 examines the diversity of Christian vocations, including those of women and men, young and older people, and the sick and suffering.

• Chapter 5 calls for an ongoing religious formation which unifies the Christian's private and public lives.

The pope balances support for post-conciliar developments with an affirmation of traditional structures and disciplines, particularly in his discussion of lay ministries, the role of women and new lay movements.

His praise of the laity for its desire to be more actively involved in the life of the church is balanced by a caution against a blurring of roles between the ordained and non-ordained ministries.

While expressing the synod's appreciation for lay involvement, the pope said bishops expressed concern "about a too-indiscriminate use of the word 'ministry,' the confusion and the equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, the lack of observance of ecclesiastical laws and norms," and the tendency to clericalize the laity.

Certain tasks such as the ministry of the word and distribution of Communion can be performed by the laity "when necessity and expediency in the church require it," he said.

But the pope warned pastors to "guard against a facile yet abusive recourse to a presumed 'situation of emergency' or to 'supply by necessity,' where objectively this does not exist or where alternative possibilities could exist through better pastoral planning."

The pope repeated his announcement of last June 17 that a commission is studying "the various theological, liturgical, juridical and pastoral considerations which are associated with the great increase today of the ministries entrusted to the lay faithful."

On the vocation of women and their role in church and society, the pope repeated his condemnation of sexual discrimination and other threats to the dignity of women contained in his 1988 apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

In his exhortation, the pope acknowledged the "indispensable contribution of women to the building up of the church and the development of society."

His reiteration of the church's teaching that the ordained priesthood is reserved for men was balanced by a call for greater involvement by

women in the church.

"Above all the acknowledgement in theory of the active and responsible presence of woman in the church must be realized in practice," he said.

Canon law contains many provisions for such participation, he added, but they "must be more commonly known" and "realized with greater timeliness and determination."

No mention was made of female altar servers or deacons, two issues raised by individual synod delegates but not included in the synod's final propositions.

The pope balanced praise for the local church and particularly the parish with words of en-

couragement for new lay movements.

"In our day the parish still enjoys a new and promising season," he said, and he encouraged various efforts to renew it.

The pope also spoke of a "new era of group endeavors" in movements, groups and associations.

In a final appeal, the pope said the church was standing on the "threshold of the third millennium."

"A great venture, both challenging and wonderful, is entrusted to the church — that of a re-evangelization, which is so much needed by the present world," he said. The laity are an "active and responsible part of this venture."

163 European theologians decry pope's 'erroneous' use of authority

By Greg Erlanson

VATICAN CITY (NC) — A declaration signed by 163 European theologians strongly criticized Pope John Paul II for his use of papal authority in the appointment of bishops and theologians and his opposition to contraception.

"When the pope does that which is not part of his office, he cannot demand obedience in the name of Catholicism," said the German-language declaration. "He must expect dissent."

The president of the German bishops' conference, Bishop Karl Lehmann of Mainz, West Germany, subsequently criticized the declaration for its "exaggerated" charges. He called on its signers "to help to clarify the concerns that have arisen and all the controversial questions" in an accurate, honest and nuanced way.

The day after the declaration was released, Vatican press spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls called it a "local matter" to be addressed by the German bishops. He also said some signers had retracted their support, but did not say who they were.

The statement by Bishop Lehmann later was released by the Vatican press office.

Titled "Against Interdictions — For an Open Catholicism," the theologians' declaration was made public Jan. 25 in Cologne, West Germany. Signers from West Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland included Fathers Hans Kung and Edward Schillebeeckx. Both theologians have been the subject of Vatican investigation and criticism.

The declaration raised three areas of criticism:

• Recent papal bishops' appointments, particularly that of Cardinal Joachim Meisner to the See of Cologne. It said the selection of the bishop should not be only the private choice of the pope and called the process by which Cardinal Meisner was chosen "scandalous."

Recent bishop appointments in Latin America, Austria, Sri Lanka, Spain, the Netherlands as well as Germany show that the Second Vat-

ican Council's call for collegiality between pope and bishops is being "smothered" by "a new Roman centralism," it declared.

• The granting of approval for the teaching of Catholic theology at public universities, as allowed by church-state concordats. The declaration said theologians with whom Rome disagreed were being deprived of their right to teach, and that this use of authority threatened freedom of research and teaching.

• The pope's teachings on the illicitness of contraception, which it called an "intense fixation." The declaration said the pope sought to link the church's ban to fundamental articles of faith.

"The concept of New Testament truth and Jesus' teaching about salvation are enlisted by the pope to represent a specific teaching that cannot be justified either in holy Scripture or in the traditions of the church," the declaration said.

The theologians said they had an obligation to criticize publicly if the teaching authority of the church "uses its power in an erroneous way and thus falls in contradiction with its objectives, putting in danger the path toward ecumenism and going back on the openings of the council."

In a response released by the German bishops' conference Jan. 26 and by the Vatican press office Jan. 27, Bishop Lehmann said the Cologne declaration "takes up again a discussion of recent months" that "has contributed to a profound confusion in many Catholics."

Bishop Lehmann said the declaration addressed "many difficult subjects, however with a summary presentation that does not take into account the real situation in a balanced way."

"It is always problematic to make, based on single episodes, a generalized description of a situation," Bishop Lehmann said. "This is still more questionable" when "imprecise statements, ... slogans and rash estimations" are used.

In a declaration in which the signatories appeal often to "scientific criteria and norms," they should take more care in addressing such difficult questions, he added.

The bishop said the declaration made the possibility of a dialogue on the issues "more difficult" when church officials' use of authority is strongly criticized and the relationship between theologians and the magisterium, or teaching authority, of the church is described in such a way as to make appear "irreconcilable authority and freedom, obedience and responsibility."

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