

Bishops' agenda covers teaching, Black Catholics

By Jerry Filteau
NC News

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops are to vote on statements on their own doctrinal responsibilities and on reconciliation between the United States and Vietnam when they hold their spring meeting June 16-19.

The meeting, the first to be held at Seton Hall University in South Orange, N.J., will also feature extended discussions on evangelization of black Catholics in the United States, integrating Catholic social teaching in the church and society, and implementing the bishops' 1987 national pastoral plan for Hispanic ministry.

A three-year, \$360,000 plan to observe the 1992 fifth centenary of Christianity in the Americas is also up for a vote at the meeting. It includes plans for celebrations to culminate in an October 1992 visit by Pope John Paul II to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, to meet with a convocation of bishops from throughout the Americas.

Also to be voted on at the meeting are two clergy exchange agreements, one with the bishops of Korea and one with the bishops of the Philippines.

Although the meeting of about 250 bishops will last four days, only the first two are devoted to business sessions open to the press.

The third day, Sunday, is a day of prayer and recollection, to be led by Cardinal Godfried Danneels of Malines-Brussels, Belgium.

June 19 will be devoted to an executive session closed to the press, according to the agenda released May 22 by the bishops' Office for Media Relations in Washington. The office said the final press conference would be held late afternoon Saturday, June 17, after the last public session of the meeting.

The document "Doctrinal Responsibilities: Approaches to Promoting Cooperation and Resolving Misunderstandings Between Bishops and Theologians" has been in various drafting stages since 1980.

It was initially presented to the bishops for debate and a vote at the end of their meeting in November 1987. Archbishop J. Francis Stafford of Denver led a move at that time to return the document to the Committee on Doctrine for substantial revision, arguing that it treated the teaching authority and doctrinal responsibility of

bishops too lightly. The bishops voted down his motion to return the document to the committee, but the vote count showed that there were no longer enough bishops present to continue the meeting, so business was suspended.

In November 1988 the document was on the agenda again, slightly revised to reflect amendments suggested by the bishops the year before. But a last-minute letter by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, expressing concern that portions of the document seemed to put bishops and theologians on the same level, led the doctrinal committee to withdraw it from the agenda. The timing of the Vatican intervention, which came too late for consultations to resolve its questions, provoked strong complaints from some bishops.

In March, doctrinal committee chairman Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, Ala., and his staff met for four days in Rome with staff members of the Vatican doctrinal congregation and agreed on 38 amendments to the 57-page text.

At the end of those meetings Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation, wrote a letter saying the consultation was "deeply appreciated"

and his congregation "can only express its satisfaction with the way in which the bishops' conference has chosen to deal with this matter."

The statement on U.S.-Vietnam reconciliation calls for the United States to restore formal diplomatic relations with Vietnam. That statement also was on the preliminary agenda of the November 1988 meeting in order for its writers to engage in further consultations, including a fact-finding visit by three U.S. bishops to Vietnam.

The clergy exchange agreements with the bishops of the Philippines and Korea, where dioceses of the North and South fall into a single bishops' conference, are two more in a series of such agreements that the U.S. bishops have engaged in to assure orderly processes for the movement of priests from one country to another.

The proposed fifth centenary observances of evangelization in the Americas involve a wide range of projects over the next three years, to be coordinated by the bishops' Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, to draw attention to the religious significance of Columbus' discovery of America

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Vatican reissues order to vacate Carmelite convent

WASHINGTON (NC)— For a second time the Vatican has ordered four Discalced Carmelite nuns to end their eight-month barricade and cooperate with church officials who offer "the possibility of saving your vocation."

The nuns, protesting what they see as a liberalization of their austere lifestyle, have been barricaded in the infirmary of their New Jersey monastery since October.

Although the Vatican congregation for religious has declined their appeal, the nuns "are going to remain where they are" and will file an appeal with the Apostolic Signature, the Vatican's highest court, said Betty Sutton, a spokeswoman for the dissident nuns at the Carmelite monastery in Morristown, N.J.

"The sisters are doing OK; they're holding up," Sutton said in a June 1 telephone interview with National Catholic News Service.

The Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in a letter dated May 15 and delivered to the nuns May 30, confirmed its Feb. 22 decision that all but the oldest protester, who is in her 70s, should leave the monastery.

Five Carmelites locked themselves in the infirmary in early October fearing they would be expelled from the monastery because of their outspoken objections to changes made in the community's contemplative lifestyle by Mother Theresa of the Trinity Hewitt, the prioress since 1987.

The changes included brighter lighting in the chapel, the purchase of a television set and the serving of sweets.

One of the protesters, 28-year-old Nicole Prescott, who was called Sister John of the Cross, left the barricade in March for health reasons after her temporary vows as a Carmelite had expired.

Copies of the May 15 Vatican letters were sent to Bishop Frank J. Rodimer of Paterson, in whose diocese the monastery is located. The diocese issued a statement about the situation May 31.

The statement quoted the letters to the nuns as saying, "The problem has been carefully re-examined from all points of view."

"The good of your soul, the safeguarding of the values of religious life, respect for the established authority and the witness we have to render to the church convinces us to confirm what has been decided," the letter said.

Thursday, June 8, 1989



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