

# Bishops focus on evangelization, minorities

By Jerry Filteau

Catholic News Service

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J. — Evangelization and Catholic minorities were dominant themes as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops met June 16-19 at Seton Hall University in South Orange. But the bishops also approved a politically delicate statement urging improved U.S.-Vietnam relations and a document on bishop-theologian relations.

The unquestioned highlight of the meeting was a brilliant, impassioned, loving testimonial of African-American Catholic faith by a dying black nun whose grandfather was a slave.

Fifty-one-year-old Sister Thea Bowman, keynote speaker in a two-hour study session June 17 on evangelization of African-Americans, brought tears to the eyes of many bishops and observers as she spoke and sang to them and, at the end, had them all link hands and join her in singing "We Shall Overcome."

Sister Bowman — a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, teacher, gospel singer, author, lecturer and faculty member of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans — enthralled the bishops with her half-hour speech. She spoke to them about black sufferings and hopes, contributions and needs, history and future and, above all, faith in the U.S. Catholic Church.

Her talk itself gave witness of the richness of African-American culture. To describe the feeling of many black Catholics about the church she sang the black spiritual, "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." At times she used the ringing cadences of the black Baptist preacher, at times the scolding or cajoling tone of the

black wife or mother.

Dressed in an elegant African-American gown, her voice clear and resonant, eyes sparkling and hands animated, Sister Bowman's only betrayal of the advanced bone cancer ravaging her body was the wheelchair she sat in as she spoke.

Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston told the bishops afterward that in his many years of bishops' meetings it was the first time "I was moved to tears of gladness in this assembly."

In a formal response to the presentation on evangelization of black Catholics, the bishops approved a plan to refine a draft document on the subject, "Here I Am, Send Me," to be debated and voted on when the bishops meet again this fall in Baltimore.

The re-evangelization of Hispanic Catholics was another major concern as the bishops devoted much of their afternoon session June 17 to discussing progress in implementing their 1987 National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry.

Among concerns in Hispanic ministry was the estimated yearly loss of some 60,000 Hispanic Catholics to aggressively proselytizing fundamentalist groups.

Experts on Hispanic culture and ministry emphasized to the bishops that a comprehensive plan of ministry must be put in place if the Hispanic Catholic community is to assume its rightful place in the U.S. church.

Before the general meeting of the bishops began, the Hispanic and black bishops of the country met for a full day in

nearby Newark to discuss common concerns and strategies, on both church and social issues. It was the first joint meeting of the two increasingly important minority groups of bishops.

Evangelization came to the fore in a third way as the bishops approved a three-year plan of educational and media programs and other observances focusing on evangelization as their contribution to the approaching 500th anniversary, in 1992, of the arrival of Christianity in the Americas.

Discussion of the Columbus quinquennial plans centered on the need to re-evangelize the estimated 10 million to 15 million unchurched U.S. Catholics and to revitalize the faith life of many who still attend church.

Continued on page 7

## Document on doctrinal responsibility gets OK

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J. — The U.S. Catholic bishops June 17 overwhelmingly approved "Doctrinal Responsibilities," a 57-page document aimed at improving relations between bishops and theologians.

The document:

- Summarizes the respective "responsibilities and rights" of bishops and theologians in matters of doctrine, theology and pastoral practice.
- Suggests a variety of formal and informal activities for ongoing collaboration between bishops and theologians.
- Offers guidelines for formal doctrinal dialogue in cases in which disagreement between a bishop and a theologian touches upon a matter of doctrine

or the pastoral good of the church.

Earlier versions of the document, which was nine years in the making, provoked strong disagreements that led to a 19-month delay in bringing it to a vote.

But the revised draft presented to the bishops at their June 16-19 meeting apparently met nearly all earlier objections. It was passed by a vote of 214-9 with almost no floor debate and only minor amendments.

Some bishops and the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had expressed concerns that earlier drafts of the document contained ambiguities which seemed at times to place bishops and theologians at the same level, downgrading the special teaching authority of the bishop.

Revisions adopted by the doctrine committee as a result of the Vatican consultation describe the pastoral and doctrinal authority of the bishop more clearly and explicitly in a number of places.

In presenting the document to the bishops the day before they voted on it, Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, Ala., chairman of the committee that drafted the document, praised the doctrinal congregation for its cooperation in reworking the document.

He said the congregation's staff raised concerns constructively and worked with his committee to address them, but at the same time recognized clearly that the document was to be written by the U.S. bishops, not the Vatican.

Continued on page 19

## the Power of Love



## 1989 Collection for the Holy Father (Peter's Pence)

### Weekend of June 24-25

#### Purpose of the Collection

The Holy Father's work as universal pastor and spokesperson for peace requires support from the faithful. Funds from the Collection enable the Holy Father to preach the Gospel's message to all the nations of the world particularly the poorer Third World countries. In so doing, he not only raises people's consciousness of Christ's presence, thus strengthening their faith, but he also promotes the issues of justice and peace among all the nations of the earth.

This Sunday, you have the opportunity to assist the Holy Father in advancing the Church's mission by contributing to the annual Collection for the Holy Father, also known as the Peter's Pence Collection. Your support will enable the Holy See to promote the message of Jesus and of global peace throughout the world. Please be generous!

Thank you