

AIDS, abortion mark agenda for bishops

BALTIMORE (CNS) — The United States' bishops opened their fall general meeting in Baltimore Nov. 6 with their conference president declaring that the bishops can bring their church's teachings to the modern world by combining moral leadership with American democracy.

The president, Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, addressed the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' four-day meeting in Baltimore, where the U.S. hierarchy was formally established 200 years ago.

Also speaking on the opening day of the meeting was Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, Vatican secretary of state, who praised the bishops for their statements and national pastoral letters "which address the great issues in the church and society in the light of the Gospel message."

To mark the bicentennial, Cardinal Casaroli attended the meeting as a personal representative of Pope John Paul II. The bishops normally hold their November meeting in Washington, but the gathering was moved to Baltimore to commemorate the bicentennial.

"The care and scholarship that has gone into this body of teaching reflects the seriousness with which you try to fulfill your collegial teaching responsibility," Cardinal Casaroli said.

In his presidential address Archbishop May said that through "a process which blends our role as moral teachers and our respect for our country's democratic traditions, we are able to present the teaching of the church as applied to the present day."

As examples, he cited the bishops' development of a statement on the Middle East, intended for action at the Nov. 6-9 meeting. The document's preparation included a year of work, lengthy discussions, the opportunity for each bishop to propose amendments, and other deliberations, he said.

He also referred to abortion as an issue "where strategy and tactics are important but secondary, where clear-cut moral principle stands tall above all else."

In dealing with abortion, the church "has no option," he said. "It must speak out to protect that (unborn) child. And while it is doing that, it must reach out, too, to help the woman," who often faces difficulties, he added.

"Every woman in America should know that the Catholic Church is willing to care both for her and for the baby she is carrying," he added.

Later in the meeting, the bishops were to vote on a resolution reaffirming the "conviction that all human life is sacred whether born or unborn," urging Catholics to redouble their efforts for laws, social policies, attitudes and constitutional

protection for unborn life, and advancing "morally acceptable alternatives to abortion."

As discussions of agenda items began, Auxiliary Bishop John H. Ricard of Baltimore — proposing a response to a black Catholic pastoral plan — cited an unprecedented "resurgence of racism" in the United States.

He attributed the resurgence of racism, "the likes of which we haven't seen in decades," to the "near loss of the national will to incorporate" blacks into the United States mainstream and to "a void of leadership" at the national level.

The proposed document on black Catholics is a response to the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan developed by a national congress of black Catholics in Washington in 1987.

The bishops began their bicentennial celebration at a Nov. 5 Mass heralding the American church's ethnic mix.

The Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Casaroli in Baltimore's Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the premier Catholic cathedral in the nation.

Among the hundreds of prelates at the Mass were two U.S. churchmen who serve at the Vatican, Cardinal William W. Baum, head of the Congregation for Catholic Education, and Archbishop John P. Foley, head of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

At the Mass, Archbishop Pio Laghi, pronuncio to the United States, read a message from the pope to the bishops.

The pope noted that the bishops face "particular challenges of our own time, both within the church and the world at large."

"As new immigration continues and the remnants of racism remain," he said, Catholics should love, care for and respect each other "so as to be a model of harmony for all people." Catholics also should collaborate with "all people of good will in upholding the dignity and rights of the human person from conception to natural death," the pope said.

In the four-page message Pope John Paul also said that many challenges which faced Bishop John Carroll, appointed Nov. 6, 1789, continue to face U.S. churchmen.

The action items on which the bishops were to vote before the end of the meeting on Nov. 9 also included:

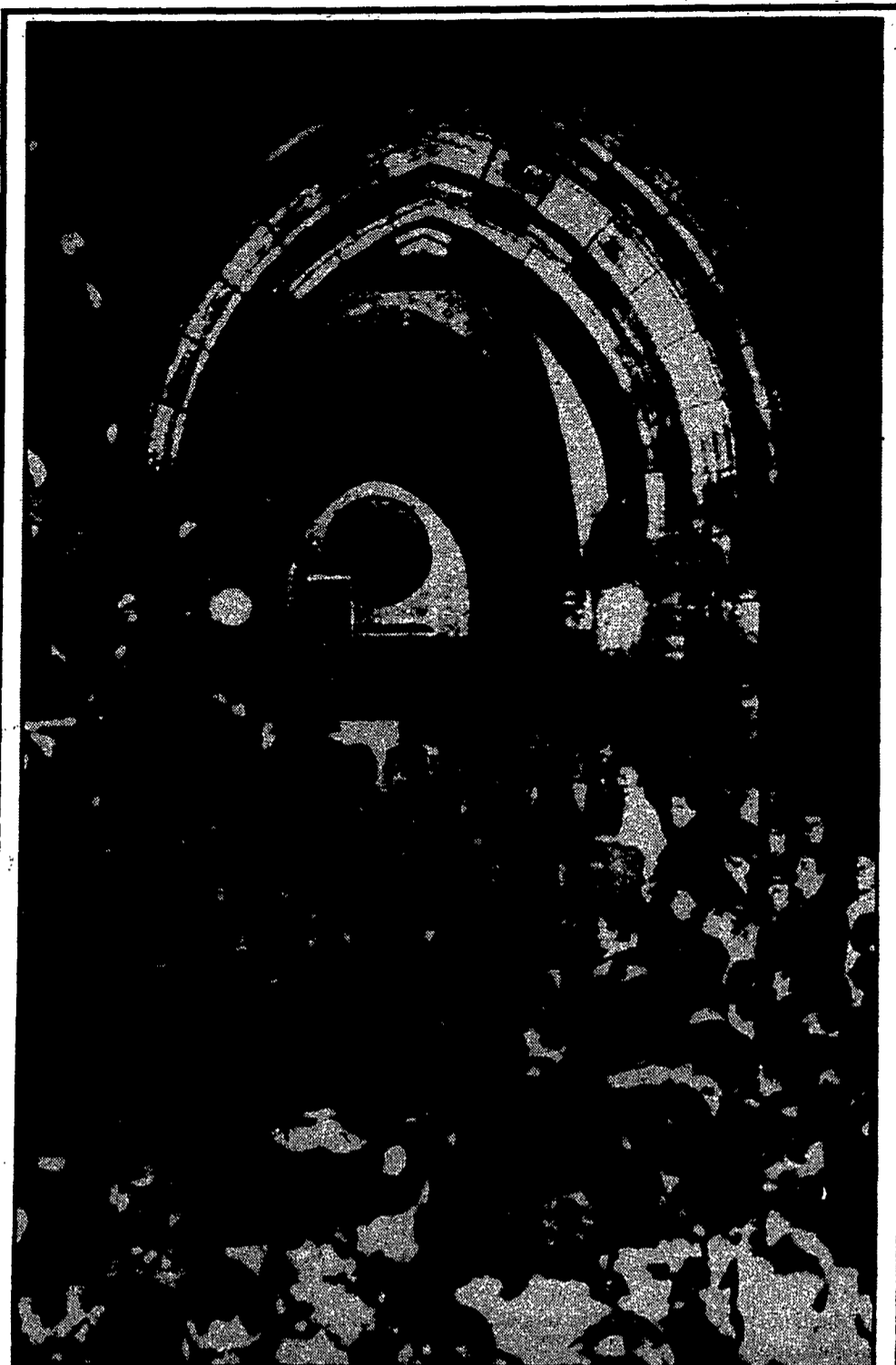
- A statement urging the restoration of Christian sexual morality and an end to drug abuse as the only real solutions to the AIDS epidemic in the United States.

- Establishment of approved prayers and liturgical norms for Sunday celebrations in the United States when no priest is available, an increasingly common phenomenon as the numbers of U.S. priests dwindle.

- A statement calling for changes in U.S. food and agricultural policy and increased attention to rural concerns in the United States.

- A plan to modify the exclusive contract to air U.S. Catholic Conference programming which the bishops entered into in 1988 with Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network — a contract under which EWTN has rejected about

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AP Wide World Photo
Peace Prayers were simultaneously offered at three different churches in the East German city of Gera Thursday night, Nov. 2. Thousands of citizens, hoping to migrate to the West, have caused overcrowding problems throughout the region.

Michigan state Senate approves consent law for teen abortions

LANSING, Mich. (CNS) — The Michigan state Senate passed legislation demanding parental consent for teenagers' abortions, and abortion foes anticipated a fight over the measure in the state House of Representatives.

The state Senate approved the parental consent legislation by a 29-8 vote in late October. A similar bill was pending in the state House of Representatives' Public Health Committee.

"We were very involved with lobbying for the passage" of the bill and are delighted by its Senate success, but expect more hard work ahead, said Barbara Listing, president of Right to Life of Michigan.

"In the long run we will pass the bill," she said. There were 55 co-sponsors of the House version of the bill, which gave the anti-abortion forces a majority as of Nov. 1, she said. There are 109 members of the Michigan House, and one vacancy.

But in the Legislature, according to Mrs. Listing, "we do have a very strong minor-

ity ... that are pro-abortion, on both sides of the aisle. As a result, there's going to be a heated battle on the floor of the House."

She expressed optimism that the House would act by the end of the year, although she said it was less certain that the Legislature could vote that soon to override a gubernatorial veto of the bill. Democratic Gov. James Blanchard "most likely will veto this," she said.

A spokesman for the Michigan branch of the American Civil Liberties Union claimed that the measure really involves "forcing unwanted pregnancies to term. I hope the public isn't suckered into thinking that this is a family-rights bill," said Howard Simon, the group's executive director.

As approved by the Senate, the bill would:

- Demand that a girl under age 18 seeking an abortion get the written permission of one parent, unless a court intervenes and waives the consent requirement.

- Allow a girl whose parent denies permission for an abortion, as well as girls who do not wish to inform their parents, to try to obtain a court waiver of parental consent.

- Demand that courts assist girls seeking judicial intervention in abortions and that judges act within 48 hours.

- Allow courts to lift the requirement for parental consent if the pregnancy threatens the girl's life.

Blanchard has warned he would veto any legislation placing further restrictions on abortions in the state.

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