

Cardinal calls for 'response' to pro-choice Catholics

By Liz Schevtchuk
Catholic News Service

BALTIMORE — American bishops should consider an hierarchical "response" to Catholics who back abortion rights, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin said Nov. 7. Cardinal Bernardin did not exclude the possibility that such a response could include penalties against those who oppose church teaching.

"I don't deny that that is something that needs to be studied, needs to be looked at," the Chicago cardinal said at a press conference in Baltimore. "Indeed, this is a very complex question. I think that this being a very complex issue we do have to look at it, we do have to study it, as indicated this morning."

The cardinal commented during the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' fall general meeting in Baltimore. Earlier

that day, the bishops approved a resolution calling for action against abortion.

During debate on the resolution, Auxiliary Bishop Austin B. Vaughan of New York suggested that the prelates consider a response to Catholics — such as politicians — who openly back abortion rights but also openly practice their faith as Catholics.

"You're going to be pressed more and more for a response" in such cases, Bishop Vaughan said during the bishops' morning discussions.

The resolution adopted by the bishops stated, among other things, that "no Catholic can responsibly take a 'pro-choice' stand when the 'choice' in question involves the taking of innocent human life."

Cardinal Bernardin said at the news conference that "the resolution, as passed, does not deal with the question of penalties. It's very difficult in one sentence (in a

resolution) to take into account all the factors that have to be weighed."

When reporters asked about such church penalties as excommunication, Cardinal Bernardin responded that penalties aren't necessarily the only concern when it comes to an abortion rights advocate's status as a Catholic.

"There are also other factors that need to be taken into account," he said.

"It seems to me that it's not so much a question of expelling a dissident person as it is ... motivating that person to change his or her mind and heart," he added.

He also said he "would prefer not to discuss individuals, whether candidates for public office or public officials," who are on record as favoring legal abortion.

"In terms of a public official," he commented, "it's obvious that that person has

to work within a certain framework," which often limits one's ability to deal conclusively with a controversial issue. But at the same time, the public official should attempt to make some efforts to further the moral agenda, he said.

"Sometimes you will hear people say, 'I'm opposed to abortion, personally opposed to it,' but add that Americans don't impose personal views on others, the cardinal said. "I have grave difficulty with that," he said.

A person who is personally opposed to abortion may agree that abortion takes a human life, he said.

"If that is the reason you are personally opposed, it seems to me you have to do something about it," he said. "It's not enough to say simply, 'I'm not going to do anything about it.'"

Bishops

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Blessed Virgin Mary. The bishops' Committee on Black Catholics sponsored the service.

In other business, Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy of Miami asked his fellow bishops for their written comments on a proposed pastoral letter marking the 500th anniversary, in 1992, of the discovery of America.

In the first draft, the contributions of European missionaries are praised, but the

treatment of Native Americans by some of the colonists is decried.

Bishop James P. Keleher, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Priestly Formation, warned the bishops of the "imminent demise" of college seminaries in the United States. Those institutions need financial support and the recruiting of more students, he said.

The bishops decided to draft a pastoral letter on stewardship to give Catholics a better idea of their responsibilities with respect to church and charitable donations, including tithing. The letter is intended to be ready for a vote in 1991.

Committee

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Education, and Auxiliary Bishop Joseph A. Francis of Newark as a member of the USCC Committee on the Campaign for Human Development. The bishops on those committees, who are elected by the whole body of bishops, become members of the 50-bishop USCC Administrative Board and NCCB Administrative Committee.

All elections were for three-year terms.

Earlier in the day the bishops had elected Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati as new NCCB-USCC president and Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore as NCCB-USCC vice president.

Because Archbishop Keeler was one year into a three-year term as NCCB-USCC secretary, the bishops were to vote later in the meeting to elect a new secretary to serve the remaining two years of that term.



More than 300 U.S. Catholic bishops gathered last week, Nov. 6-9, in Baltimore, Md., for their annual meeting. They reemphasized the evils of abortion, passed a pastoral plan for black Catholics, attacked hunger as "morally intolerable," and approved guidelines for Sunday services in priestless parishes.

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