

Draft letter on women garners mixed reviews

By Laurie Hansen
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Reaction to the second draft of the U.S. bishops pastoral letter on women's concerns has ranged from enthusiastic support to dismay.

In interviews with Catholic News Service, the president of the National Council of Catholic Women called the draft "a marvelous, marvelous first step," while the national coordinator of the Women's Ordination Conference expressed hope the document would "mold on the shelf."

The draft pastoral letter, "One in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society," was made public April 3. An amended version of it is expected to be voted on at the bishops' general meeting in November.

The second draft, written by a committee of six bishops, calls sexism a sin and says men and boys must be educated to recognize that every form of sexual exploitation is sinful.

It defends the church's stand against ordination of women to the priesthood and the ban on artificial birth control, but encourages women to participate in all liturgical ministries that do not require ordination. It urges quick action on a study of the possibility of ordaining women as deacons.

Sister of Charity Margaret Nulty, associate director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, said April 4 that the pastoral's position reiterating church stands against women's ordination to the priesthood and birth control "belies the logic of what they're saying on the full personhood of women in the church."

At the same time, she told CNS, considering "where we are in the church today," the bishops did all they could. The defense of church teaching on those two controversial issues does not detract from "other very important parts" of the second draft, said Sister Nulty.

She cited as significant the draft pastoral's emphasis on "structural analysis on the issue of patriarchy," noting passages in the draft pastoral that call for just wages for women and say a seminarian's incapacity to deal with women as equals should be "considered a negative indication for fitness for ordination."

The second draft's call "to investigate admitting women to the diaconate" is "an opening, not a closed door," she said.

In addition, she said, the draft pastoral offers "a very honest assessment of sexism

within the church."

Beverly Medved of Kalispell, Mont., president of the National Council of Catholic Women, said she was pleased to discover upon reading the draft pastoral that her organization and the bishops "are working from the same agenda."

Medved, whose organization claims some 8-to-10 million members nationwide, praised the bishops' stands in favor of allowing women and girls to be acolytes and urging study of ordaining women as deacons.

She said there would be criticism of the document by women who don't think it goes far enough.

"Maybe it doesn't go far enough, but it's a marvelous, marvelous first step," said Medved. "Change comes one step at a time."

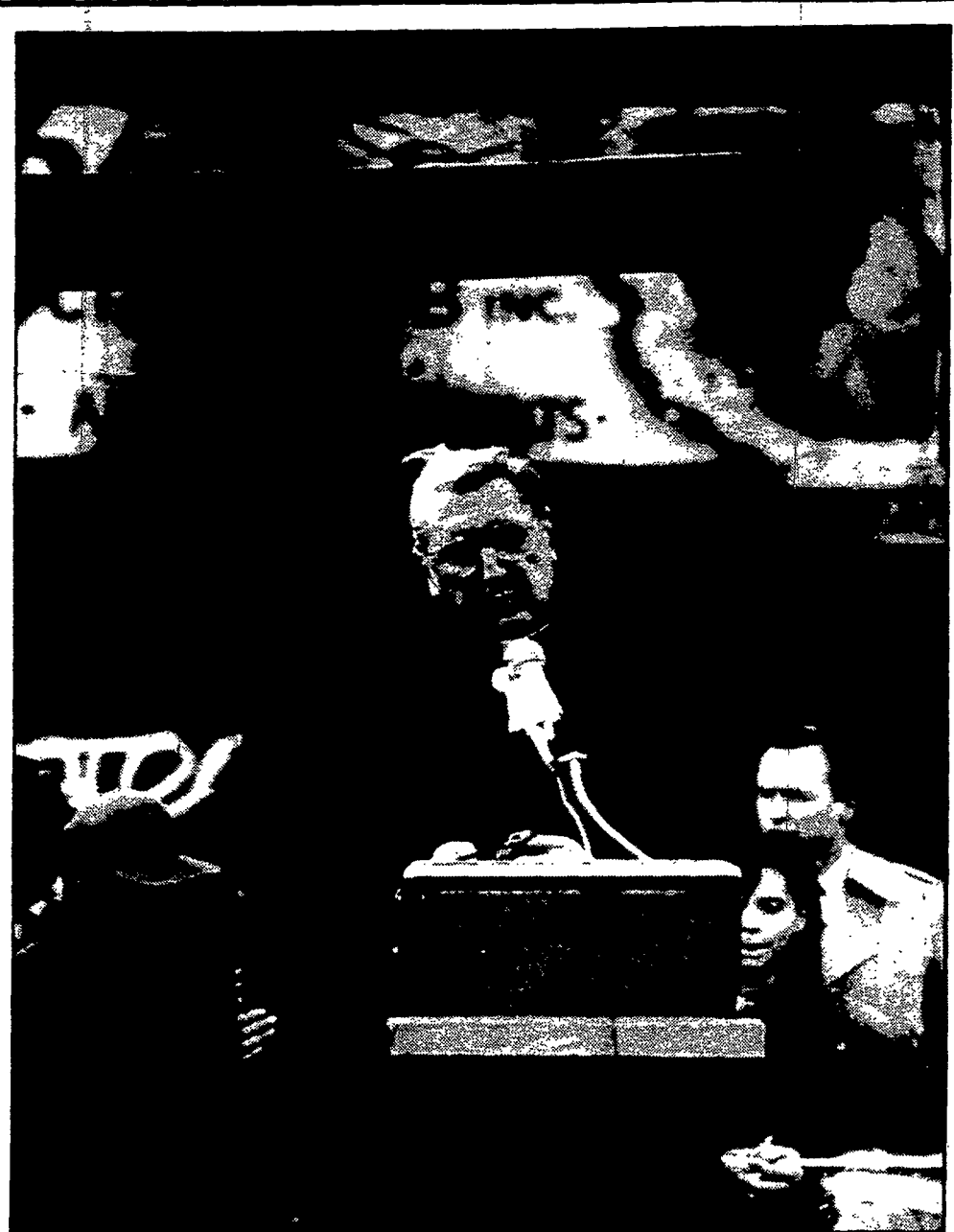
An opposing view came from Ruth Fitzpatrick, national coordinator of the Women's Ordination Conference, with headquarters in Fairfax, Va., who said the second draft was "not worth the paper it's printed on."

The second draft is "seductive," because it contains many "good suggestions," she said.

Refusing to say some women are called to be ordained priests but then urging a study on ordaining women as deacons, the draft pastoral "throws a crumb to the women," said Fitzpatrick.

The U.S. bishops, she said, by "not challenging what's coming out of Rome even though many of them disagree" with Rome, have produced a "dishonest paper" that Fitzpatrick said she hopes will "mold on the shelf."

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AP/Wide World Photos
CARDINAL LEADS ROSARY — Cardinal John J. O'Connor, center, leads a rosary service in front of the Happy Land Social Club in New York on Monday, March 26. The service was for victims of a March 25 fire that killed 87 people.

Priest pleads guilty in sexual abuse case

PITTSBURGH (CNS) — A Pittsburgh diocesan priest, despite an apology to the court and a psychologist's testimony that the priest's chances of a relapse are "quite low," was sentenced to concurrent 5-to-10-year terms for sexually assaulting two altar boys.

Father Robert Wolk, who was stripped of his priestly duties by the diocese in 1987 once it learned of the sexual assault allegations, pleaded guilty to two counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with minors and two counts of corrupting the morals of a minor.

In a plea bargain arrangement with the

Allegheny County District Attorney's Office, three other counts were dropped.

"I've been silent through this whole time, looking for a way to say that I am sorry for what happened," Father Wolk said during his sentencing hearing April 3.

Father Wolk added he was under "too much stress and too much guilt to even know how to get out" of his situation.

"That doesn't take away any of my sorrow. It won't happen again," he said.

Stephen Montana, a clinical psychologist at St. Luke's Institute in Suitland, Md., a Washington suburb, said Father Wolk's chances of a relapse were "quite low."

Montana likened Father Wolk's condition to alcoholism. "People drink, not because it will kill their liver or lose their job but because they cannot stop it."

Father Wolk's sentence is mandatory under Pennsylvania law.

Allegheny County Common Pleas Judge George Ross told Father Wolk, "What a

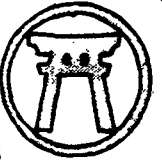
man of your position, a man of the cloth, did to these two fine young men is despicable."

The victims of the assaults are brothers, now ages 19 and 21. They had previously told Ross they were satisfied with the plea bargain.

The brothers have alleged that two other Pittsburgh diocesan priests, Fathers Richard Zula and Francis Pucci, also involved them in sexual activities over a six-year period.

Father Zula pleaded guilty to two counts of corruption of minors in a plea bargain arrangement in which 138 other counts were dropped. He is serving prison terms on those charges concurrently with a term stemming from charges over a 1984 incident with one of the youths in another Pennsylvania county.

Fathers Wolk and Pucci were awaiting trial on additional sexual misconduct charges in a third county.



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