

Seven bishops urge panel to scrap letter

By Laurie Hansen
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Seven U.S. bishops have urged in an amendment to the proposed pastoral letter on women that the letter be scrapped — at least for now.

And Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill., chairman of the U.S. bishops' committee writing the document, told Catholic News Service Aug. 24 that there was "certainly not" the unanimity on the women's pastoral that there has been on other bishops' pastorals.

"I don't know of any pastoral letters that haven't been approved. Maybe we'll make some history that way," he said.

The amendment was submitted to Bishop Imesch's committee on the heels of the release of two statements this summer calling on the bishops to drop their proposed pastoral letter on women. The statements were by the Center of Concern, a social justice group, and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, a national organization of heads of women's religious orders.

In addition, Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee, in May, citing credibility problems raised in part by the draft's treatment of the issue of women's ordination, suggested the bishops' proposed pastoral letter be scuttled.

The amendment by the seven bishops says that rather than publishing the document as a formal pastoral letter, the bishops should continue their process of reflection on concerns of women, a bishop who signed the amendment told CNS. He declined to be identified or release the names of the signers.

In interviews in late August, however, a number of bishops contacted by CNS said they would vote against approval of the pastoral letter at the bishops' general meeting in November.

In commenting on the amendment, Bishop Imesch said that if some bishops thought that instead of issuing a formal pastoral letter by the whole body of bishops the document should just be issued by the writing committee, the public would prob-

ably not note the distinction.

As for those who complain about the way moral teachings are treated in the second draft, Bishop Imesch suggests they try to write a pastoral on women's concerns.

"Pastoral letters do not make new teachings. There were restrictions in this (pastoral) that were not there in other letters. How many moral stands are there on the economy?" he said, referring to the bishops' 1986 economics pastoral.

The bishops' deadline for submitting amendments to the second draft of the proposed pastoral is Sept. 1.

The text of the second draft of the proposed pastoral letter on women is "so inadequate that it would be counterproductive to approve it," Auxiliary Bishop P. Francis Murphy of Baltimore told CNS. Bishop Murphy was a member of the bishops' Committee on Women in Society and the Church for 12 years.

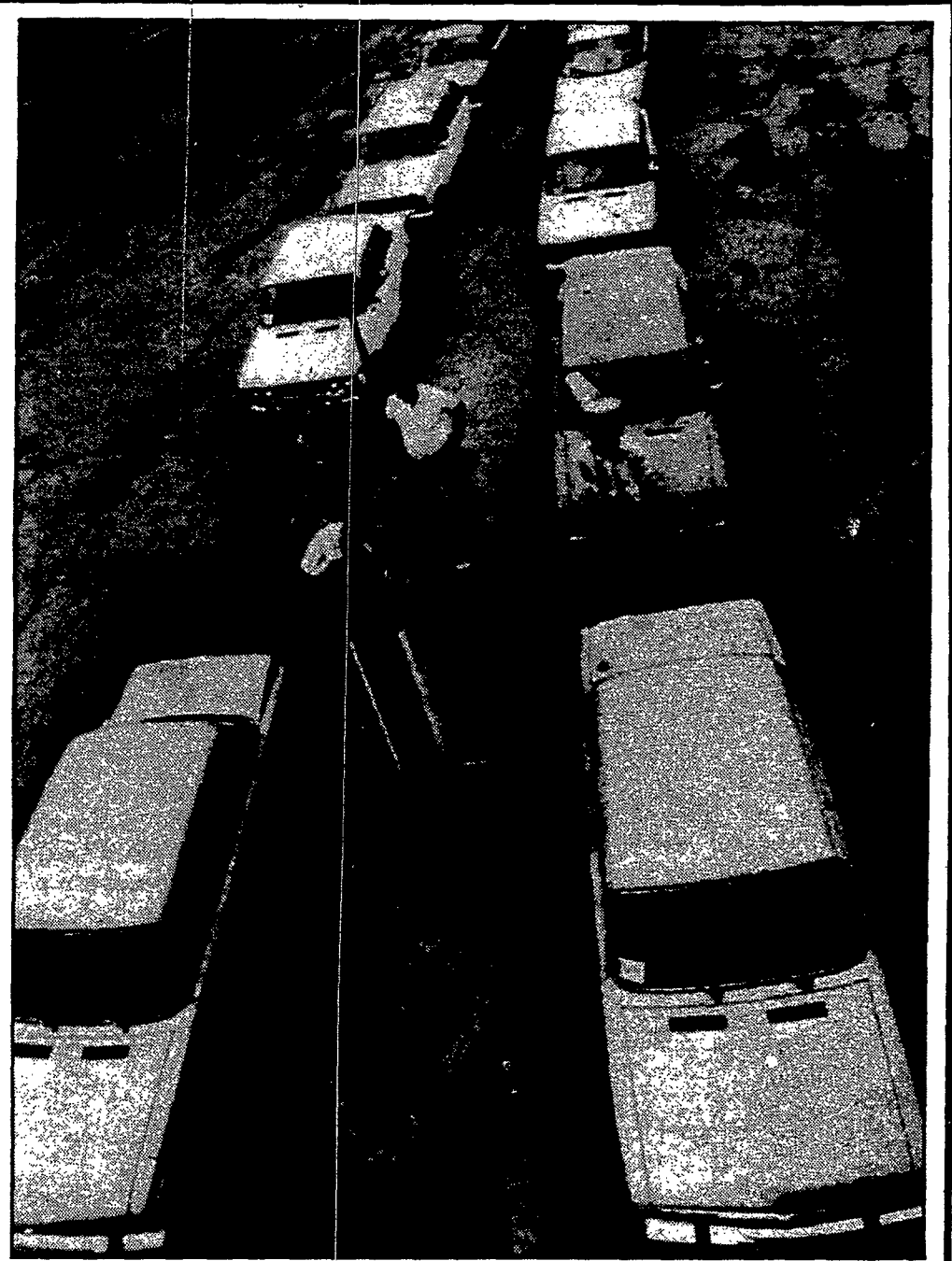
While past pastoral letters by the U.S. bishops on war and peace, economic justice, Hispanic ministry and racism were "uplifting" and "visionary," Bishop Murphy said "quite candidly I do not find either vision or hope in the first or second draft" of the proposed pastoral on women.

"Those Catholic women who are quite informed on the issues are clearly dissatisfied with the document" as are Catholic women "who are very comfortable with the status quo and who do not wish any change in the role of women," he said.

Many will not take the document seriously, he said, adding that "loss of credibility in any sphere negatively affects the full range of bishops' public policy efforts, including our pro-life agenda, our peace and economic agenda, parochial school issues and global matters."

Bishop Murphy said he hoped the committee writing the document would prepare a "pastoral plan of study and action" for the bishops' November meeting based on the 25 recommendations made in the pastoral's second draft.

Bishop William A. Hughes of Cov-
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AP/Wide World Photos
SOVIET FUEL SHORTAGE — A group of Soviet drivers lingers around a gas pump in downtown Moscow as a long line of vehicles wait for gasoline. Government officials said that although the shortage was not related to the Gulf crisis, it was due to the large amount of fuel allocated to farmers transporting grain during the harvest season.

Mother Teresa celebrates 80th

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Mother Teresa of Calcutta turned 80 with the apostolic blessing of Pope John Paul II for her "selfless caring for all God's children without discrimination."

"Giving prayerful thanks to God for the eloquent testimony of your religious consecration and of your lifelong dedication and service to the poorest of the poor, I wish to assure you of my warmest best wishes on the occasion of your 80th birthday," said the pope.

The pope sent his birthday wishes Aug. 27 to the Calcutta, India, headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity, the religious order founded by Mother Teresa.

Earlier this year, the pope accepted her resignation as head of the order because of declining health due to heart problems.

Mother Teresa was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu on Aug. 27, 1910, to Albanian parents in Skopje, in what is now Yugoslavia.

At age 15 she joined the Irish branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and made her first vows as a nun in 1928. She was assigned to work as an educator in Calcutta.

Mother Teresa founded the Missionaries of Charity in 1950, and it was formally recognized by the Vatican 15 years later. Currently, the order has about 2,000 members working in 92 countries with the elderly, lepers, abandoned children and AIDS patients.

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