

U.S., Canadian bishops set topics for synod

By Jerry Filteau

Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — When the world Synod of Bishops meets in Rome Sept. 30-Oct. 28 to discuss priestly formation, representatives of the U.S. bishops plan to give talks on nuts-and-bolts issues.

They plan to address the synod on priestly identity, spirituality, seminary formation, lay involvement in formation, and ongoing formation of priests after ordination.

Ukrainian-rite Archbishop Stephen Sulyk of Philadelphia, an automatic synod member, said he plans to talk about the urgent needs of priestly formation "in our present circumstances in Eastern Europe, where the church is newly liberated from communist oppression."

The Canadian synod delegates have prepared and discussed seven draft papers.

Their papers treat the challenge of a secularist culture, training seminarians in a university setting, issues of psycho-sexual maturity in priesthood candidates, spirituality of seminarians and priests, pastoral formation, ongoing formation after ordination, and the impact of the Second Vatican Council's theology of the church on priestly formation today.

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and leader of the NCCB delegation to the synod, outlined the U.S. delegation's plans in a brief interview with Catholic News Service Sept. 12.

The Canadian bishops reported their progress on preparations at the end of August.

Archbishop Pilarczyk described the synod in practical terms, saying the U.S. delegation was simply "a group of hard-working diocesan bishops" going to Rome "to share some of our experiences in the United States" with similar groups from other countries around the world.

His main hope for the synod, he said, is that it will bring "renewed interest in vocations and the priesthood."

He said the fact bishops from around the world will meet in Rome for a month to focus on issues of priestly formation calls attention of the world's Catholics to "the truth that (the church) can't exist without the priesthood."

He said for the synod's first phase — two weeks devoted to individual speeches, during which each of the 230-plus members is allowed to speak for up to eight minutes — the NCCB delegation has divided up its work this way:

- Archbishop Pilarczyk is to speak about priestly identity.

- Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago is to talk about priestly spirituality, with a special emphasis on celibacy.

- Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington is to address the question of lay involvement in the formation of priests.

- Bishop John A. Marshall of Burlington, Vt., is to speak on the topic of seminary formation.

- Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh is to talk about ongoing formation of priests after ordination.

Bishop Wuerl said in an interview his concern in addressing formation after ordination is to "underline that before a priest is ordained, we have a systematic program of formation. At the same time, though, formation is a lifelong process, and after ordination we don't have that same kind of systematic support."

He said he hoped that as a result of the synod, individual U.S. bishops, the

bishops' conference and the church around the world would set up more systematic programs for ongoing formation and spiritual renewal that priests need.

Archbishop Pilarczyk said some have questioned whether the much-discussed shortage of priests in the United States is really a shortage in view of the positive effect it has had in "the rise in lay ministry that we've not had before."

But the smaller number of priests has highlighted the fact that "there is a contribution made by priests" which cannot be made by others, he said.

He said the fact U.S. seminaries today must deal increasingly with the different formation needs of older candidates may play a role "informally" in the presentations of the U.S. bishops to the synod, "but it is not part of a formal agenda."

He said that is a concern in the United States but not in many other parts of the world, such as Africa, where seminaries

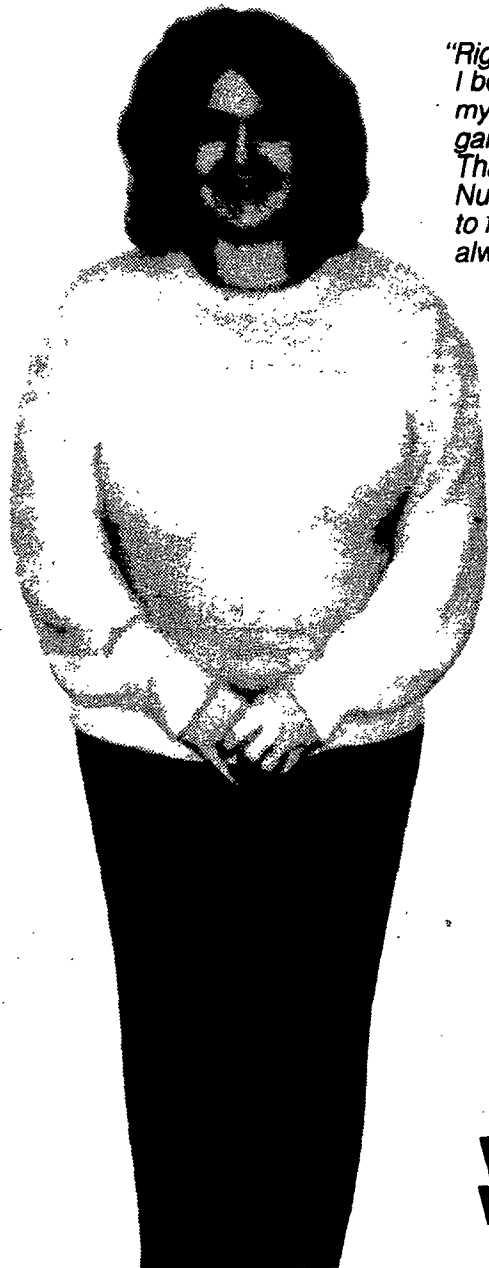
are overflowing with young candidates.

Archbishop Sulyk is one of three North Americans who, as Eastern-rite metropolitan archbishops, have automatic membership in the synod. The other two are Ukrainian Archbishop Maxim Hermaniuk of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Byzantine Archbishop Stephen J. Kocisko of Pittsburgh.

Archbishop Sulyk said in a telephone interview that in North America the Eastern rites "have practically the same needs as the Latin rite" in forming candidates who have grown up in a secularized, materialist culture.

He said he would leave the main discussion of those issues to the other U.S. bishops and would focus his speech on what the church in the West must do to help the long-suppressed church in Eastern Europe rebuild seminaries, libraries and teaching faculties.

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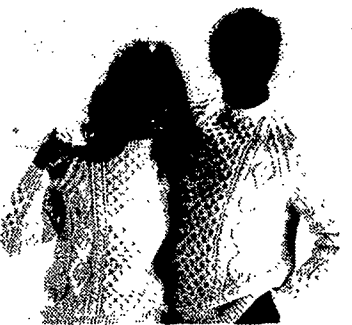
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