

# Synod reaffirms priestly celibacy

By Agostino Bono  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — A monthlong Synod of Bishops has handed Pope John Paul II 41 proposals for priestly formation, basically reaffirming traditional practices and stressing their improvement.

Included was strong support for mandatory celibacy in the Latin-rite priesthood. Isolated voices among the 235 synod delegates had asked for the ordination of qualified married men.

Support by synod delegates was also given to the minor seminary "as a valid instrument" of vocational formation, to developing the major seminary as a "true house of formation," and to a special spiritual or academic preparatory year for major seminarians.

Major seminarians generally are those in the final years of preparation for the priesthood after college.

Other points favored by the synod were: participation of qualified women in seminary formation, seminary programs tailored to the "demands and necessities of a particular culture," and use of psychological testing in seminaries.

Regarding vocations, the proposals sought a greater role for the laity through a strong Christian family life and by developing strong Catholic schools and parishes.

The synod also favored ongoing formation programs and asked that a directory of available programs and guidelines for such programs be published.

The proposals were approved Oct. 27 by two-thirds majority. They are for the

pope's use in preparing a post-synodal document.

The synod has no decision-making powers, but the pope promised at the synod's close Oct. 28 that "the proposals and programs" would be "speedily put into effect."

Developing the synod blueprint on priestly formation was the result of 215 floor speeches, debates in small working groups and voting on the proposals that survived the monthlong process. The synod started Sept. 30.

Although several bishops favored ordaining married men in the Latin rite, the majority opposed this and passed a resolution reaffirming the need for obligatory celibacy in the Latin church, composed of almost 90 percent of the 906 million Catholics worldwide.

Most Eastern rites allow the ordination of married men, but bishops in those rites are chosen from the celibate clergy.

"The celibate state of life is a precious gift of God that perfectly suits the image of the priest," said the summary of the proposals.

Shortly after the synod voted to reaffirm celibacy, the pope thanked delegates for their decision and branded calls for ordaining married men as "systematic propaganda hostile to priestly celibacy."

Ordaining married men "is not to be taken into consideration" to solve the vocations problem, the pope said.

Synod officials at the news conference said delegates reaffirmed celibacy to counter interpretations that the pope was alone in promoting it and to erase any false

impressions among seminarians and priests that it would be changed.

One advocate of ordaining married men was Bishop Lawrence Burke of Nassau, Bahamas, who suggested this as a way to overcome the priest shortage, which is denying the sacraments to many believers.

Several Third World bishops also raised the issue, asking that the natural leaders of their Christian communities, many of whom are married, be ordained.

Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider of Fortaleza, Brazil, created further controversy by giving an interview to an Italian Catholic magazine saying that the pope already had approved the ordination of two married men in Brazil on condition that they and their wives live as brother and sister.

Cardinal Lorscheider's interview sparked a Vatican press release saying the pope had granted permission in "an extremely limited number of cases" and only on condition that the wife and children were in agreement and that the priest and his wife lived in separate households.

Mandatory celibacy was questioned even though the pope had reaffirmed celibacy prior to the synod and asked that it be discussed only in the light of ways to strengthen its commitment.

Before ending, the synod published a "Message to the People of God," which expressed hope that its suggestions would help form priests ready to face today's "challenges and difficulties" in evangelization.

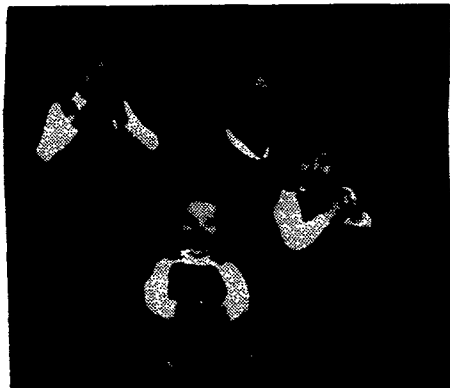
These include "religious indifference, materialism, poverty and injustice, an increasing gap between rich and poor nations and classes, family difficulties," said the message.

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AP/Wide World Photos  
**'MIRACLE' BABY** — Janet Kilpatrick, left, kisses her son Weston as they leave the Loma Linda University Medical Center in San Bernardino, California Oct. 19, for their home in Redlands. While awaiting a heart transplant at the hospital, Weston grew a portion of his heart that he needed and hence did not need the operation.

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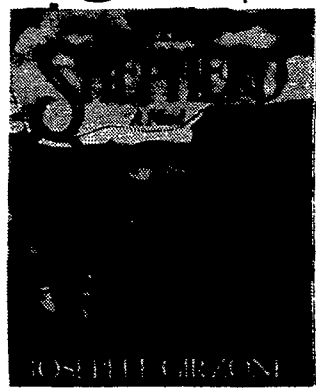
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