

# Vatican wrote bishop after gathering with ex-priests

By Jerry Fliteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — After Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh and three other U.S. bishops met last June 23 with representatives of CORPUS — an organization of married former priests — a top Vatican official wrote a letter asking Bishop Wuerl about the meeting.

But Bishop Wuerl and the head of CORPUS interpreted the letter, written by Cardinal Antonio Innocenti, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, in different ways.

In Rome Oct. 25, the day after a story in *The New York Times* described the letter as a "warning" against such meetings in the future, Bishop Wuerl said it was simply "a request ... for information about what happened."

CORPUS president Anthony T. Padovano told Catholic News Service Oct. 25 that, "as reported to me" by sources he has found to be reliable, Cardinal Innocenti not only asked for information about the meeting but also complained that meetings of that type might lend an air of legitimacy to CORPUS' efforts to restore a married priesthood.

Padovano, a well-known theologian who married after resigning from the priesthood in the mid-1970s, called the letter a "terribly intrusive" Vatican intervention and said he was afraid it would "terminate the dialogue" just begun between CORPUS and the bishops.

In Rome as a member of the synod, Bishop Wuerl told the CNS Rome bureau that he did not think the letter he received precluded future discussions with CORPUS.

"That wasn't the tone of the letter," he said. "He (Cardinal Innocenti) was asking for information. There was no instruction."

Bishop Wuerl said that the communication with the cardinal was typical of what he does in his own diocese: "If I see in the newspaper something going on in the parish that I'm perplexed about, I write and ask" for information.

He said he answered the cardinal "as was my responsibility to do, to say what

went on" at the meeting.

At the June meeting, Padovano said, members of CORPUS — the Corps of Reserve Priests United for Service — asked the bishops to appoint a married priest as a liaison with the bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry and to provide an opportunity for a married priest to address the U.S. bishops as a group.

"We did not ask for a married priesthood," he said, but only for an ongoing dialogue.

At the request of CORPUS, the meeting took place while about 200 bishops were at the University of Santa Clara in California for a weeklong meeting of prayer and study.

Other prelates who met the CORPUS delegation along with Bishop Wuerl were Bishops R. Pierre DuMaine of San Jose, Calif.; John A. Marshall of Burlington, Vt.; and John C. Favalora of St. Petersburg, Fla.

Bishop Wuerl is chairman of the Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, and the other three are committee members, but the bishops stressed that they met with CORPUS as individual bishops, not as committee members or representatives of the bishops' conference.

Other members of the CORPUS delegation who met with the bishops were Terence Dosh, executive director, and officers Robert Charpentier, Patrick Callahan and Frank McGrath of Chicago.

Dosh told CNS that "in the last four years there have been at least 15 meetings of bishops with the married priests in their dioceses" as well as many private meetings of bishops with individuals or small groups of married priests.

During the monthlong world Synod of Bishops in Rome on priestly formation, celibacy was a major topic.

A small number of bishops broached the question of permitting married priests during the synod. But Pope John Paul II before the synod and several Curia officials during the gathering rejected any change in the rule of mandatory celibacy for priests of the Latin rite.

Contributing to this story were John Thavis and Cindy Wooden in Rome.



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