

# U.S. bishops face heavy agenda for meeting

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops face a heavy agenda for their Nov. 12-15 national meeting in Washington with action pending on 20 items — among them guidelines for sex education and catechetics and statements on substance abuse, social justice, evangelization, family ministry and Catholic schools.

The document "Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning" takes up 185 pages — two-fifths of the 462-page book of action items sent to the nation's bishops a month before the meeting.

Money issues on the agenda include proposals to start a special national collection for the church in Eastern and Central Europe and to allocate one-fourth of future increases in the yearly Latin America collection to U.S. Hispanic needs.

The bishops will be asked to approve criteria for use of inclusive — non-sexist — language in liturgical texts.

They also face action on whether bishops should be authorized to permit lay people to preside at a funeral liturgy if no priest is available.

One major item originally planned for their agenda will not be on it. A proposed pastoral letter on women's concerns has been delayed because of a Vatican request that the bishops consult with other bishops' conferences before issuing the document. During the meeting they are to hear a progress report on the pastoral by its drafting committee.

About 300 bishops are expected to attend the yearly fall meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference.

The proposed "Human Sexuality" document, drafted by a task force formed by the USCC Committee on Education, is designed to refine and update 1981 guidelines, with the aim of fostering "a greater appreciation of and respect for the precious gift of human sexuality."

A statement on Catholic schools forcefully reaffirms their value and sets plans for their future development, including seed money to establish "diocesan, state and national organizations of Catholic school parents" by 1992.

National guidelines for doctrinally sound catechetical texts spell out what such texts are expected to contain in the central areas of Catholic teaching and life.

Proposed criteria for the use of "inclusive language translations" of Scripture readings in the liturgy are aimed at maintaining "fidelity to the word of God" and at the same time dealing with the problem that many masculine terms once considered generic are "increasingly seen to exclude women" in contemporary American English.

In a partially related area, a separate proposal offers nine principles for the liturgical adaptation of Scripture texts. In addition to the question of inclusive language, the proposal sets out principles for language concerning people with handicaps and adaptations of a translation for public reading.

The proposal for permission for lay people to preside at funeral liturgies in the absence of a priest is one of four other liturgical issues before the bishops. The

others are proposals to add to the U.S. liturgical calendar three optional memorials — Blessed Miguel Agustin Pro Nov. 23, Blessed Juan Diego Dec. 9 and St. Paul of the Cross Oct. 20.

A proposed pastoral letter, "Heritage and Hope: Evangelization in America," sets out a new U.S. Catholic effort at evangelization as the centerpiece of the approaching 1992 quinquennial of Columbus' arrival in the Americas. The pastoral describes both the successes and failures of 500 years of evangelization in the Americas and calls for new evangelization programs to be especially sensitive to the "particular values, customs and cultural institutions of those who respond to God's revelation."

The proposed pastoral message on substance abuse calls for a comprehensive program of education and action at the family, church, community and public policy levels to combat chemical dependencies and help those caught up in addictions to free themselves from their "slavery." While it focuses mainly on illegal drugs and alcohol abuse, the statement also notes the "newer abuse of prescription drugs," especially by the elderly.

Another pastoral message to be debated and voted on, "A Century of Social Teaching," summarizes basic social teachings of the church since Pope Leo XIII in 1891 issued the first papal social encyclical, "Rerum Novarum," on the social conditions and rights of workers. It calls the 100th anniversary of that encyclical "a unique opportunity" to take up the challenges of Catholic social teaching

"with new urgency and energy." Other items on the bishops' agenda include:

- A proposed statement on "Promotion of the Spirituality of Priests in Pastoral Ministry."

- A statement reaffirming the bishops' 1980 "Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry" and urging new efforts to implement that plan's "comprehensive vision of family life and of ministry with families."

- A proposal for procedures for the formal church approval in the United States of Scripture translations and their explanatory notes.

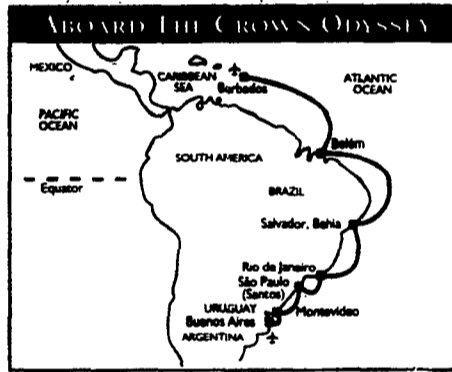
- Two alternative plans to increase the monetary value of church property transactions that a diocese may decide without prior Vatican approval. Currently any transaction involving the disposal or mortgaging of property worth more than \$1 million must first be reviewed and cleared by the Vatican.

The bishops also face their annual review of NCCB-USCC priorities and plans and approval of a 1991 budget and a 1992 diocesan assessment to help fund conference activities.

The proposed 1991 budget is \$34.2 million, up nearly \$2.7 million from 1990. Diocesan assessments, based on the number of Catholics in each diocese, bring in slightly more than \$8 million of that amount.

The proposed 1992 diocesan assessment remains at 15.7 cents per Catholic — a level set in 1988 — but it is to be reviewed next spring when the bishops hold a special meeting on conference finances in St. Paul, Minn.

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