

Bishops vote against use of war in the Gulf

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops opened their fall general meeting by urging the U.S. government to avoid war with Iraq except as a last resort after all possibilities of a peaceful resolution are exhausted.

As the Nov. 12-15 meeting began in Washington, the bishops also heard praise for U.S. priests from Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk, president of their twin conferences, despite what he called "reasons to be concerned about ordained ministry in our country."

Meeting as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference, the bishops faced a heavy agenda, 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.

But their first action had not been on the agenda. By a 249-15 vote, they made their own a Nov. 7 letter to U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III outlining just war principles and calling attention to "the ethical dimensions" of U.S. policy choices in the new Middle East crisis.

The letter was sent to Baker by Archbishop Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, chairman of the bishops' Committee on International Policy, the day before President Bush announced a second major military buildup in Saudi Arabia. The bishops were to discuss the issue further during their executive session, closed to the press, on Nov. 14.

In his presidential address, Archbishop Pilarczyk skipped the usual "state of the

church" message and instead spoke about the monthlong world Synod of Bishops recently concluded in Rome. The synod's theme was priestly formation.

"They're not all geniuses and they're not all perfect," he said of U.S. priests, "but they represent an immense treasure of grace and dedication, without which God's people could not survive and flourish."

Later that day, the bishops unanimously approved a brief document on priestly spirituality. It calls for dioceses and religious institutes to "consider implementing a process to engage priests in common reflection upon their spirituality."

Making his first appearance before the U.S. bishops as papal pro-nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan praised the "good relations" between the U.S. hierarchy and the Holy See. His Nov. 12 address, without a prepared text, struck a supportive, friendly note.

About 300 bishops were in Washington for the yearly fall meeting of the NCCB and USCC.

One major item originally planned for their agenda was not 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 were to hear a progress report on the pastoral by its drafting committee.

The bishops also began preliminary discussion of several action items, including a proposed pastoral letter on the

Continued on page 5



MOTHER'S BLESSING — Mother Teresa blesses a child in its mother's lap as another boy pays respect by touching Mother Teresa's feet after the silver jubilee Holy Mass of Fatima Parish in Calcutta, Nov. 8. AP/Wide World Photos

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