

Activists commend bishops for delaying vote

By Ines Pinto Alicea
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — More than 200 women gathered Nov. 12 to praise the nation's bishops for postponing a vote on their pastoral on women's concerns, a move the demonstrators said indicates that the bishops may be listening to their complaints about the document.

"Perhaps this is a sign that they are reclaiming their American democratic roots," said Andrea Johnson, member of the board of the Women's Ordination Conference.

Gathered in an empty lot near the Washington hotel where the bishops were meeting, however, the women said they

have a lot of work ahead in their effort to get the document shelved permanently and convince the bishops to start another one that includes more women's voices.

"The bishops must now deal with the patriarchal system and the sin of sexism," said Ruth Fitzpatrick, national coordinator of the Women's Ordination Conference. "That should be their next pastoral, and women will gladly help them write it out of reflection of our own experiences."

In September Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, announced that the bishops would defer the vote on the document, originally planned for the Nov. 12-15 meeting. The vote was

being deferred, he said, partly because the Vatican had suggested consultation be held first with other bishops' conferences.

The bishops were to discuss the current draft as an information item Nov. 15, but no vote will be taken until the broader consultation is carried out.

Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, pastoral assistant at St. Mary's Church, Rochester, was among the protesters. Sister Sobala said that the women's gathering originally was being called a "block party" in an effort to block the bishops from approving the women's pastoral.

When the vote was deferred, the women decided to proceed with their gathering to encourage the bishops to find courage "to push theology to its limits" and allow the ordination of women.

"We believe they decided to shelve the vote because of the great controversy it stirred in the Catholic community," Sister Sobala said. "By pushing theology to the limits, they must recognize that we can catch a new glimpse of the Gospel."

Loretto Sister Maureen Fiedler of the Quixote Center in Mount Rainier, Md., told the crowd at the demonstration that the U.S. bishops need to be reminded that sex-

ism was something they promised to eradicate in 1965 at the Second Vatican Council.

Sister Fiedler said the Quixote Center was gathering signatures to publish an ad in the *National Catholic Reporter* newspaper, calling on the bishops to eliminate all sexism in the church. The ad, which is to run Dec. 7, will mark the 25th anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes*, the council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

The ad, quoting from Vatican II document, says, "With respect to fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination ... based on sex ... is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent."

The group was joined by members of the National Organization for Women, Catholics for Free Choice and lesbian-rights groups. All were calling for women's rights in general in the church.

"Women will not be held back by any church dogma," NOW president Molly Yard told the crowd. "If a church is to minister to the people, it must change with them."

Bishops

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500th anniversary of Christianity in the Americas.

Three black bishops raised questions about praise of Bartolome de Las Casas in the letter, saying that Las Casas — cited in the proposed pastoral as a "tireless defender of Indian rights" — is known as a father of the African slave trade.

The letter, "Heritage and Hope: Evangelization in America," sets out a new U.S. Catholic effort at evangelization as the centerpiece of the approaching 1992 quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in the Americas. It was to be voted on Nov. 15.

Also up for preliminary presentation during the meeting's first day were a 185-page statement on sex education, a document pledging more financial and moral support of Catholic education and a set of national guidelines for doctrinally sound catechetical texts. All three were to be debated and voted on Nov. 14.

Among the liturgy-related issues discussed Nov. 12 was a proposal to authorize the bishops' Committee on Pastoral Research and Practices to approve Scripture translations. It was to be voted on Nov. 15.

The bishops also debated proposed criteria for use of inclusive — non-sexist — language in liturgical texts. The guidelines were 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.

Other issues scheduled to come before the bishops included:

- A proposal that would authorize bishops to permit lay people to preside at a funeral liturgy if no priest is available.

- A set of nine proposed 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.

- 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 new national collection for the church in Eastern and Central Europe and a recommendation to shift one-fourth of the yearly Latin America collection to U.S. Hispanic needs.

- A proposed pastoral message on substance abuse which 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."

- Another pastoral message, "A Century of Social Teaching," which 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.

- 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."

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