

# Gulf crisis dominates bishops' conference

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops ended their fall meeting Nov. 15 as they had begun it — with discussion of the Persian Gulf crisis and a call to resist war until all peaceful options are exhausted.

"Clear moral criteria must be met to justify the use of military force," said a letter to President Bush from Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference.

Hand-delivered to the White House Nov. 15, the letter reflected discussion of the Persian Gulf crisis by about 300 bishops in a closed-door session Nov. 14.

"We are also concerned not only about the international consequences of possible war, but the domestic impact as well: the resources diverted, the human needs neglected, the potential political conflict and divisions within our society," the letter said.

Their first vote at the Nov. 12-15 meeting had been to write their own letter to U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III urging the U.S. government to avoid war with Iraq except as a last resort after all possibilities of a peaceful resolution are exhausted.

The Persian Gulf discussions bracketed debate leading to approval of documents on such topics as substance abuse and sex education, Catholic schools and the 100th anniversary of the papal encyclical "Rerum Novarum," inclusive language and the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Americas.

The only major action items defeated by the bishops were a proposal that would have authorized them to permit lay people to preside at a funeral liturgy if no priest is available and a recommendation to use a portion of the national collection for Latin America to meet pastoral needs of U.S. Hispanic Catholics.

They also sent back to their Committee on Pastoral Research and Practices a proposal to authorize that committee to grant imprimaturs for translations of Scripture.

The longest document up for consideration by the bishops was the 185-page statement on sex education. Passage of the document, titled "Human Sexuality: A

Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning," came only after debate which highlighted underlying questions from some bishops about the church's credibility on artificial contraception, the proper pastoral approach to homosexuals and long-standing controversies between educators and some Catholic parents over sex education in schools.

Perhaps the most lively debate was on the proposal for priestless funerals. Supporters of the proposal had argued that the measure was needed, especially in large rural dioceses, to adequately meet the needs of Catholics at a time of loss in the family. Opponents countered that passage of the measure would erode the value of the priesthood. The vote was 113-136.

The schools document, entitled "Statement of the U.S. Bishops in Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools," calls for more support from the bishops through fund raising and creating offices to help schools budget wisely and increase parental involvement.

The substance abuse document, approved 221-3, 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."

The pastoral letter on the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Americas was approved after it was revised to reflect concerns of black bishops about praise of Bartolome de Las Casas — cited in the proposed pastoral as a "tireless defender of Indian rights" but also considered by some a father of the African slave trade. The revised document noted that "while for a time (Las Casas) advocated the practice of importing African peoples to replace the Indian slaves, he soon repented upon suffering profound moral anguish."

The 41-page 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. The vote to approve was 213-6.

Another pastoral message, "A Century of Social Teaching," summarizes basic social teachings of the church since Pope



AP/Wide World Photos  
Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, holds up the conference's letter to President George Bush, in which the bishops expressed their concern about the possibility of war in the Persian Gulf.

Leo XIII in 1891 issued the first papal social encyclical, "Rerum Novarum," on the social conditions and rights of workers. It passed 237-4.

In other action at the meeting, the bishops:

- Voted unanimously to reaffirm their 1978 "Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry" and to commit themselves to new efforts to implement that plan's "comprehensive vision of family life and of ministry with families."
  - Elected Bishop Anthony M. Pilla of Cleveland as their treasurer and filled nine NCCB and five USCC committee posts.
  - Approved a \$34.2 million budget for 1991.
  - Accepted a set of guidelines for publishers of catechetical materials which Bishop John J. Leibrich of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo., said were "not meant to be all inclusive" and would supplement existing catechetical directories and the forthcoming Vatican universal catechism.
  - Passed a brief document on priestly spirituality, calling for dioceses and religious institutes to "consider implementing a process to engage priests in common reflection upon their spirituality."
  - Approved an optional national collection for Central and Eastern Europe, to be held for three years beginning in 1991 and perhaps extended for another two years.
- A variety of liturgical matters also came up for debate and vote. The bishops approved 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. The memorials require approval by the Vatican.

The bishops also accepted 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.

Also approved was 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.

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, Bishop Joseph L. Imesch, chairman of the writing committee, said the committee would meet in January to review comments on the letter and prepare a revised draft.

As the meeting opened, more than 200 women gathered in an empty lot near the Washington hotel where the bishops were meeting to celebrate the postponement of the document and to urge the bishops to find courage "to push theology to its limits" and allow the ordination of women.

## Bishops' committee on women to present 'wisdom' symposium

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church will sponsor a national symposium on "The Wisdom of Women" Nov. 29-Dec. 2 in Arlington, Va.

The symposium was announced Nov. 12 at the U.S. bishops' meeting in Washington by Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill., chairman of the ad hoc committee charged with writing a proposed pastoral letter on women's concerns.

Bishop Imesch said the symposium was designed to provide resources for diocesan commissions on women. Speakers include Bishop Matthew H. Clark of Rochester, N.Y., chairman of the bishops' standing Committee on Women in Society and in the Church; members of diocesan commissions on women; and Sidney Callahan, as-

sociate professor of psychology at Mercy College of Detroit.

Susan Muto, a staff member to the writing committee, and Bishop Imesch will summarize the symposium, highlight its major themes and look toward the future in a joint closing presentation.

Bishop Imesch also told his fellow bishops that the writing committee would meet in January to review comments on the proposed pastoral and prepare a revised draft. The document had been scheduled for consideration at the bishops' Nov. 12-15 meeting but was withdrawn because of a Vatican request that the bishops consult with other bishops' conferences before issuing it.

The Joliet bishop also announced the appointment of five advisers to the bishops' standing committee on women. They are: Sister of St. Joseph Catherine McNamee, president of the National Catholic Educational Association; Phyllis Willerscheidt, executive director of the Commission on Women of the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese; Maria Guarracino, special assistant for women's concerns in the Archdiocese of New York; Constance Sambrope of the Archdiocese of Atlanta; and Poi Buenaventura of the Diocese of San Jose, Calif.

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