

# Bishop: Switch would send wrong message

ROME (CNS) — Despite advice from a Vatican consultation to "walk cautiously" with their pastoral document on women, Bishop Matthew H. Clark said he hoped the U.S. bishops would go ahead with plans to produce a pastoral letter.

Consultation participants suggested that the planned document not be a pastoral letter, but should instead be a pastoral statement or some other type of document that carries less weight than a pastoral letter would.

Bishop Clark believes such a decision would be a mistake.

"I think to do something else now would be to send a message that I don't want to send — that this isn't important," explained Bishop Clark, one of nine U.S. participants in the May 28-29 consultation in Rome.

The consultation, scheduled at the Vatican's request, comprised nine U.S. delegates, five Vatican officials, and representatives of the bishops' conferences of 13 other countries.

"I'm afraid to back off would be seen to be done for the wrong reason," Bishop Clark said in a June 1 telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier* following his return to Rochester.

Nevertheless, Bishop Clark — a member of the committee drafting the pastoral letter — said the consultation was valuable "because for the first time it brought this issue to a level of international attention in this way."

Further, he added, the consultation was helpful because, "I think it's always important to have other people's perspective on (our) work. I think it's valuable to know when people stumble over what you write."

Delegation member Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said it is up to the U.S. bishops to decide whether to

issue a pastoral letter — or a document with "lesser value of authority," as suggested by the consultation participants — and to incorporate suggestions from the consultation.

Yet, he said, "if we have our heads screwed on tight we are going to listen to the input" because it is "valuable theological and pastoral input."

Archbishop Pilarczyk and other members of the U.S. delegation spoke with reporters May 29 at Rome's North American College, a U.S. seminary.

In the telephone interview, Bishop Clark said the U.S. bishops were not told what to do with the document. The suggestions made during the consultation, were "reflection, recommendations made by this particular group of ad hoc bishops," he said.

of ordaining women deacons.

A statement issued jointly by the participants at the end of the consultation praised the U.S. bishops for their "pastoral solicitude" in undertaking the project and for "having listened to the concerns of many women before drafting the document."

But it listed "three major areas of concern" with the second draft:

- "The precise nature of the document and the related question of methodology," meaning its level of authority, and the way it presented material the bishops had gathered through nationwide consultations with women.

- "The need for a more profound anthropology, especially in the light of Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter 'Mulieris Dignitatem' on the dignity and vocation of women."

carries far more weight than a statement or other document would, because, "a pastoral letter is a statement by the entire bishops' conference which they present as the best statement they can give at a particular time on a particular issue."

Likewise, Bishop Clark defended the large-scale input from women, noting, "I think it was essential to begin that way. I think the effort would not have been credible without it."

Bishop Imesch said he hoped the concern would not lead to the deletion of statements "expressing reality."

One example in the second draft is the passage: "while some (women) strongly affirm the church's teaching on the regulation of births, there are many others who are profoundly disturbed by the same."

Bishop Imesch said the bishops must find a way to reflect those sentiments, but "not say just because someone is caused pain by something that therefore church teaching should be changed."

Another of Cardinal Ratzinger's concerns was the section urging that a Vatican study on the possibility of women deacons "be undertaken and brought to completion soon" and the opening of non-ordained ministries to women.

"The comments were that these things are under study, they've been under study for a long time, the study isn't over yet and it's not going to help if you bishops clamor for the completion of these studies," Archbishop Pilarczyk said.

The bishops weren't told to "delete" those passages, but consultation participants who raised the issue "said these are problematic," he said.

*Contains additional reporting by Lee Strong.*

*"I think to do something else now would be to send a message that I don't want to send — that this isn't important."*

*Bishop Matthew H. Clark*

Bishop Clark noted that during the consultation, "We were told in several different ways by those present that whatever we wrote would have a profound impact."

In addition to Bishop Clark, the U.S. delegation included two other members of the bishops' committee drafting the letter: committee chairman Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill., and Archbishop William J. Levada of Portland, Ore.

Committee members said they had begun work on a third draft of the letter. The second draft, released in April 1990, focused on the dignity and equality of women and stressed the sinfulness of sexism. It asked that all church roles not requiring ordination be open to women and that the Vatican quickly complete a study on the possibility

- "The need to develop more fully the Marian dimension of the church."

Archbishop Pilarczyk said downgrading the authority of the document from a pastoral letter to a statement carries the "very real" possibility that some people will think the issues aren't as important as those in earlier pastorals on peace and the economy or that the suggestions for action in the women's document aren't as binding.

But "another conclusion one might draw is that the theological clarity of these issues is such that we are not ready at this point to speak out" with full force, he said.

Bishop Clark noted that a pastoral letter

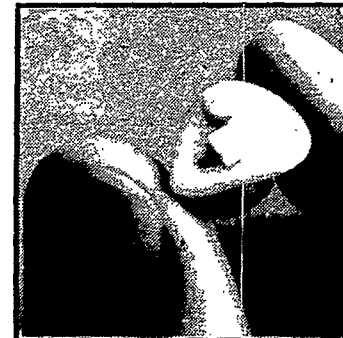
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