

Conference tackled sensitive issues

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Sunday, Nov. 17:

I want to thank you very much for the support of your prayers for our bishops' conference as we met in Washington last week. I was there for six days, during which my time was equally divided between committee meetings and our plenary sessions.

The issue of highest public profile was our consideration of the status of the holy days of obligation observed in the United States. The net result of the definitive votes was to leave things just as they are.

There are two issues yet to be resolved: whether the obligation to observe holy days will be relaxed when they fall either on a Saturday or a Monday.

Each of those issues requires a two-thirds majority of members of our conference. Neither received enough votes. But both came close enough that they could achieve the necessary number of votes in a polling by mail of bishops who were unable to attend the meeting. Should the two-thirds majority be attained, the decision would require the confirmation of the Apostolic See. (I just re-read that explanation. It's clear to me. I hope it is to you!)

We spent a good deal of time on lay preaching. Our hope had been to develop conference norms to guide the practice, but we decided not to accept the material presented by our committee.

As frustrating as that may have been for the members of the committee, I believe the decision was a good one. The issue is a sensitive one, the pastoral conditions of local churches around the nation are quite di-



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verse, and we bishops are still working through the long-range implications of such norms.

We did pass a carefully prepared paper on the teaching ministry of the local bishop. Although the document is public in nature, its primary purpose is for the guidance and assistance of bishops in their pastoral service to their local churches. I know that I look forward to reading the final, revised version when it is published.

Of a totally different nature was a statement on children to which we gave very strong approval. That statement, which I hope will help us to be aware of the special needs and enormous dignity of our little ones, will be issued around the Feast of the Epiphany in January.

There were several other issues before us during those crowded days in Washington — health care; the concerns of Native

Americans about the Fifth Centenary of the Discovery of America; the pastoral conditions of Catholics who belong to minority groups; and issues of conference financing and planning.

I enjoyed the meeting, but as I indicated on the evaluation form we fill out after each meeting, I thought we spent too much time on information items. It seemed to me that we might have dealt with them in a more efficient way and had more time to devote to a fuller discussion of such issues as the development of our norms on preaching.

It's great to be home. Last evening I celebrated Eucharist with an R & R group at Mother of Sorrows in Greece. They were a group charged with energy and joy. It was a shot in the arm to be with them.

This morning I visited St. George's Parish in Rochester to celebrate with that wonderful Lithuanian community the liberation of their beloved homeland after over 50 years of brutal oppression and suffering.

We had hoped that Bishop Paul Baltakis who ministers to Lithuanians in our country would be with us. However, an eye problem will restrict his travel for several weeks. Please pray for his speedy recovery.

As the quirks of scheduling would have it, I'll be traveling again tomorrow — this time to Atlanta, Georgia. I'll be spending two days with the priests of that region and a third with the catechetical leaders of Atlanta.

Although I will have returned by the time you read this, I know that I'll be supported by your prayers. I thank you for that and pray for you each day.

Peace to all.

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