

Prelate to retain confirmation age

MILWAUKEE (CNS) — Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee said he is "inclined to stick with" an older age for confirmation while the issue continues to be debated.

However, he said, he does see "the difficulties" that can come with the older age, including a lower number of confirmations, and "they must be faced."

In a column in the Feb. 13 issue of the *Catholic Herald*, Milwaukee's archdiocesan newspaper, he noted the theological development of confirmation and the other initiation sacraments of baptism and Communion, saying that "the church can indeed redirect the meaning of sacraments according to the needs of the times."

In his archdiocese the sacrament is conferred at age 16 or the junior year

of high school.

Archbishop Weakland said, "My second choice, if a change must be made, would be to adopt the Byzantine practice of confirming at baptism. Although it reduces pastorally the sacraments to six, it has the advantage of conforming our practice to theirs — no small ecumenical point."

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the U.S. bishops, appointed an ad hoc committee of bishops in December to propose a national rule for the age of confirmation in the United States.

In 1984, the bishops voted to allow individual bishops to set the confirmation age in their own dioceses. Most bishops have set it somewhere between ages 12-17, up from grade school ages a generation ago.

But through an administrative oversight, the bishops' 1984 decision was not submitted to the Vatican until many years later. When it finally was, Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, head of the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, said the Code of Canon Law does not permit the issuance of a norm that does not set a specific age.

Church law permits the age of discretion — usually considered age 7 — as the governing norm for confirmation unless a bishops' conference sets another specific age. U.S. liturgists in October called for, administering confirmation before first Communion.

Archbishop Weakland said Pope Paul VI's preface to the confirmation rite that the pope published does talk "about becoming a full adult member of the church."

"But certainly baptism also makes one a full member of the church," he added. "The accent here seems to be on the word 'adult.'"

The archbishop pointed to "serious" drawbacks to an older confirmation age, based on Milwaukee's experience.

A 1979 study by the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices listed five distinct theological positions on the nature of confirmation. "No particular practice or theology seems to be able to claim a monopoly position," the study said.



AP/Wide World Photos
SELLING AID — A woman in Moscow Feb. 26 holds a can of Dutch hot dogs, part of the European Community's food relief to Russia, along with a bottle of cognac. Russia has been working to overcome the perception that humanitarian food aid from the United States and Europe eventually ends up on the black market.

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