

# Draft of women's pastoral criticizes sexism

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

Even if the bulk of the U.S. bishops' proposed pastoral letter on the concerns of women in church and society was put aside, study of a section on sexism and labeling it a sin "would lead us back to the other issues being dealt with," according to Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

Bishop Clark, a member of the committee that wrote the document's third draft, offered that insight in an interview with the *Catholic Courier* the day after the document's April 9 release.

The treatment of sexism is one of the elements retained from the proposed pastoral's second draft, which was released in 1990. The new draft also retains a call for equal treatment of women in society and the workplace.

At the same time, however, the document omits the second draft's explanation about why the church does not ordain women as priests; tones down the earlier call for examining the possibility of women deacons; and deletes a statement encouraging "participation by women in all liturgical ministries that do not require ordination," including that of altar servers.

The latest document, "Called to Be One in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society," will be discussed at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' meeting June 18-20, at Notre Dame University.

It is expected to be voted on at the bishops' general meeting in November in Washington, D.C.

Bishop Clark, who has been a member of the women's pastoral writing committee since it was formed in 1983, said the description of sexism as a sin is one of the "strongest pieces in the document."

The bishops' decision to speak so strongly about sexism stems not from a belief that "there are a lot of raging sexists in our church, but (because) we think there are a lot of sexist attitudes in our church," explained Bishop Clark, who authored his own pastoral letter on women, *Fire in the Thornbush*, in 1982.

Bishop Clark noted that the current version of the letter reflects input from a May, 1991, Vatican consultation on the document.

In addition to influencing the wording in the section on women in the diaconate, Bishop Clark said, the consultation with Vatican officials and bishops of 13 other countries led the writing committee to put additional emphasis on Mary as a model of discipleship and to expand discussion of human nature and what it means to be men and women.

He added that the third draft's sec-



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

tion on human nature incorporates elements of Pope John Paul II's reflections on the subject from his 1989 pastoral letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, ("On the Dignity and Vocation of Women").

The international consultation was not intended to criticize the document, but rather to give the U.S. bishops input from bishops of other nations on some of the themes raised in the proposed pastoral, Bishop Clark said.

One aspect of the draft that was especially influenced by the consultation was the question of discussing women in the permanent diaconate, Bishop Clark said.

In the second draft, the bishops urged that the Vatican undertake and soon complete a study on admitting women to the permanent diaconate. The current draft simply calls for "continued dialogue and reflection" on various ministries such as the diaconate.

In part, Bishop Clark said, the bishops declined to call for a study of women in the diaconate because, "We were told by Vatican authorities that this simply was not going to happen for some time. We felt, 'Why create expectations or (raise) issues that are simply not going to (be acted on) now?'"

Similarly, the current draft drops the second draft's discussion of reasons traditionally given for not ordaining women to the priesthood. This change comes in spite of evidence from listening sessions conducted at the start of the pastoral-writing process that this issue is a deeply felt one, Bishop Clark said.

"We felt it would be beating a dead horse to merely repeat all the (reasons why) women are not being ordained," Bishop Clark said. "There's no way the document is going to solve the issue."

Thus, the proposed pastoral simply restates the church's current teaching that only men may be ordained.

At the same time, the document cites provisions of the 1983 Code of Canon Law allowing women to participate as lectors and eucharistic ministers, diocesan tribunal personnel, and diocesan chancellors.

Bishop Clark noted that despite canon law's support for such activities by women, "some local churches refuse to allow women to carry out those functions. I'm deeply puzzled by that."

Although the current draft does reflect input from the international consultation in many areas, Bishop Clark said he hoped that — if they vote to approve it — the U.S. bishops will not heed suggestions that the document be released as a statement rather than as a pastoral letter.

"I would like to see it published as a pastoral letter," the bishop said. "I feel that to publish it at a level (below) a pastoral level would be to signal that it was not important enough to be published at (the higher) level."

That sentiment was shared by Nora Bradbury-Haehl, co-chairperson of the Rochester diocese's Commission on Women, with which Bishop Clark has consulted throughout the writing process.

To release the document as anything less than a pastoral letter — or to decline releasing it at all — would be to "waste all the time and effort that went into it," Bradbury-Haehl said.

She acknowledged that some commission members would prefer that the document not be released, either because they feel it goes too far or does not go far enough. Nevertheless, she said, the document as written serves a purpose.

"Overall, it's encouraging to see a women's pastoral," Bradbury-Haehl said. "I think that just the fact that they have a pastoral on the subject is going to do wonders."

She suggested that a pastoral letter by U.S. bishops on the concerns of women will lead the bishops of other nations to begin to pay more attention to the issues raised.

Even if the pastoral letter is not approved, it has already served a purpose, Bishop Clark noted.

Many individuals who oppose the document or dislike some parts of it, Bishop Clark predicted, "will be among the first to say that this has done a great deal to stimulate the kinds of conversations we need in the church on this issue."

Contains reporting from Catholic News Service.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

**BISHOP HONORED** — Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, auxiliary of the Archdiocese of Detroit, prays with the crowd after an April 9 press conference at the Open Door Mission. The previous day, Bishop Gumbleton received the Rochester Association for the United Nations' 1991 Joseph C. Wilson Award.

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