Myorld & nation

Draft labors with divisive issues

WASHINGTON -- "If you're looking for something to criticize ins this document, you'll find it," said Bishop Jóseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill.

He was referring to the third draft of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on women's concerns, titled "Called to Be One One in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society," which was released April 9.

Rochester's Bishop Matthew H. Clark is a member of the committee writing the pastoral.

In a world in which millions of people still don't think of sexism as a problem, the proposed pastoral says it's not just a problem, it's a "sin."

In a world in which many who do call sexism a sin would also say it is sexist for the church to exclude women from ordained ministry, the pastoral continues to support the church's "unbroken tradition" of "calling only men to ordained priesthood."

In a U.S. Catholic society that has overwhelmingly ignored or rejected church teaching against artificial contraception, the pastoral recommends natural family planning as the approach for "couples who for serious reasons wish to postpone a new birth."

Amid the passionately debated is-XX Xic

sues of women's roles in U.S. society and in the Catholic Church today, it seems unlikely that the bishops could have written any document on the topic without arousing everyone's anger on one issue or another.

Yet the new draft is out there now, with 20,000 words of potential controversy — and apparently is finally headed for a vote. The U.S. bishops are to discuss it at a national meeting in June at the University of Notre Dame. When they convene again in Washington this November, they are supposed to vote on it.

"It can't say it all, (but) at least let us say what can be said. It's time for the bishops to address women's concerns," Bishop Imesch said.

The document firmly denounces sexism and pronounces women's equality. But it declares that "the equality of men and women as persons is best served not by disregarding sexual difference but by taking this gift and reality into account."

Among the concerns the document addresses are:

• Male-fémale relationships and the consequences of sexism in personal and family life.

 Problems of societal discrimination against women, ranging from economic and career disadvantages to special problems such as the double obstacles faced by single mothers and women of racial and ethnic minorities.

• The need for the church to advance women's church roles in all areas open to them and to combat sexist attitudes among Catholics through preaching and education.

• Violence against women so widespread that "one woman in four will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime."

• Pervasive sexual exploitation of women, ranging from prostitution and pornography to the exploitation of women in entertainment and advertising.

In its conclusion the document calls for the establishment of commissions on women in church and society in every U.S. diocese. It sets out a 25-point education and action program for the U.S. Catholic Church; the commissions would work to implement the program at the parish and diocesan level.

One of the most striking features of the first draft was a series of direct quotes from U.S. Catholic women, some sharply critical of the church, interspersed throughout the text. The quotes were drawn from the extensive grass-roots consultation that preceded the first draft.

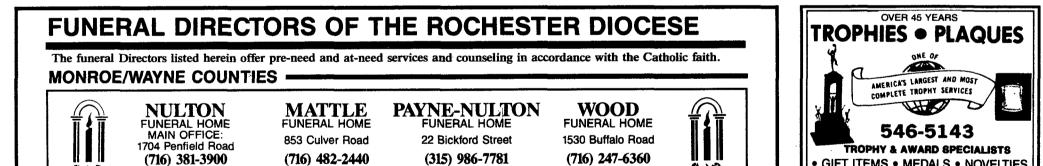
In the second draft that use of such quotations was significantly reduced, and in the third draft they disappeared in favor of paraphrases.



AP/Wide World Photos GERMAN EVACUEES - Members of the German community in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Hercegovina, kiss while waiting April 9 at the local Volkswagen plant to be evacuated on buses. Under armed guard, 21 Germans --- many who worked at the plant ---- departed with other nationals for the Serbian capital of Belgrade.

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