

NCCB leaders receive pastoral's fourth draft

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A fourth draft of the U.S. Catholic bishops' proposed pastoral letter on women's concerns was mailed Aug. 18 to the bishops' Administrative Committee.

It was not immediately made public.

In response to an inquiry by Catholic News Service Aug. 19, Mercy Sister Sharon Euart confirmed that the new version of the pastoral was included in documentation sent to the committee the day before. Sister Euart is associate general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The 50-bishop NCCB Administrative Committee is to meet in Washington Sept. 15-17 to set the agenda for the NCCB's general meeting this fall.

The pastoral on women — now nine years in the making — is expected to be the most controversial and heavily debated issue during the bishops' Nov. 16-19 meeting.

It describes sexism as a sin and calls for a wide range of changes in church, society and personal attitudes to end unjust discrimination against women. Most of the controversy concerned its efforts to deal with divisive issues concerning the role of women in the church.

When the bishops met in June at the University of Notre Dame, they discussed the third draft at length and directed the drafting committee to make several important revisions before bringing the document back to them in November for final debate, amendment and vote.

A number of bishops criticized the third draft sharply. But the diversity of views expressed at the June meeting led some observers to wonder whether the bishops can reach enough consensus at this time to issue a single, common statement, especially on questions regarding women in the church.

Several bishops called for a revised document that would explain more fully and defend more strongly the position that, in trying to discern and follow the will of Christ, the church does not consider itself able to ordain women.

The third draft stated the official church position, but avoided a detailed analysis or defense, saying, "This pastoral letter is not the appropriate place to

enter into a discussion of these complex issues." Several bishops objected that a failure to explain and defend church policy would make it seem that the bishops were not sure of the teaching or did not support it.

But at least a small number of U.S. bishops are known to favor the ordination of women, and others do not consider the question definitively answered and closed for all time.

In June some bishops argued that the bishops should admit they could not agree on all the issues facing them and not issue a pastoral letter at this time.

One of that group, Bishop Raymond A. Lucker of New Ulm, Minn., urged the bishops to "drop the pastoral but continue the dialogue."

In place of the pastoral, he said, the bishops should issue a short statement summarizing areas they do agree on and acknowledging "underlying issues that still divide us, especially the need for open and honest study of the ordination of women."

A debate on whether or not to move ahead toward issuing a pastoral letter was cut short at the June meeting when a number of bishops indicated that they thought it was premature to make such a decision before seeing a new draft.

Another criticism some bishops made was that the third draft analyzed the evils of sexism at length, but failed to subject some forms of "radical feminism" to the same kind of analysis.

Even two members of the bishops' committee that wrote the third draft publicly criticized it in June. The two dissenting writers were Archbishop William J. Levada of Portland, Ore., and Auxiliary Bishop Alfred C. Hughes of Boston.

National Catholic Reporter, an independent Catholic weekly based in Kansas City, Mo., reported Aug. 14 that the Vatican had also sent the writing committee a critique of the third draft. NCR did not report the contents of the critique, and officials contacted by Catholic News Service said it was a private document that would not be released.

NCR quoted Bishop Joseph L. Imsch of Joliet, Ill., chairman of the writing committee, as saying that the Vatican's latest comments were "in line with the comments, previous suggestions made (by the Vatican) on the earlier draft."



AP/Wide World Photos

WELCOME RELIEF—An old woman cries, while a Bosnian defender peers out from behind a balcony in Gorazde Aug. 15, as the first United Nations convoy of relief supplies arrives in the besieged town.

Holy Father renews call for peace in the Balkans

LORENZAGO DI CADORE, Italy (CNS) — Pope John Paul II renewed his "pressing appeal" for peace in the former Yugoslavian republics Aug. 23, after church officials gave pessimistic assessments about ending the war soon.

Government officials must "do everything possible to restore to this dear region the fundamental good of peace," the pope said.

The papal appeal was preceded by establishment of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Bosnia-Herzegovina Aug. 20. The Vatican announcement expressed hope that the move would help bring peace.

But the papal efforts were accompanied by dim views from church officials witnessing the fighting that an end to the war was possible any time soon.

"The situation is getting worse from day to day," said Father Mila Anicic, chancellor of the Diocese of Banja Luka, in Serb-controlled Bosnia.

"The Serb majority is putting into practice its so-called 'ethnic cleansing,'" he said in a message prepared for the pope and reported Aug. 22 in Italian newspapers.

Ethnic cleansing refers to Serbian efforts to rid large sections of Bosnia of non-Serbs, mainly Catholic Croats and Muslim Slavs. "It's not a matter of war, because Catholics possess neither arms

nor provoke incidents," he said.

"It's a case of irrational mistreatment — arrests and deportations — of houses destroyed and of the persecution of Catholics and Muslims in the territories where they have lived for centuries," he added. Many Catholics have fled, he said, and others, mostly men, are in concentration camps.

"Regarding women, children and the elderly, some have been murdered, while others — almost crazed — hide in the woods," said Father Anicic.

Pessimism also was expressed by French Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, who visited Bosnia and Croatia Aug. 14-18 as a papal envoy.

"No one can see a way out in the immediate future," he told Vatican Radio after returning. "Even more tragic in this war is that no one manages to foresee a spiral of hope for the future."

Cardinal Etchegaray is president of the pontifical councils for justice and peace and *Cor Unum*, the Vatican emergency relief agency. He visited the Serbian-besieged Bosnian capital of Sarajevo and camps for displaced people in Bosnia and Croatia.

Archbishop Vinko Puljic of Sarajevo has criticized U.N. peacekeeping forces in his area of ignoring church requests for help in obtaining information about deaths and injuries among priests and other church workers in the republic.

"It offends us to hear all the stories, by which they (United Nations) try to conceal their own avoidance of responsibility for defending the human right to life, as well as the sovereignty of a state which they themselves have recognized," Archbishop Puljic told Croatian journalists. "If they don't want to defend this sovereignty, they should never have recognized us in the first place."

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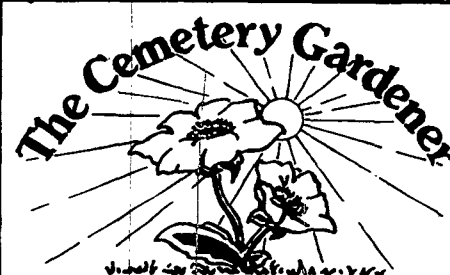
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