

Prelate: Justice demands ordaining women

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The Catholic Church should admit women to the priesthood because "justice demands it" and "the pastoral needs of the church require it," said Auxiliary Bishop P. Francis Murphy of Baltimore.



In publicly declaring his disagreement with Vatican authorities about the issue, Bishop Murphy said he considers the question "as important as the issue Paul raised with Peter; namely, the admission of gentiles into Christianity."

He defended his loyalty to the church, saying, "To speak the truth in love is the deepest loyalty to anyone or any institution."

Bishop Murphy stated his position in a five-page article that sharply criticized the latest draft of the proposed U.S. bishops' pastoral on women. The article was scheduled to appear in the Sept. 25 issue of *Commonweal*, a New York-based national Catholic magazine.

In the article, Bishop Murphy urged the U.S. bishops to "issue a call for an international commission to review the (women's) ordination issue." The commission should have a mandate to conduct a thorough, open investigation and should include scholars, bishops, representatives of Orthodox and other major Christian churches and as many women as men, he said.

Bishop Murphy told Catholic News Service that he has publicly urged a full, open study of the question of women's ordination since 1977, but that the *Commonweal* article was his first direct statement in a general public forum that he supports the ordination of women.

"Today, I can say that I am personally in favor of the ordination of women into

a renewed priestly ministry," he wrote. "Women's calls (to priesthood), as well as men's, should be tested," he added. "Justice demands it. The pastoral needs of the church require it."

Anticipating accusations of disloyalty, he wrote that "it is right and just, urgent in fact, that the Catholic Church in the United States bring its insights and wisdom, the shared reflection of the community about the role of women, to the church universal ...

"The question is raised: How does a bishop maintain both loyalties — to Rome and to the local church? My response is: If one is loyal to Christ and to the truth as one honestly sees it, one will ultimately be loyal both to Rome and to the local church.

"If one listens attentively to the faith and experience of the local church," he continued, "genuine loyalty to Rome

requires that one communicate that faith and experience to Rome. Withholding it because Rome does not appear to wish to hear is disloyalty to Rome and the Petrine ministry."

"Petrine ministry" is a theological term for the pope's ministry of unity and charity over the whole church as St. Peter's successor as bishop of Rome and head of the Apostles.

The fourth draft of the proposed national pastoral letter on women was sent to the U.S. bishops in late August in preparation for an expected debate and vote on it at their November meeting.

The draft document strongly defends the official church position, spelled out by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a 1976 declaration, that "the church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to

priestly ordination."

From 1978 to 1989 Bishop Murphy was a member of the bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church, which in 1983 proposed that the bishops develop a pastoral letter on women's concerns. When the bishops adopted the proposal, a separate committee was formed to do the writing.

Bishop Murphy's article urged release of secret Vatican critiques of the second and third drafts of the pastoral, saying the U.S. bishops "have a right and a need to ... see the kind of harmful pressure being exerted by Rome on the legitimate process of discernment under way in the Catholic Church in the United States."

In place of the pastoral, he said, the bishops should issue a brief statement "outlining agreed-upon truths, spelling out a few of the substantive proposals from the conclusions of (the third draft) and identifying major issues in need of further dialogue and discernment."

He also urged the bishops to advocate and engage in open dialogue on women's concerns "without fear of being considered disloyal," to press Rome for dialogue on admission of women to unordained liturgical ministries, and to insist that the Vatican drop its ban on altar girls.

Despite his disappointment with the fourth draft, Bishop Murphy said a number of positive achievements in the process of dialogue and reflection were initiated by the pastoral's drafting committee.

In an editorial preceding Bishop Murphy's article, *Commonweal* called the pastoral a "dead letter" and said what began as a pastoral on women's concerns had turned into "a pastoral letter on the concerns of the bishops over what the Vatican will tolerate them saying on the question of women."

"Lest the messengers be killed, kill the message. Stop the pastoral," *Commonweal* said.

Advisory council urges bishops to table pastoral

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops' National Advisory Council has urged the bishops to table their proposed pastoral letter on women, saying that the tone of the latest draft is "defensive and authoritarian rather than pastoral."

Sources told Catholic News Service that the council overwhelmingly opposed the latest draft of the pastoral and urged the bishops to replace it with a brief statement calling for more study and dialogue.

The council urged that a replacement statement simply summarize "the benefits of the process, the humbling complexities of the issue and the need for much more prayer and dialogue."

The council consists of priests, reli-

gious and lay people who meet twice a year to provide input to the Administrative Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on agendas for NCCB general meetings and on other issues facing the bishops.

The Administrative Committee, which sets the agendas for NCCB general meetings, decided Sept. 15 to include the proposed pastoral on the November agenda as an action item.

The National Advisory Council also objected to the pastoral's latest draft because its expanded treatment of women's ordination "unfortunately suggests that this topic has become the church's principal preoccupation regarding women's concerns."

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