

# Vatican launches effort to highlight catechism

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Less than six months after unveiling the "Catechism of the Catholic Church," Vatican officials have launched a major effort to place the volume in the hands of catechetical planners, religion teachers and the ordinary faithful.

Behind the initiative is a simple concern shared by Pope John Paul II and his top aides: They do not want the universal catechism to become just another reference book gathering dust on the shelf.

Nor do they want the catechism's content diluted in the writing of local instructional materials. Individual Catholics, in fact, could benefit from the full 700-page text of the catechism, they told an international gathering of catechetical experts at the Vatican April 27-29.

The universal catechism "cannot be considered just a stage which precedes the writing of local catechisms, but is designed for all the faithful who have the ability to read it, understand it and assimilate it," the pope said in a speech to participants.

The meeting, sponsored by the Congregation for Clergy, raised a sensitive issue that has accompanied the universal catechism since it was first suggested at a Synod of Bishops in 1985: Would this "compendium of church teaching" function as a resource for local churches or as a standard catechism text for the whole world?

The pope and others have been careful to describe the universal catechism as a "point of reference" for dioceses and bishops' conferences. The Vatican meeting for the first time defined that term — in "the strong sense," as clergy congregation secretary Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe said.

"Point of reference means that (the catechism's) teaching is normative for every future activity, because of its completeness and authoritativeness," Archbishop Sepe said, summing up the meeting's conclusions.

No local catechism can contain "any element that is, or can be interpreted as being, contrary to the doctrine of the 'Catechism of the Catholic Church,'" he said. The universal catechism's "in brief" summaries, designed for easy memorization, should be used in local texts, he said.

Even the catechism's four-part structure is strongly recommended as the model for local works, he said.

The universal catechism could be adopted as the "national catechism" in places that do not have one, he suggested. The United States is one of

many countries where a variety of instructional texts are used, but not a national catechism.

Archbishop Sepe opened the meeting by outlining basic "premises." One was that in using the universal catechism, compilers of local catechisms "cannot just choose this or that truth at their pleasure, ignoring the rest," he said.

Unpopular church teachings must also be included, he said. One advantage of the universal catechism is that it avoids the "evasiveness and omissions found in certain catechisms" today, he said.

The archbishop said local churches have some flexibility in "extracting" the content of the universal catechism. Language or order of presentation may be different, for example. But he emphasized that through the universal catechism, "the church speaks a single language" in terms of its teachings.

Based on its consultations, the clergy congregation plans to eventually produce a document with guidelines on implementing the catechism in local churches, he said.

Cardinal Jose T. Sanchez, who heads the clergy congregation, said proper application of the universal catechism was important in ending "doctrinal diversity" in the church.

Sandwiched between the opening and closing speeches were group discussions among the 66 participants. Representing the United States was Bishop John J. Leibrecht of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo., chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Education.

Bishop Leibrecht said participants recognized the new catechism as a "sure guide" for local teaching materials, but also saw the need for freedom in adapting its contents. The key was to find the right balance on this question, he said.

What also emerged from the meeting was the catechism's usefulness as a "ready resource" for individual Catholics, he said.

"There was emphasis on the catechism as being an immediate resource for many adults, for example Bible study groups. We also mentioned the idea of families having a copy in their own homes," he said.

The new catechism's English-language translation is still awaiting final Vatican approval. But in a report to the meeting, Bishop Leibrecht detailed the variety of ways the U.S. church plans to promote the book's use once it is available. These include videotape introductions, symposiums and new course offerings in seminaries.

## Abuse

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delete in Jemez, N.M., but "we do not agree." It recommended that the program follow the guidelines outlined in the report, and urged the archdiocese to closely monitor the number of "dropout" priests who remain in the area after leaving the program.

Among the report's other recommendations:

- Victims should be notified of the board's actions at each step of the process. "In the past, victims were left in the dark about what the archdiocese was doing in regard to their allegations," the report said. "This contributed both to their anxiety and their

anger."

- The archdiocese should immediately set up a trust fund to finance treatment costs for the victim and his or her family.

- The abusing priest should be encouraged to apologize to the victim, in person or in a letter, if the victim and the treatment provider agree.

- To guard against false accusations of sexual abuse, priests should not permit minors to visit their rectories, go on outings or trips or travel in their cars without another adult present and should keep written records of their activities with minors.

"While this process may seem cumbersome, it is intended to avoid the secrecy of sexual abuse and the appearance of secrecy when a false accusation occurs," the report said.

# Thousands mourn Chavez



AP/Wide World Photos

## Poignant procession

A young girl places flowers atop Cesar Chavez's casket after an April 29 procession at the UFW's Forty Acres Compound in Delano, Calif. Thousands of farmworkers from across the country, trade union leaders, politicians, religious leaders and ordinary citizens converged at the huge, tented Mass site to honor Chavez, who died April 23.

## Official: Start peacemaking earlier

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Continued fighting in the Balkans demonstrates that peacemaking must begin before the shooting starts, a Vatican representative said at a meeting on European security.

The official also said that diplomatic efforts cannot bring peace without support from the governments and individuals directly involved.

The lesson Europe should learn is that countries and their citizens must be educated to peacemaking before the fighting breaks out, Monsignor Alain Lebeaupin told an April 26 meeting in Geneva of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Vatican diplomat cited international appeals for an end to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which all sides have been urged to make sacrifices and take steps toward reconciliation. But these pleas have had little effect,

he said.

"What is happening in the Balkans is a lesson for all of us: People must be educated to peace and cooperation before the weapons are fired and before hearts and consciences are darkened by vengeance and hatred," he said.

This is the main task of organizations such as the conference, which has primarily a promotional and diplomatic role, he said.

"It would be an illusion to think that the CSCE could impose peace, security or cooperation," he said. But it should step up its educational effort to help end the "horrible violations of human dignity" occurring in Europe, he said.

Governments should be made to respect the agreements they have signed regarding human rights and commitments they have made to dialogue, he said. Dialogue within each country is extremely important today because many of Europe's potential conflicts involve national minority groups within particular states, he said.