

Approval of altar girls will bring little change

Diocesan churches already using them

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican's decision to approve the use of female altar servers, subject to the pastoral needs of local churches, will not have a dramatic impact on churches in the Rochester diocese.

Several diocesan parishes had been using altar girls for a number of years, according to several diocesan sources. The ruling must still be approved by U.S. bishops in November.

Father Thomas P. Mull, priest consultant to the diocesan Office of Liturgy, noted that his office had sent out an April 20 letter explaining the Vatican's decision to all pastors.

"Obviously, this decision does not indicate any direct change in the policy in effect in our diocese," the letter said. "Pastors are encouraged to seriously consider the option of inviting girls as well as boys to service at the altar."

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has permitted the use of altar-girls since 1986, Father Mull said. He noted that the bishop had interpreted Canon 230.2 as allowing for the presence of females in some aspects of the liturgical celebration, an interpretation that the Vatican has now echoed. That section of the canon states that all lay persons can fulfill "the functions of commentator or cantor or other functions" during a liturgy.

A letter to bishops' conferences around the world dated in mid-March said service at the altar can be performed by lay people, whether they are male or female. The ruling on church law that clarified the policy was confirmed by Pope John Paul II, said the document.

The contents of the letter were made available to Catholic News Service by informed sources at the Vatican. It was

signed by Cardinal Antonio Javierre Ortas, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

Asked about the new policy, Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said it was the result of an interpretation of existing church law and not a major innovation by the church. He emphasized that the decision resolves a pastoral question, not a doctrinal one.

"It may be that one bishop says 'yes' for pastoral reasons, while another says 'no,'" he said.

Navarro-Valls also pointed out that the question has no connection with the church debate over ordained ministries. Service at the altar has a much different canonical and doctrinal nature, he said.

Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, called the reported papal decision "a welcome one."

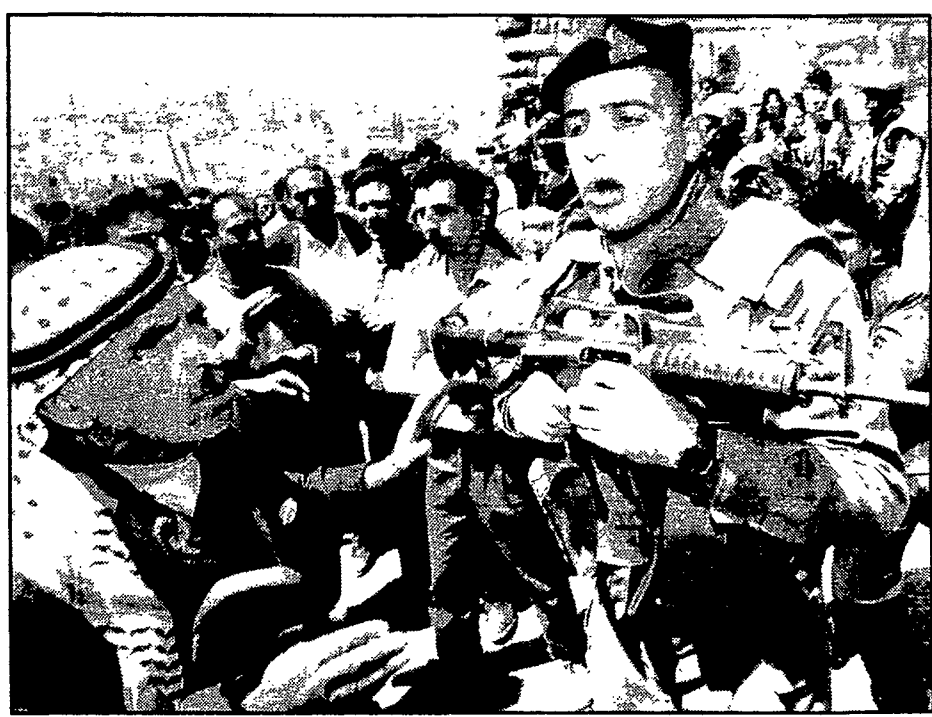
"I would expect our conference to discuss this matter at its next regular business meeting which is scheduled for November 1994," he said.

The Vatican's letter explained that the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts had decided the basic question in 1992 with a one-sentence ruling on Canon 230 of church law. The ruling was "affirmative" regarding female altar servers but said there was a need for further instructions on the matter by the worship and sacraments congregation.

It apparently took another 18 months to draw up the instructions, which were included in Cardinal Javierre Ortas' letter. They highlighted four points:

The policy is optional for each bishop, depending on local pastoral needs. The bishop, after hearing the advice of the national bishops' conference, must make his own decision in order to best promote "an ordered development of liturgical life in his own diocese."

Altar boys represent a "noble tradi-



AP/Wide World Photos

Mosque remains closed

An Israeli soldier prevents Palestinians from marching to the Tomb of the Patriarch mosque, site of the Hebron massacre on April 11. An advance team of international observers ended its visit to Hebron after the army fired tear gas to stop militants protesting the mosque's continued closure.

tion" that has led to priestly vocations and must continue to be supported.

Any decision to use female altar servers should be explained well to the faithful. Pastors should note that women already perform such tasks during Mass as reading from Scripture and, in some circumstances, distributing Communion.

U.S. bishops have been particularly eager for a clarification of the policy on female altar servers. Several bishops raised the issue during their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican in 1993 and were told that the question had virtually been decided but that the Vatican was not yet ready to publish the decision.

The role of lay people in liturgical ministries is governed mainly by Canon 230 in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

It says that properly qualified lay men may be permanently installed as lectors and acolytes, the technical terms used

in church law for readers and altar servers.

It also says lay persons — men or women — can act as lectors "by temporary deputation" and "all lay persons can fulfill the functions of commentator or cantor or other functions, in accord with the norm of law."

Finally, it says: "When the necessity of the church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply for certain of their offices, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism and to distribute holy Communion in accord with the prescriptions of the law."

Contributing to this story were Jerry Filteau in Washington and staff writer Rob Cullivan.

Protesters of military school staging fast at Capitol

Rochester man among activists

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — For 40 days the front steps of the U.S. Capitol will be home base to 11 priests, religious workers and other activists fasting to protest against a U.S. training school for Latin American military officers.

Among the fasters is Steve Smock, a member of Rochester's Catholic Worker community.

Led by Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois, the group began a beverages-only fast April 11 to protest continued operation of the U.S. Army School of the Americas, Fort Benning, Ga.

"In the midst of all the budget cuts affecting the elderly, the poor and children, what's the rationale of training soldiers for Latin America in combat skills?" said Father Bourgeois as the fast began. "Who's the enemy?"

The School of the Americas was targeted by activists from groups such as the Maryknoll Missioners, the Catholic Worker Movement, Witness for Peace and Veterans for Peace after its graduates were implicated in hundreds of human rights abuses in various Latin American countries.

A U.N. Truth Commission report on

the 1989 murders of six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador implicated 19 graduates of the school among the 27 Salvadoran military officers named. Two other graduates were implicated in the 1980 murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Other alumni include former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, now serving a 40-year prison sentence for drug trafficking; Guatemalan Gen. Hector Gramajo, who was convicted in 1991 of war crimes against his countrymen; and Haitian Gen. Michel Francois, who ousted Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Haitian president, in a 1991 coup.

Defenders of the school say it has proved invaluable in bringing professionalism and high standards to the militaries of the 17 countries from which its graduates come.

Lt. Col. William Darley, public affairs officer for the school, told Catholic News Service April 12 that since the school was first established in Panama in the 1940s, there has been some attention to human rights training based on international treaties such as the Geneva Convention. Human rights became an official part of the program in 1989, he said.

"We think we have the most sophisticated human rights training in the country, as concerns the laws of land warfare," Darley said. "It's incorporated into every class."

In an April 8 story, National Catholic

Reporter said a review of school course catalogs since 1980 shows mandatory human rights awareness training began in 1992. It also quoted a former instructor as saying a four-hour course on human rights offered when he taught there from 1986-89 was worthless.

At the Capitol, Father Bourgeois said, "We're here as U.S. citizens, clergy, veterans to call attention to a program that's very costly in terms of lives and of money."

Father Bourgeois claims the actual cost of the school is between \$40 million and \$50 million a year. But Darley said this year's budget of \$4.5 million covers operations, training and boarding of students.

An amendment to the House defense appropriations bill last year would have eliminated the school's \$3 million operations budget but it was defeated in a 174-256 vote. Similar legislation is expected to be sponsored again by Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II, D-Mass.

One faster, Father Jim McKennon of Dallas, said he decided to join the protest out of concern for the "lack of a policy" by the U.S. government toward problems in Latin America caused by the school's graduates. He said he sees closing the school as "a way to bring an end to the monstrous efforts to dominate and control the people of Latin America."

Kathy Boylan, of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker Community in Wash-

ington, said she joined the fast "as a form of reparation for my own complicity" in allowing her tax money to be spent on the school. Her interest in U.S. policy toward Latin America military was piqued several years ago when her community helped settle Salvadorans through a sanctuary network.

She said she realized some people she was helping in Washington had fled El Salvador in part because "we trained their military officers to become better killers."

Father Bourgeois recently lost an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court of a conviction for trespassing and vandalism stemming from his protest at Fort Benning soon after the Jesuits were killed in El Salvador. By the time the court received the appeal — pursued on grounds that the judge who heard the case should have removed himself because of bias — Father Bourgeois and co-defendants John P. and Charles Liteky had already served their jail sentences.

Other fasters at the Capitol include: Jesuit Father Bill Bichsel and Bruce Triggs of Tacoma, Wash.; Harold Fager, a Wisconsin attorney who spent 28 years in the U.S. Army and Army Reserves; the Rev. Kenneth Kennon, a Disciple of Christ pastor from Tucson, Ariz.; Kathleen Rumpf and Ed Kineen of the Syracuse, N.Y., Catholic Worker organization; and Bill Thompson, a retired teacher who is co-director of the Humboldt Bay, Calif., chapter of Veterans for Peace.