

U.S. Bishops join call for changes at ICPD

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops unanimously affirmed the pope's stance that the upcoming United Nations International Conference on Population and Development should respect traditional family life.

In a closed meeting in San Diego June 16-22, the bishops endorsed Archbishop William H. Keeler's statement on the ICPD, which is scheduled for Cairo, Egypt, Sept. 5-13.

Archbishop Keeler, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the NCCB encourages the U.S. government to press for agreement on a document "that respects the life and dignity of every innocent human being, born and unborn, that recognizes and supports the fundamental and indispensable role of the family for the good of humankind, and that identifies the genuine needs of developing nations and commits resources essential for their true development."

Supreme Court nixes school for Hasidics

WASHINGTON — A school district created for the special-education needs of a Hasidic Jewish community violates the Constitution, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled June 27. In a 6-3 ruling, the court said the New York Legislature effectively endorsed a particular religion when it created a public school district for the Satmar Hasidic village of Kiryas Joel. The U.S. Catholic Conference urged the court to rule the Kiryas Joel district constitutional.

Republicans issue call for Elders' removal

WASHINGTON — Eighty-seven House Republicans have called for U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders to be removed from her post because of her outspoken views. At a Capitol Hill press conference June 24, the members said Elders is "a menace to public health" and "an embarrassment to the Clinton administration."

Catechism sells fast; extra printings slated

WASHINGTON — The new "Catechism of the Catholic Church" could become a million-seller in the United States. Heavy early sales prompted a second printing of 340,000 copies in addition to the initial printing of 560,000, said Dan Juday, director of the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, the catechism's main U.S. publisher. A third printing is scheduled for later this summer.

Former Canisius head succumbs to leukemia

BUFFALO — Jesuit Father James M. Demski, 72, chancellor and former president of Canisius College, Buffalo, died June 15 from complications of the leukemia he had battled for two years.

An evening funeral Mass for the priest was held June 20 in Buffalo, followed by burial at the Martyrs Shrine in Auriesville.

Compiled from Catholic News Service reports.

Bishops welcome Vatican ruling

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The National Conference of Catholic Bishops "overwhelmingly" supported the Vatican's March ruling permitting females to serve at the altar, according to an NCCB announcement.

The bishops' action, taken at the beginning of their June 16-22 meeting in San Diego, was announced in Washington June 23 by the NCCB Office for Media Relations. The bishops' meeting was closed to the press.

"It is the opinion of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) that the option of having women and girls serve at the altar is a welcome one, subject always to the guidance of the diocesan bishop," said the motion approved by the bishops.

"The NCCB expresses its gratitude to the Holy Father and his collaborators for their pastoral concern on this matter," it added.

The motion was offered by Archbishop

Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, a former NCCB president. It was approved on a voice vote open to all bishops normally eligible to vote.

Monsignor Francis J. Maniscalco, NCCB spokesman, said the term "overwhelmingly" was used to describe the vote because, while opposition to the measure may have been expressed, it was not heard during the voice vote.

The NCCB announcement said one point made during the discussion was that the permission for female servers does not affect the Eastern-rite churches, because the permission is based on the interpretation of Canon 230, paragraph 2, in the Code of Canon Law. That canon is not paralleled in the recent Code of Canon Law issued for Eastern-rite churches.

Paragraph 2, as translated by the Canon Law Society of America, reads: "Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector during liturgical actions by tem-

porary deputation; likewise all lay persons can fulfill the functions of commentator or cantor or other functions, in accord with the norm of law."

Another point made during the discussion was that it was important to continue supporting "the noble tradition of having boys serve at the altar," the NCCB announcement said. That phrase was used by the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in conditionally granting permission for female servers.

After the Vatican decision was announced in April, some bishops announced they would move quickly to have females serve at the altar.

The worship congregation had said in its permission that a local bishop could allow female servers "after hearing the opinion" of his own bishops' conference.

Several bishops had said publicly they wanted the consultation to take place at the June meeting rather than wait until the bishops' annual November gathering.

NCCB again urges universal coverage, exclusion of abortion

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The chairmen of two U.S. bishops' committees have written Congress asking that health-care reform include universal coverage and exclude abortion.

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, chairman of the Pro-Life Activities Committee, and Auxiliary Bishop John H. Ricard of Baltimore, chairman of the Domestic Policy Committee, noted that the Catholic Church has much at stake in the health-care debate.

As an employer, operator of hundreds of medical facilities and caretaker for the poor, the U.S. Catholic Church has broad interests in the health-care system, said their June 15 letter, which was released June 23 by the U.S. Catholic Conference.

Mandating coverage for abortion not only would have destructive implications for Catholic health-care organizations, but also would fly in the face of how most Americans feel about use of tax dollars to pay for abortions, they said.

The letter cited a recent University of Cincinnati poll that found 69 percent of Americans oppose including abortion in standard national health-care benefits. Yet, the Clinton administration's proposal and several alternative plans would require such coverage.

"The irony of this situation is clear," the letter said. "For 20 years abortion advocates have insisted on calling themselves 'pro-choice,' and said the real issue in abortion is 'who decides — the individual woman or the government?'"

Now American women have said in numerous surveys that they do not want mandated abortion coverage — and abortion advocates insist that government must impose it on them regardless."

An abortion mandate also would have "destructive implications" for Catholic health care, the two bishops said.

Conscience clauses permitting some institutions to withdraw from requirements to provide abortions do not protect individuals and organizations from having to ensure access to abortions by providing referrals for patients, they said. The clauses also would prevent Catholic health-care institutions from leading provider networks, thus forcing them to the fringes of the system where survival would be more difficult, said Cardinal Mahony and Bishop Ricard.

Such employers as dioceses and Catholic agencies also would be required to provide insurance plans including abortion, they added. "We find it hard to believe that Congress intends to force all Catholic institutions to violate their own religious convictions and moral principles by subsidizing abortion for their employees."

By simply adding abortion services to the list of procedures excluded from mandated benefits, all those problems would be resolved, the letter said.

The House Education and Labor Committee voted 25-16 June 23 to include abortion in basic benefits. It was the third such vote by a congressional committee.

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