

# U.S. bishops discussing liturgy, women's role

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Urged by their president to continue working toward goals that are "not politically correct" but "unfailingly consistent," the U.S. bishops began discussions at their fall meeting on topics ranging from women in clergy to liturgical matters to the sex abuse.

On the first day of the Nov. 14-17 meeting at the Omni-Shoreham Hotel in Washington, some 280 Catholic bishops approved a \$41.3 million 1995 budget, the first segment of the Revised Roman Missal and a continuation of the collection to aid the church in Central and Eastern Europe.

The bishops also began debate on revised ethical and religious directives for Catholic health care, a pastoral message outlining a Catholic framework for action against violence, and a reflection

designed to increase dialogue on women's role in the church. Each bishop also received a detailed resource manual to help him deal with issues of sexual abuse of minors by church personnel.

Cardinal-designate William H. Keeler of Baltimore, president of the National Council of Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference, opened the meeting with a talk that sharply contrasted the church portrayed in the media with "the real church in which we live and worship."

"Our advocacy does not fit ideological or partisan categories," he said. "Our witness is not politically correct, but it is unfailingly consistent."

Cardinal-designate Keeler cited the recent track record of the church's contributions to peace in places like South Africa, Mozambique, Northern Ireland

and the Philippines as a prelude to inviting the U.S. government to take up the church's initiatives toward a dialogue in Cuba.

On domestic policy issues the cardinal-designate said the church stands "with the unborn and the undocumented, the hungry and the homeless, in the defense of human rights and human life."

At a meeting where liturgical decisions were expected to play a dominant role, the first vote was on segment one of a whole new translation from Latin of the Sacramentary, the official book of prayers used at Mass. The bishops had been expected to vote on the first three segments during the meeting, but the third segment was withdrawn from consideration at the last minute.

Part of a massive project under way

for several years now, the revised Sacramentary will not be completed until the bishops deal with four additional segments in coming years.

In addition to the revised translation of texts, the bishops will be asked to approve several changes or optional alternatives in the way people celebrate Mass every week.

Other votes at the meeting Nov. 14 included the 159-8 approval of the NCCB-USCC budget for 1995, representing a \$400,000 decrease from the 1994 budget; the 153-13 vote to extend the Eastern Europe collection for three years; and the voice vote to expand membership on the Tri-Conference Commission on Religious Life and Ministry to include the recently established Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious.

The commission was formed by and is composed of representatives of the NCCB, Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Conference of Major Superiors of Men. The newer council of women's superiors was formed in 1992.

Preliminary discussion of the proposed revisions to the nearly 20-year-old "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services" — now in its 10th draft — was generally positive, but the document seemed destined for further revisions.

The 48-page document looks at such questions as abortion, euthanasia, care for the poor, medical research, treatment of rape victims, surrogate motherhood, in vitro fertilization, prenatal testing, nutrition and hydration for the terminally ill and organ donation.

The directives, to be voted on Nov. 17, break no new ground on those topics, but bring together in one document church thinking in those areas.

## Pope says church must examine conscience

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In an apostolic letter anticipating the 2,000th anniversary of Christianity, Pope John Paul II said the church and its members must make a profound "examination of conscience" to measure their past and present conduct against the ideals of the faith.

Announcing a "great jubilee" for the year 2000, the pope unveiled plans for regional synods, ecumenical and inter-religious meetings and possible papal trips to the land where Jesus lived. The pope made it clear he expects to personally preside over the ambitious program, saying the preparations have become a key to his pontificate.

Christ's 2,000th birthday will be an extraordinary moment not only for Christians but indirectly for all humanity, the pope said in his letter, titled "Tertio Millennio Adveniente" ("The Coming Third Millennium"). The 72-page text, made public at the Vatican Nov. 14, followed a consultation on the topic with the world's cardinals last spring.

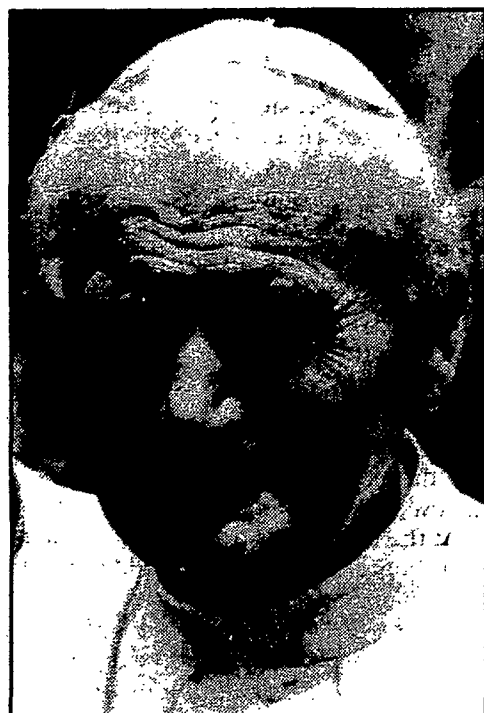
The pope said the jubilee, or holy year, will be celebrated simultaneously in Rome, the Holy Land and local churches during the year 2000. An International Eucharistic Congress will be held in Rome the same year, highlighting that Christ, born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, continues to offer himself to humanity, he said.

But the bulk of the letter focused on a six-year preparation program: a first phase, 1994-96, which concentrates on self-examination and historical shortcomings, in particular the fractured unity of Christian churches; and a second phase, 1997-99, which centers on Christ and his meaning for people today.

Taken as a whole, the jubilee preparations should confirm Christians in their faith, sustain their hope in eternal life and rekindle their charity toward the world's poor, he said.

All this requires that the church take a closer look at its own conduct. It needs to "become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel," he said.

The church "cannot cross the thresh-



Pope John Paul II

File photo

old of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency and slowness to act," he said.

At the same time, the pope said the church has to recognize that its members over the centuries have given in to "intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth." At times, because of cultural conditioning, many people mistakenly felt that authentic witnessing to the truth could include "suppressing the opinions of others," he said.

Today the church has an obligation to express "profound regret for the weaknesses of her sons and daughters who sullied her face," he said. This offers a lesson for the future: that the truth cannot be imposed upon people, he said.

The pope emphasized that the church's "examination of conscience" must also include the present day, which he said was marked by religious indifference, ethical confusion and growing secularism. Church members, he said, need to pose serious questions about the theological correctness of their faith, especially in view of what he termed "the crisis of obedience" regarding the church's teaching authority.

In social areas, too, he called on Chris-

tians to judge their own conduct against the Gospel teaching. He wondered, for example, how many Christians have accepted the violation of human rights by totalitarian regimes, and why so many Christians share responsibility for grave forms of injustice and exclusion.

The document calls on churches, in imitation of the early church, to recognize martyrs among their own members.

A strong theme of the document is the need for a new ecumenical push. He said he hoped that the next six years would see an acceleration of ecumenical dialogue and an increase in specific agreements, so that "we can celebrate the great jubilee, if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium."

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**Thank you to all participants!**