

Issues ranged from violence to Prop. 187

By Nancy Franzer O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — When the U.S. bishops met in Washington Nov. 14-17 for the fall general meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, they:

— Called for action to confront a violent culture, in a pastoral message approved on a voice vote that said fear of violence is "paralyzing and polarizing our communities."

— Urged an expansion of women's roles in the church and dialogue with those who feel alienated, in a pastoral reflection passed 728-10.

— Received a detailed resource manual to help them deal with issues of sexual abuse of minors by church personnel, and heard a report from Bishop John F. Kinisky of Newark, N.J., on the past and future work of the Ad Hoc Commission on Sexual Abuse.

— Approved a new version of "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services," last revised in 1975, which looks at such questions as abortion, euthanasia, care for the poor, medical research, and nutrition and hydration for the terminally ill.

— Extended their ad hoc committees, including the one on sexual abuse, for another three years, and created a new ad hoc committee to study the financially ailing Catholic Telecommunications Network of America.

— Approved the first and second segments of a new Sacramentary, with the exception of 21 prayers that will be sent back to an international commission for revision. The bishops had been expected to consider three segments of the Sacramentary, but the third segment was withdrawn from consideration before the meeting, along with proposed American adaptations to the Mass.

— Adopted the Swiss Synod's Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions and a provisional English translation of the text, pending Vatican approval.

— Elected Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr, a priest of the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, as general secretary for the next five years and chose Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston for a three-year term as conference secretary.

— Gave their outgoing general secretary, Monsignor Robert N. Lynch, a Miami archdiocesan priest, a standing ovation in gratitude for his work over the past six years.

— Approved a \$41.3 million budget for 1995, representing a \$400,000 decrease from the 1994 budget.

— Agreed to a three-year continuation of the collection to aid the church in Central and Eastern Europe.

— Expanded membership on the Tri-Conference Commission on Religious Life and Ministry to include the recently established Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious.

— Adopted a statement in light of California's Proposition 187 that said that all people had a basic right to health care and education.

Haitian president to leave priesthood

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CNS) — Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has asked to leave the priesthood in response to what he said was a request by the head of the church in Haiti.

"You have asked me to leave the priesthood for the growth of harmonious relations ... between two heads of state: the head of state of the Vatican and the head of state of the Republic of Haiti," Father Aristide said in his letter requesting dispensation, sent to Archbishop Francois Gayot of Cap-Haitien, head of the Haitian bishops' conference.

"I have decided, Excellence, to agree to your request."

The letter was dated Oct. 17. The offer to resign became public in mid-November and would not be official until accepted by the Vatican.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said Nov. 21 "there was never any pressure on the part of the Holy See" to force Father Aristide to seek dispensation from the priesthood.

Asked if the Haitian president has begun the formal Vatican process, Navarro-Valls said requests for dispensation are "matters of conscience on which the Holy See never comments."

Father Aristide was dismissed from the Salesians Nov. 8, 1988, by the rector major of the order because of his political activity. According to Canon 701 of the Code of Canon Law, such a dismissal includes "the suspension of the exercise of holy orders."

The dismissal was confirmed by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life Dec. 7, 1988, because of "serious conflicts with the Salesians' life and mission and with the canonical laws of the church," particularly Canon 285, paragraph 3, which states that "clerics are forbidden to assume public offices which entail a participation in the exercise of civil power."

With his dismissal from the Salesians, Father Aristide has remained a priest but has been prohibited from exercising his ministry and celebrating the sacraments.

A Vatican official who deals with dispensation requests said the process "is not a matter of simply sending a letter of resignation."

Currently, dispensation requests are handled either by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith or by the Congregation for Worship and Sacraments.

The process can take years and involves a thorough investigation of the individual's understanding of priesthood and its obligations at the time of ordination, personal ability to make a lifelong commitment to celibacy as well as the applicant's current situation.

Publicly, the Vatican has consistently recognized Father Aristide as the legitimate, democratically elected president of Haiti, although it also has been clear in saying that Catholic clergy should not run for elected office.

As one of Haiti's foremost exponents of liberation theology — which finds in Scripture the principles and inspiration for working to free people from unjust social patterns and structures — Father Aristide, a biblical scholar ordained in 1982, rose to fame in the mid-1980s with fiery sermons criticizing the Duvalier family regime.

His homilies won him the support of Haiti's impoverished majority but the ire of the church hierarchy.

A spokesman for Father Aristide, Yvon Neptune, said Nov. 16 that the church hierarchy "was uncomfortable with the president being a lay authority and at the same time a priest who should be working for the Holy See."

One source said Father Aristide made the decision because he wanted to concentrate on rebuilding the country without any clouds hanging over him.

"The country is in such a bad state, the last thing we need now is to have trouble of that kind," the source said.

Another priest, Father Gerard Jean-Juste, said the move was made to reconcile Father Aristide with the church.

In early November, Father Aristide met with Archbishop Gayot in Cap-Haitien and embraced him in a gesture of reconciliation. The move brought an angry response from Father Aristide's supporters, who accused Archbishop Gayot of collaborating with the leaders of the 1991 coup that sent the president into exile for three years.

Bishops

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related to one of the Prefaces.

Vatican confirmation of the Swiss prayer seems virtually assured. Bishop Donald W. Trautman of Erie, Pa., chairman of the bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, told the bishops that his committee decided to propose U.S. use of the prayer on the recommendation of the head of the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

The bishops' actions on the first two segments of the Sacramentary mark the

beginning of a long process that will involve reviewing a total of seven segments plus the U.S. adaptations.

Segment 1 contains the opening prayers, prayers over the gifts and prayers after Communion at Mass for Ordinary Time — the periods of the year between the Christmas season and Lent and between Pentecost and Advent.

Segment 2 contains the same prayers for Advent, the Christmas season, Lent and the Easter season.

A notable new aspect of those segments is the introduction of alternative opening prayers, original compositions in English, which reflect themes of the

Scripture readings of the day.

The alternative prayers take advantage of the fuller use of Scripture in the liturgy since Vatican II reforms and are labeled to correspond to the three-year cycle of Lectionary readings introduced after the council.

Where the bishops have decided to return certain prayers to ICEL for further consideration, any revisions must go through an extensive review process by ICEL — which is responsible for developing common English liturgy texts for use throughout the English-speaking world — and then be submitted to the U.S. bishops again for a vote.

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