

# WORLD & NATION

## Rome releases document on lay ministerial limits

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The Vatican issued an instruction Nov. 13 spelling out clear distinctions between the ordained ministry of priests and the ministry of lay people collaborating with them.

The main point of a new instruction is "to reaffirm the indispensable role of the ordained priest," Bishop James R. Hoffman of Toledo, Ohio, told the U.S. bishops Nov. 10.

The actual text of the 38-page document, issued with the authority of Pope John Paul II, was not scheduled for release by the Vatican until later in the week.

The bishops, attending their annual fall meeting in Washington, had pre-release copies of it in their meeting materials.

The document reaffirms such rules as the one that reserves preaching of a homily at the Eucharist to an ordained deacon, priest or bishop.

It reaffirms involvement of lay people in "the pastoral ministry of clerics in parishes, health care centers, charitable and educational institutions, prisons" and other

situations. But it insists that this should be done only when necessary because of a lack of sufficient priests "and not for reasons of convenience or ambiguous 'advancement of the laity,' etc."

Bishop Hoffman — who represented the National Conference of Catholic Bishops at a Vatican meeting Nov. 7 about the new instruction — told the bishops that the document "needs to be viewed through the lens of the ordained priesthood" or else it will be easily misunderstood.

"It is not intended to disvalue the pastoral ministry of lay women and lay men," he said.

The Vatican document is titled "Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Nonordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest."

It was issued with papal approval "in forma specifica" — a technical phrase meaning the instruction bears the full weight of papal authority — by an interdepartmental commission of six Vatican congregations and two pontifical councils, with the Congregation for the Clergy as the lead agency. It opens with a short chapter on the call



CNS/Nancy Wiehac

## Demonstrate for doctrine

Jennifer Kane (left) of Buffalo joins a small group of Catholics in prayer outside the Washington hotel where the U.S. bishops were meeting Nov. 10. Kane and her mother, Mary Marks (not pictured), said they came to Washington to ask the bishops to take responsibility for the church's doctrine.

of all baptized persons to share actively in building up the body of Christ.

After a second chapter devoted to theological principles governing ministry and distinguishing ordained ministry from the common priesthood of all the baptized, the third and largest part of the document is devoted to "Practical Provisions."

Bishop Hoffman described those provisions, spelled out in 13 articles, as basically reaffirmations of existing canon law regarding what ministries lay people may perform and under what conditions, and what is reserved to the ordained minister.

Among specific areas dealt with in the instruction are church norms governing ministry of the word, preaching, Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, ministry to the sick, assisting at marriages and the use of lay ministers to administer Communion.

The norms recognize that, even apart from cases of necessity, a lay minister may be deputized to administer baptism "should there be no ordinary minister or in cases where he is impeded."

But they go on to say that the ordained minister's absence or impediment "cannot be defined in terms of the ordinary minister's excessive workload, or his nonresidence in the territory of the parish, nor his nonavailability on the day on which the parents wish the baptism to take place." Reasons such as those are not enough, the norms say.

An article on the parish priest and the parish, while affirming the effective collaboration of lay ministers in pastoral ministry, also emphasizes the "extraordinary" character of such collaboration and stresses that competencies of "directing, coordinating, moderating or governing the parish" belong to the priest alone.

In a two-page conclusion, it says that where there is a priest shortage, it must be viewed as a transitory situation to be dealt with long-range by giving priority to priestly vocations. Interim solutions provided for under church law must not "fall into the ambiguity of considering as ordinary and normal, solutions that were meant for extraordinary situations," it says.

## Bishops to weigh new fasting rules

Washington (CNS) — The U.S. bishops voted Nov. 10 to study ways to revive the penitential practices of fasting and abstinence to support pro-life efforts.

The bishops agreed to explore ways to revive the tradition of fasting and abstinence on Fridays to counteract such "attacks against human life and human dignity" as abortion, euthanasia, war, violence and drugs.

Boston's Cardinal Bernard F. Law, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, presented the idea.

He noted that under current church law, all Fridays that are not solemnities are "penitential days" that should be observed with fasting, abstinence or some other form of penance. But, he said, "our pastoral experience has shown that the sense of Fridays as penitential days has waned significantly in recent years."

The proposal, passed unanimously by voice vote, will go to an as-yet-unspecified committee of the bishops to be shaped into recommendations for consideration by the full body of bishops next year.



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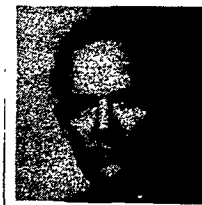
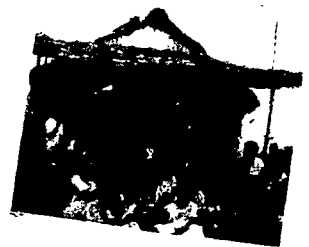
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