

U.S. bishops to consider social teaching statement

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Too many Catholics don't know Catholic social teaching or understand its importance to the faith, says a statement the U.S. bishops will be asked to approve when they meet in June.

"The Catholic social tradition is a central and essential element of our faith," the proposed statement says.

However, it adds, "far too many Catholics are unfamiliar with the basic content of Catholic social teaching. More fundamentally, many Catholics do not adequately understand that the social mission of the church is an essential part of Catholic faith. ... We need to do more to share the social mission and message of our church."

The bishops are to meet in Pittsburgh June 18-20. They are scheduled to debate and vote June 19 on the proposed statement, "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions."

Jointly proposed by three bishops' committees — education, domestic policy and international policy — the statement gives a brief overview of seven major themes in Catholic social teaching and focuses on what should be done to improve the formation of Catholics in the social teaching of their church.

"We want to encourage a fuller integration of the church's social tradition in the mainstream of Catholic education and catechesis," the statement says.

"The commitment to human life and dignity, to human rights and solidarity is a calling every Catholic educator must

share with his or her students," it adds.

The 4,500-word statement is based on the report of the Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education, a 30-member panel of educators and social justice leaders formed by the bishops in 1995 and headed by now-retired Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis.

The document lists seven "key principles which are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition":

- Human life and dignity. "Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching," it says.

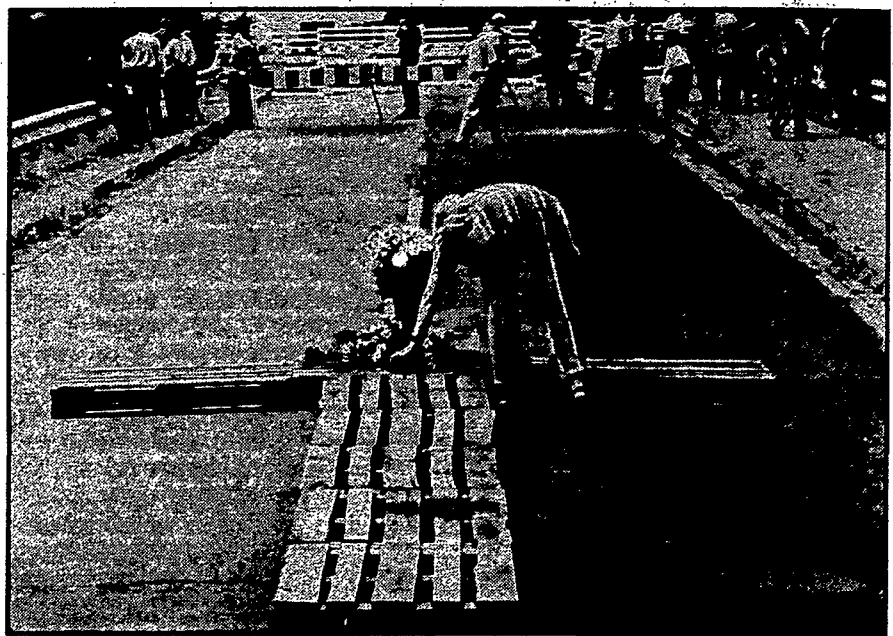
- The call to family, community and participation. "While our society often exalts individualism," it says, "the Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and achieve fulfillment only in community."

- Rights and responsibilities. "Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met," it says.

- Option for the poor and vulnerable. It says that "a basic moral test (of any society) is how our most vulnerable members are faring."

- Workers' rights and dignity of work. "Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation," it says. "If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected."

- Solidarity. "We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic,



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Train memorial

A woman lays flowers in the road leading to the site at Eschede, Germany, where the country's fastest passenger train hit a bridge support June 3, derailing the train and splitting the bridge. At least 102 people were killed.

economic and ideological differences, ... "Loving our neighbor" has global dimensions," it says.

- Care for creation. It says that "we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith."

For fuller expressions of Catholic social thought it refers readers to the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the U.S. bishops' 1990 statement, "A Century of Social Teaching."

To meet the challenge of integrating the church's social teachings into Catholic

elementary and secondary education, the statement calls for resource and curriculum development and teacher training and the creation of a model process for initiating such developments.

It urges diocesan offices of religious education, youth ministry and adult faith formation, as well as national organizations working in those areas, to focus on Catholic social teaching in their meetings and publications. It calls on them to develop leadership formation programs "to enhance the explicit teaching of Catholic social doctrine in these educational ministries."



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