

WORLD & NATION

Multiple issues challenge bishops at fall gathering

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Opening their fall general meeting Nov. 13 in Washington, the U.S. bishops heard their president promise "no turning back" from the Second Vatican Council and heard sad news about the nation's first black Catholic archbishop.

The first day of the Nov. 13-16 meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference at the Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill also featured preliminary discussion of documents on the Mideast crisis, the U.S. criminal justice system, immigrants, church architecture and art, and the U.S. Supreme Court and the "culture of death."

Further debate and a vote on each of those documents was scheduled for later in the meeting.

The bishops opened their meeting with prayers for Archbishop Eugene A. Marino, who died Nov. 12 at the age of 66. The first black archbishop in the history of the U.S. Catholic Church, he resigned in 1990 as archbishop of Atlanta and admitted to an affair with a woman.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston, NCCB-USCC president, focused his presidential address on the church's jubilee-year celebrations.

Highlighting the church's ecumenical commitment, the beatification of Pope John XXIII and the canonization of Mother Katharine Drexel the NCCB president stressed the importance of the Second Vatican Council in preparing the church to enter the new millennium.

"We can assure the faithful and those who have a sincere interest in the work of the church that the Second Vatican Council continues as the instrument of navigation that sets the course we will follow," Bishop Fiorenza said. "There is no turning back from the council."

The day before their meeting, many of the bishops participated in a workshop on the ecumenical role of bishops. It was led by Australian Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy,

president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

In all, the bishops were to deal with 18 main action items during the meeting. A special message on the Middle East, added to the agenda at the last minute, included explicit support for an independent Palestinian state, something the bishops have never done before.

Their concern about immigrants came up in two separate items, both submitted by the Committee on Migration.

One is a resolution urging several reforms in U.S. immigration law and policy to "uphold the basic dignity and human rights of immigrants among us and preserve the unity of the immigrant family."

The other is a 52-page pastoral statement, "Unity in Diversity: Welcoming the Immigrant Church in the U.S."

"The new immigrants call us back to our ancestral heritage as descendants of immigrants and to our baptismal heritage as members of the body of Christ," the statement says.

It challenges church leaders and all Catholics to welcome immigrants and celebrate cultural diversity as a gift. It calls on them to work against prejudice and distrust and for the advancement of new immigrants to full integration in the life of the church and society.

The 42-page statement, "Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," sharply challenges the trend toward more prisons, stiffer sentences and more executions as the U.S. response to crime. It was drafted by the bishops' Domestic Policy Committee.

"We are convinced that our tradition and our faith offer better alternatives that can hold offenders accountable and challenge them to change their lives, reach out to victims and reject vengeance," it says.

It especially questions the growing use of incarceration as American society's main response to drug offenders, in light of



Nancy Wiechoc/CNS

Denise Ray Mueller (right), a Catholic from Worthington, Ohio, joins demonstrators outside the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington to protest Catholic Church teachings on homosexuality Nov. 13. The silent protest was held as U.S. bishops made their way to the shrine

studies indicating that programs of education and community-based treatment are more productive and cost-effective.

Last November the bishops discussed a draft of a new statement on art and environment for worship, titled *Domus Dei* ("The House of God"). The final draft, which received preliminary discussion Nov. 13, has been significantly restructured and rewritten in light of consultations with the bishops and other experts and has a new name, "Built of Living Stones."

The 108-page text, subtitled "Art, Architecture and Worship," discusses spatial requirements for various liturgical rites and the role of art and architecture in assisting the church at prayer.

Among shorter statements the bishops were to vote on is one drafted by the Committee for Pro-Life Activities titled "The U.S. Supreme Court and the Culture of

Death." It decries the high court's persistent denial of rights to the unborn since its *Roe vs. Wade* decision in 1973.

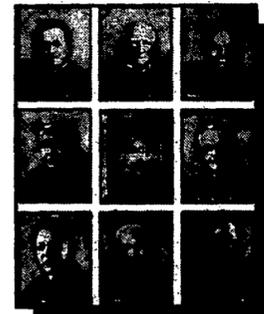
It says the Supreme Court's rejection this summer of a Nebraska law banning partial-birth abortion has shattered any hope of "legal sanity on abortion" and "has brought our legal system to the brink of endorsing infanticide."

The bishops also have been asked to approve the concept and timeline for revising the Lectionary for Masses With Children, and adoption of the Mexican Lectionary for Scripture readings in U.S. Spanish-language liturgies.

Scheduled for debate and vote later in the meeting was a brief statement, "Sudan's Cry for Peace." It says that all sides in "the cruel, fratricidal conflict in Sudan ... are implicated in egregious human rights abuses."

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