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Detroit archbishop warns clergy not to attend Catholic gathering

by Jerry Filteau



CNS photo

Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron warned his priests and deacons June 3 that they could be dismissed from the clerical state if they participate in a eucharistic liturgy June 12 closing an international American Catholic Council convention in Detroit.

The ACC, a coalition of liberal Catholic groups seeking changes in the church, said Vigneron's warning brought a sharp spike in visits to its Web site, and in registrations for the convention.

There are good reasons for believing forbidden concelebration will take place by the laity and with those not in full communion with the church at the June 12 Mass, Vigneron said in his June 3 letter.

He did not explain why he thought lay people or clergy not in full communion with the church would be engaged in concelebration of the ACC's closing Mass. The ACC Web site gave no such indications, and leaders of the convention said there was no such intention.

In an e-mail to NCR June 7, John Hushon, co-chairman of the ACC, said, "We stated categorically to Msgr. [Robert] McClory [Detroit archdiocesan moderator of the curia] that "There will be only one presider, an ordained priest in good standing." We could not have been any clearer."

Under church law, a local bishop has full authority over all liturgical celebrations in his diocese, and Vigneron emphasized that he has given no authorization for the closing Mass at the convention of the American Catholic Council.

The June 11-12 gathering is to be held at Detroit's Cobo Hall "a historic venue symbolically recalling the church's famous American bicentennial Call to Action conference on social justice in 1976, hosted by then-Detroit Cardinal John Dearden.

That conference, featuring mainly social action personnel from dioceses across the country, spun out of hierarchical control and produced many resolutions in apparent conflict with traditional Catholic teaching. The bishops subsequently adopted some of its proposals but rejected many of them. An independent progressive Catholic organization based in Chicago, Call to Action, was later formed to advance many of the conference's proposals and goals.

Among featured speakers on the ACC agenda is Sr. Joan Chittister, former prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pa., and an NCR columnist.

Swiss-born theologian Fr. Hans Kung, 83, long a leading ecumenist and professor at the University of Tübingen, Germany, is expected to address the group in a video recording if health prevents him from appearing personally. Kung's 1971 critique of papal infallibility led to a 1979 Vatican order declaring he could no longer teach as a Catholic theologian.

In a news release June 4 ACC organizers said the convention will draw "several thousand center-left Catholics committed to the principles of Vatican II."

One of the goals of the gathering is to endorse a "Catholic Bill of Rights and Responsibilities" which stresses the primacy of conscience and the rights and responsibilities of lay Catholics, by reason of their baptism, to participate in the ministry and governance of the church and in working for social justice.

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An archdiocesan announcement for parish bulletins sent out to Detroit Catholic parishes www.aodonline.org/bulletins for the weekend of June 11-12 reiterated Vigneron's warning against participation in the meeting or its June 12 liturgy. It said the archbishop has "serious concerns over the ACC's distortion of church teachings and issues, and most notably the group's expressed opposition to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council."

[Jerry Filteau, NCR Washington correspondent, is covering the Detroit meeting. Watch NCRonline.org for updates.]

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