

## Controversial former Seattle archbishop celebrates 50-year anniversary as bishop

Jerry Filteau | Aug. 30, 2012



Retired U.S. Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen smiles at the celebration of his 40th anniversary as a bishop at St. James Cathedral in Seattle in 2002. This week, Hunthausen, now retired, celebrates his 50th anniversary as a bishop. (CNS/Mike Penney)

Fifty years ago, Raymond Hunthausen, a popular Montana priest who was barely 41 and widely known to all his friends and colleagues as "Dutch," was ordained sixth bishop of Helena, Mont.

Less than six weeks later, Oct. 11, 1962, he went to Rome as the youngest U.S. bishop at the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

Now retired, Archbishop Raymond Gerhardt Hunthausen of Seattle, 91, is the only living U.S. bishop who participated as a bishop in all four sessions of Vatican II.

To Catholics who lived through the early 1980s and the growing opposition of the U.S. bishops to nuclear deterrence as a policy with no end in sight, Hunthausen was one of the most prominent, forthright and vigorous

opponents of that nuclear policy.

He was the only bishop in the country who intentionally withheld half his income tax in 1982 to protest the U.S. stockpiling of nuclear weapons and the then-growing U.S. reliance on the Trident-submarine-based mobile nuclear missile program, which included a Trident submarine port in Puget Sound, in his own backyard in the Seattle Archdiocese, where he became archbishop in 1975.

"Trident is the Auschwitz of Puget Sound," he said in 1981. The IRS garnished his wages to recover its lost 1982 income.

Anti-nuclear talks and activities by Hunthausen and fellow Bishop Leroy Matthiesen of Amarillo, Texas (where a Pantex plant produced many of the nation's nuclear weapons), were among key catalysts in the process leading to the bishops' 1983 peace pastoral, which condemned nuclear deterrence as a permanent state of international relations, saying it could be morally justified only as a temporary policy on the path to global nuclear disarmament.

Hunthausen led in many other post-Vatican-II changes in the church, making Seattle one of the most progressive dioceses in the nation.

His stands on nuclear deterrence and other issues also led to a sharp conservative Catholic backlash, however, that led to a Vatican investigation in 1983.

In that year, Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington, the Vatican's chief investigator, concluded that the Seattle archbishop had exercised weak doctrinal leadership in a number of areas.

These included archdiocesan accommodation to a homosexual Catholic organization that did not clearly accept Catholic teaching on the immorality of all homosexual activity, admission to the sacraments for some divorced and civilly remarried Catholics who had not obtained church annulments of their first marriage, and admission of children to First Communion prior to first reception of the sacrament of penance (then a burning issue in church discipline around the world and still today a question of appropriate pastoral practice, though later clearly settled in church law).

Hunthausen's anti-nuclear stand was not his first or only salvo against then-standard views in the U.S. church or general field of public opinion.

In October 1980, he openly questioned the church's denial of priestly ordination to women, asking in a pastoral letter whether the church is drawing women "to the fullest possible degree" into "all forms of [church] service, especially in the uniquely ecclesial areas of word and sacrament."

In September 1983, he let Dignity, an unofficial Catholic organization of homosexuals, use St. James Cathedral in Seattle for a liturgical service.

It has never been clear what precipitated the Vatican's 1983 investigation of Hunthausen's leadership of the Seattle Archdiocese, apart from the fact that his views and activities provoked numerous complaints on many fronts from conservative Catholics in the archdiocese.

Whatever the case, in late 1983, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), asked Archbishop (later Cardinal) James A. Hickey of Washington to make an official Vatican visitation.

Hickey concluded, according to the subsequent Vatican report, that apart from exaggerated conservative

Catholic criticisms of Hunthausen, there were "a number of other basic doctrinal problems" in the archdiocese.

Those problems -- widespread in U.S. Catholic dioceses in those years -- included not only Catholic teaching on issues of homosexuality and other questions of sexual morality, but also on sacramental issues such as use of general absolution and admission of divorced and remarried Catholics to Communion and whether women should be eligible to be ordained as priests.

Questions on a number of those issues, then still arguably subject to open discussion in the church, were ruled out of the question in later Vatican declarations.

After Hickey's visitation, in 1985, the doctrinal congregation found Hunthausen's pastoral leadership wanting and appointed a Pittsburgh priest with long experience in Rome, Fr. Donald Wuerl, as his auxiliary bishop with special powers over liturgy and several other areas of jurisdiction.

Wuerl, now cardinal archbishop of Washington, told *NCR* on Wednesday that he and Hunthausen have maintained a long friendship despite conflicts they faced in the 1980s over the Vatican decision and said he had just talked with the retired archbishop shortly before.

Since his retirement in 1991, Hunthausen has lived in Helena, where he grew up.

"His spirits are great," even though "he has a hard time walking," Wuerl said.

"I've always had a high regard" for the former Seattle prelate "as a person of great integrity," he said.

Hunthausen, he added, always "took very seriously the support that bishops owe one another" and has always been part of a quiet team of prayer and mutual support within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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