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Liturgy bends rules despite prelate's threat

by Jerry Filteau



Communion at the June 12 closing Mass of the meeting (Judy Hushon)

DETROIT -- At the start of the American Catholic Council's Pentecost Sunday liturgy, closing the June 10-12 gathering in Detroit, the entire congregation donned inexpensive red confirmation stoles.

The celebrant, Benedictine Fr. Robert Wurm, invited them to "wear these stoles as a reminder of your baptism and confirmation when you committed yourself to God and to the great commandments of our God."

The left side of the 90-inch stoles featured a dove, symbol of the Spirit, and the prayer, "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love."

Before the council's meeting, Detroit Archbishop Allen Vigneron had warned that there were reasons to believe that an unlawful concelebration of the Mass by laity and people not in full communion with the church would occur. He threatened to laicize any Detroit priest or deacon who participated in the liturgy.

Some observers took the distribution of the confirmation stoles as an invitation to members of the

congregation to concelebrate with Wurm.

Indeed, at the consecration, as he sang the words of institution at least a few other voices in the congregation could be heard singing along with him. The members of the Marygrove College Choir, stationed a short distance behind the altar, had books raised and appeared from a distance to be singing the words of institution as well.

Loretto Sr. Maureen Fiedler, a well-known church activist and host of the weekly radio show "Interfaith Voices," told *NCR* afterward that the entire congregation recites the words of institution along with the priest in several Catholic intentional communities that she knows of in the Washington, D.C., area. She said she believes it is a common practice in such intentional communities across the country.

Earlier in the liturgy, a woman proclaimed the Gospel after which Janet Hauter, a co-chair of the American Catholic Council, delivered what organizers called a "post-homily reflection."

The creed was not the one from the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. After its opening, "We believe in one God, our Lord, in the Holy Spirit, and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God," the prayer consisted of a series of affirmations excerpted from *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World.

Wurm, 78, is retired and told reporters afterward that he did not expect to be penalized for celebrating the Mass. He was pastor of St. James Parish in the Detroit suburb of Ferndale from 1985 to 2003, and according to local news reports, one of the things he was noted for there was his pastoral outreach to gays and lesbians.

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