

Vatican studies condom use to fight AIDS: South African bishop describes "ethical imperative"

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Welcoming news that the Vatican is considering approving condom use by those with HIV/AIDS, a South African Catholic bishop fighting the pandemic said April 25 that the church must look beyond its teaching on sexual conduct to regard condom use as an "ethical imperative."

Speaking in a conference call from an AIDS prevention meeting in Washington, Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg, South Africa, said he hopes the study will ultimately relax the Vatican's 1968 ban on condoms rather than reinforce it.

"It would in fact be an ethical imperative to use condoms in order to preserve and protect life. That's what I hope will come out," Dowling said.

The bishop's comments came days after a Vatican cardinal announced that his office is preparing a document on condom use and Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, a prominent liberal prelate, asserted that condom use could be acceptable as a "lesser evil" in preventing the spread of AIDS.

In an interview with Vatican Radio on April 25, Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán, who heads the Vatican's health department, appeared to revise his estimate that a document would be released "soon," saying the issue is being closely examined by various Vatican departments. "We are conducting a very profound scientific, technical and moral study," he said.

In recent years the Vatican has argued that abstinence is the only effective measure for preventing the spread of AIDS.

Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo of Colombia, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, has argued that the HIV virus that causes AIDS is small enough to pass through a latex condom. Bishop Dowling dismissed Cardinal Trujillo's assertion as

“plainly scientifically untrue,” saying that the cardinal’s statement “undermined the credibility of the church.” *-Religion News Service*