

# How Does Karol Wojtyla Celebrate Christmas?

## Even As You and I . . . He Enjoys Carols, Presents, Cards and a Tree

Vatican City (NC) -- Christmas trees, carols, presents and cards are distinctive features of the Christmas season for many people.

Pope John Paul II is no different, say members of his household staff.

Although the pope has to devote time to preparing several major addresses and has to allow for extra hours of prayer during the Advent and Christmas seasons, he still carves out slices of time for cherished homey celebrations.

Pope John Paul also has brought some familiar Christmas traditions to the public life of the Vatican. More than a million Christmas visitors last year were beneficiaries of a papal brainstorm. For the first time a Christmas crib with life-sized figures and a 40-foot Christmas tree decorated St. Peter's Square.

According to his staff, the pope also had a tree placed in the hallway of the papal apartment and a crib scene in his private chapel.

As for cards, the pope sends none but receives thousands from across the globe, say members of his staff. Many of them are acknowledged by the Vatican Secretariat of State, but the pope personally responds to old friends, heads of state and church dignitaries.

"The pope has no time to shop" for gifts, says a staff member, but he receives hundreds of presents, including food, from around the world. Much of the food is donated to orphanages in Rome.

"He wants people to know that Christmas is a time for sharing," says a staff member, "and that what is his, is everyone's."

Members of the staff also outlined the pope's personal Christmas schedule, marked by customs from the pope's native Poland.

The pope marks Dec. 24 in a Christmas vigil spirit. He

observes strict fast and abstinence, with only one full meal in the evening, when the first star appears. Joining him at this meal are his "family," the members of his household staff. During the meal, as is Polish custom, family members express special gratitude, ask forgiveness and re-establish loving relations with each one present, if any difference has developed among them.

The pope has no close family living. His only brother died when the future pope, Karol Wojtyla, was 12, and his only sister died before he was born so his staff makes up his Christmas "family." Since this Christmas vigil is a special time of good will, the pope also may invite poor neighbors or travelers to the dinner, where a special place is set for an "unknown overseas guest."

Before eating, all who have gathered exchange good wishes and share a thin white wafer, the symbol of Christ born in Bethlehem.

Then begins the traditional meal of Polish dishes such as beetroot soup, fish, sauerkraut with mushrooms and macaroni with poppyseed. No meat is served as the day of abstinence is still observed.

After dinner, guests join in Christmas hymns and carols.

On Christmas, the pope celebrates three Masses. The first is a public midnight Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, with the Sistine Choir providing the music. After a short night's sleep, the pope celebrates Mass again, this time in the early morning in his private chapel. At 10:30 a.m. he celebrates Mass in St. Peter's, after which he goes to the balcony over the central door of the basilica to greet the thousands who await him in St. Peter's Square.

From the balcony he delivers his traditional message of peace and gives a blessing "Urbi et Orbi," Latin for "to the city and to the world." He also delivers Christmas greetings in about 40 languages, which, his staff say, he



practices beforehand with a tape recorder.

Throughout Christmas day, the sound of Christmas carols flows through the papal apartment from a record player. Christmas night, the pope places several telephone calls to old friends and to ailing church officials.

The pope is known for his love of music, particularly carols. Five years ago, on the pope's first New Year's Eve as pontiff, he invited a group of Polish students to the papal apartment to join in some caroling.

One of the carols is traditionally sung while people join hands and sway to the music. An elderly priest beside an attractive young woman and declined in shyness to reach out for her hand. Then he heard the pope call out his name.

"I see," said the pope with a wide smile, "that father is not used to this custom."

Everyone laughed, including the priest, who took the woman's hand as the singing went on.

# Meese's Remarks Castigated As 'Outrageous, Scandalous'

## 'President Should Direct Meese to Work At a Soup Kitchen for a Week as Penance'

By NC News Service

Catholic officials dealing firsthand with the nation's hungry expressed shock at comments by White House counselor Edwin Meese III that some people line up at soup kitchens not because they are hungry but because the food is free.

Words such as "outrageous," "scandalous," and "an insult to the poor" were used in reaction to Meese's remarks, in which he also said he had never seen "any authoritative figures that there are hungry children in America."

As criticism mounted, President Reagan defended Meese's comments and elaborated on them himself, comparing abusers of soup kitchens to welfare cheats. He also said, however, that he and Meese agree that "something must be done" about hunger.

His comments came in an interview with the New York Daily News.

"How do we find cheaters on welfare? People that are getting welfare and being supported by their fellow citizens who don't really have a need, who should not be there," he said.

"Well, isn't it logical to suggest that people of the same train of mind are going to take advantage of those who are privately trying to help?" the president continued. He said private groups "have no way of checking" whether a person really is in need.

"As long as there is one person in this country who is hungry, then that's one person too many, and something must be done about it," the president added. "And I happen to know that Ed Meese agrees with that."

(Later in the week, Meese claimed the press misconstrued his remarks about the hungry. He said the administration does indeed have compassion for the poor and there "undoubtedly" is hunger in America.)

Meese made the earlier remarks in a Dec. 8 interview with reporters from the Associated Press, United Press International and Reuters.

Sister of Charity Catherine Rowe, director of Eva's Kitchen, a soup kitchen in Paterson, N.J., sponsored by the city's Catholic priests, asked in a letter to Meese that he visit the facility and that he retract his remarks.

"You can't come down to Eva's Kitchen and say that there are no hungry in Paterson," said Sister Rowe, who remarked that she was sorry for the country that President Reagan has such "ill-informed" advisers.

Father Daniel Noonan, also of Paterson, said his city is the fifth poorest in the nation and remarked that while "there probably are not many poor people" in the region of California where Meese comes from, "I personally give out canned food to truly hungry people every day."

Father C.B. Woodrich, pastor of downtown Denver's Holy

Ghost Church, which operates a regular sandwich line for the hungry, called Meese's remarks an "insult" and said, "I think the president should direct Meese to go and work at a soup kitchen for a week as penance."

As the controversy over Meese's remarks continued to boil, Father Woodrich held a Turkey dinner Dec. 10 for Denver's poor to mark the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. "I would have given anything for Meese to have seen that," said the priest of the 600 attendees.

He added that he did not see any freeloaders at the dinner and that people who can afford meals do not stand in the cold for 45 minutes to eat free.

"I don't think the general public and those taking care of the poor can let this fly by," said Father Woodrich of the controversy.

In Wilmington, Del., Franciscan Brother Ronald Giannone of the Ministry of Caring, Inc., which operates two dining rooms for the poor, said Meese must be "blinded" because "there is extreme poverty in our nation's capital that has been well documented."

He added, "It is outrageous and hard to comprehend that a man so bright and intelligent could make such a statement hoping that America would believe it."

Catholic Church officials in Washington also found Meese's comments on hunger hard to understand.

Mathew Ahmann, the National Conference of Catholic Charities' associate director for government relations, said he found it "hard to believe" that the White House has not maintained close contact with congressional committees that have studied domestic hunger.

Ahmann said Catholic Charities has testified before Congress on the growth in its own case load reflecting the national growth in the poverty rate.

Ronald T. Krietemeyer, director of the domestic social development office of the U.S. Catholic Conference, public policy arm of the U.S. bishops, said Meese's comments were "blatantly ridiculous" and said it was "outrageous that a key decision-maker in the administration would say those things on the record and be so uninformed about such a basic issue in society."

He added that he hoped the controversy surrounding Meese's remarks would lead to a better public understanding about hunger in America.

Sister Nancy Sylvester, coordinator of Network, a Washington-based Catholic social justice lobby, called Meese's remarks "both insensitive and irresponsible."

Sister Sylvester, a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, called hunger in the United States "a visible fact" and said Meese "tries to avoid that fact and the evidence for it by resorting to his own assumptions about human behavior."

## 'Privileged Isolation' Charged to Meese

Local reaction to Edwin Meese III's remarks approximated that of others involved in feeding the hungry across the country.

Sister Margaret Brennan who directs St. Joseph's House of Hospitality said that "if Mr. Meese were to join us for a day, he would see that indeed there are hungry, homeless, unemployed, unemployable people in our cities, people whose lives are not considered worthy of our government's notice because they are 'unproductive,' people who are victims of the very system that Mr. Meese and others in our administration perpetuate."

"It is not 'easier' to come to a soup kitchen for one's daily bread," Sister Margaret said, "rather it can be humiliating and degrading. But for so many -- and we meet them every day -- there is simply no alternative. Such ignorance is sad, such stereotyping is irresponsible and shows a shocking lack of information about the realities of American life."

Brother Robert DiManno, who directs St. Peter's Kitchen on West Main Street, said that for many who eat at his place "it's their only meal. Some have no heat to cook with and depend on us for food and clothing."

He added that some of his guests "have some money they pay for heat and utilities and then have nothing for food."

St. Peter's Kitchen serves lunch from noon to 2 six days a week. Brother DiManno said 4,000 people were served in August, 3,200 in September, 3,400 in October and 3,200 in November. The reason for the difference between summer and fall is that children do not come in for meals after school starts.

Brother DiManno made a distinction -- "These people often are not suffering not just from physical hunger -- they're lonely, they hunger for companionship."

He said he calls on an army of 500 volunteers to work the kitchen.

Sister Margaret felt a need to defend the guests of St. Joseph's House -- "Mr. Meese is speaking, in ignorance, of people who are my friends, people whom I know, whose struggles and sorrows I have shared and whose courage I witness every day."

She said that Meese "is speaking from an obviously privileged isolation."