

# Religious leaders to raise \$100 million if contra aid approved

By Julie Asher

Washington (NC) — A coalition of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish groups has pledged to raise \$100 million for Nicaragua if Congress gives final approval to President Reagan's request for \$100 million in aid to "contra" rebels fighting Nicaragua's government.

The pledge was announced April 14 at a press conference in Washington.

Coalition leaders called Reagan's aid proposal "mean and lawless." They said their pledge was for "true humanitarian" aid and would help the Nicaraguan people until "common sense and decency prevail" in U.S. policy toward that country.

The House of Representatives was to begin debate April 15 on Reagan's proposal after earlier rejecting it. The Senate March 27 approved a modified contra aid plan, sending the Reagan proposal back to the House for further action.

"If Congress votes \$100 million, we'll match the \$100 million," said Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, president of Pax Christi USA, a Catholic peace group.

"The aid will alleviate suffering from the war that the administration and Congress have so cruelly inflicted on the people," he said. "We are committed to defending the

ideals we all cherish of self-determination, democracy and the right to live in peace."

Reagan's policy in Nicaragua is built on deception, Bishop Gumbleton said.

The pledge follows an earlier campaign, called Quest for Peace, which was launched last December to raise \$27 million as a "direct challenge" to a 1985 U.S. aid package for the contras.

So far \$20 million has been raised and donations should reach the June goal of \$27 million, Jesuit Father William Callahan, co-director of the Quixote Center near Washington, said during the press conference.

The Quixote Center is coordinating the aid, which is made up of medical supplies, food and clothing along with donations of cash to be used mainly for shipping the goods to Nicaragua.

Episcopal Bishop Paul Moore of New York termed U.S. policy toward Nicaragua "obscene."

He added that during an Easter visit he "probed and probed and probed" to find evidence of human rights violations and religious persecution by the Sandanista government and found none.

Charges of Sandinista harassment of the

church have been leveled most often by Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua.

Rabbi Balfour Brickner, of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York, said Reagan is stirring his "anti-communist obsession with a Jewish ladle," referring to the administration's claims the Sandinistas are

anti-Semitic.

Following the press conference religious leaders carried medical supplies earmarked by the coalition for Nicaragua in a procession to the steps of the U.S. Capitol across the street, where Father Callahan blessed the supplies and prayed for Congress.

## USCC repeats opposition to U.S. military aid

Washington (NC) — The U.S. Catholic Conference April 10 reiterated its opposition to U.S. military aid to the rebels in Nicaragua and urged Congress to back a diplomatic solution instead.

In a letter to members of the House of Representatives, Msgr. Daniel F. Hoye, USCC general secretary, repeated concerns raised in a similar letter to the House three weeks earlier.

Shortly before its Easter recess, the House defeated a proposal for \$100 million in aid to the "contras," the rebels fighting the Marxist government of Nicaragua.

But an aid package passed the Senate and the measure bounced back to the House for further action, expected by the end of April.

In the latest USCC letter, Msgr. Hoye noted the American bishops' concern over allegations of human rights violations by the Nicaraguan Sandinista government.

"The USCC does not believe, however, that the provision of military assistance by

outside powers to either side in Nicaragua is a useful contribution to a peaceful solution of the problem," he said. "Hence, the USCC opposes the measure before the House of Representatives to provide military aid to forces in conflict with the Nicaraguan government."

He backed the Contadora peace process, a series of negotiations undertaken by other Central and South American nations to bring peace to Central America. Nicaragua's neighbors blamed a breakdown in talks in early April on the Sandinistas' refusal to cooperate.

"We believe a productive road is still open to U.S. action," Msgr. Hoye said in his letter. "It involves a sustained commitment to the regional peace process sponsored by the Contadora group."

"Despite periodic and inevitable setbacks," he added, "this process continues to represent a realistic alternative to the path of ever-escalating violence."

## Circuit-riding

Continued from facing page

better off now than before. There is more of a sense of unity than in the past," he added.

Our Lady of the Lake has a new parish council and a new burst of life, according to parishioner Nancy Dillon. "A lot of people had left this parish, but a lot of them have come back now. I think it's drawn us together," she said.

"Before if you lived in Aurora, you went to church there, and if you lived in King Ferry, you went to church here," Dillon said. "Now that we've got one priest, if you want to, you go to Mass in Aurora. I know more people in other parishes now, which I think is good."

Henry MacDonald terms it "a broader spectrum of community."

"When they see people from another parish at Mass on Sunday, people are seeing that Church is more than a building ... that we the people are the Church," he said.

Without a precedent in the diocese or a hand in the planning, the cluster's ministry team has earned its kudos through experience. "It was a totally new situation," Father Spilly said. "We had no idea what to expect."

The team is organized so that each member specializes in certain areas of ministry, but each also resides at a different parish to provide a ministerial presence.

Sister Brigid works with worship committees and lives at Our Lady of the Lake. Prave's area is Christian Formation and he lives in Union Springs. Father Spilly concentrates on finance, social ministry and buildings and grounds from his "headquarters" in Aurora.

All three team members appreciate the intimacy they find in the small communities.

"I like to be able to see people in the street and know who they are, not just meet them in church on Sunday," Prave said. "I think here you're more involved with feeling a part of people's daily lives and to me, that's what Church is all about."

Father Spilly describes his travels between communities as "energizing."

"There's a beauty in the people's feeling of responsibility for the land," he said. "It's a real contrast to the portent of Romulus across the lake. Somehow, people seem determined that this beauty will not be marred by pollution or weapons."

"There's an openness to what Church is and can do here," he added.

For Prave and Sister Brigid — both ground-breakers of a sort — that openness is a sign of hope.

"I feel like I'm paving the way to the future for other women when I can take my turn at preaching," Sister Brigid said. "I love the amazement of people who have never worked with a sister before when they find out that we're human."

Prave, who was ordained a permanent deacon in the first diocesan class in 1980, said he has never sensed any opposition to his ministry. "I think we have more freedom to minister. People realize that the priest can't always be there, and they're just glad to have someone," he said.

That doesn't mean there aren't problems. The Mass schedule has been one source of tension, especially on such special occasions as Midnight Mass and during Holy Week, when celebrating each Mass at each parish is simply out of the question. So far, the solution has been to alternate years and to change the Sunday Mass schedule every two years.

"This coming September might be the biggest change for our church," Dillon said of Our Lady of the Lake. "Until now, the Mass sched-

ule has stayed the same, but Father Spilly is trying to be fair to all the churches."

Meanwhile, there are limits to what the team can accomplish.

"I can't emphasize enough my concern about burnout," MacDonald said. "We do have people who will only respond to a priest on certain issues. I am not happy about the demands on Father Spilly."

At 60, Sister Brigid might be considered the most susceptible to the effects of time and trav-

el. "I feel the years at times," she admitted.

"But that's when I pull back and take it easy." Lack of time is also been a strain for Prave, 53. Parents of three children, he and his wife both work full-time as teachers, and Prave also serves on the local board of education.

"Practically every night of the week there's something. Time here is time away from my family," he said. "But burnout is being tired of things happening the same for too long a time. Things here are too exciting for that."

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