

National/International Report

Scandal could hurt collection

Fund, bank distinct, Vatican emphasizes

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — Reports that arrest warrants have been issued for U.S. Archbishop Paul Marcinkus and two other officials of the Vatican bank could hardly have come at a worse time for the Vatican.

The news has given the Church a financial black eye just when it was about to launch a worldwide campaign hoped to double the contributions to Peter's Pence, the fund used in recent years to cover much of the Vatican's spending shortfall.

Some Vatican officials argue that the political crisis that drove Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi of Italy from office might have spawned the warrants as an attempt to discredit the Church.

A commission of cardinals was expected to meet at the Vatican in late March to discuss the Holy See's budget shortfall and initiate the appeal for more money, according to a scenario outlined by informed Vatican sources.

"This news could jeopardize these plans," one source said. The arrest warrants reportedly were issued for alleged fraudulent bankruptcy in connection with the failure of an Italian bank in 1982.

Church officials fear that the average man or woman in the pew will be less likely to contribute after seeing newspaper headlines suggesting a Vatican banking scandal — even though the Vatican has denied accusations of wrongdoing.

Lamented a Vatican financial expert: "The image that comes out of this case could greatly damage the Holy Father's collection. We need to make clear that the Institute for Religious Works (the Vatican bank) has nothing to do with the money used to run the Holy See."

In recent years, Pope John Paul II has applied the money collected for Peter's

Pence to the annual shortfall in Vatican operating expenses. But since 1984, even the \$26 million collection could not completely cover the shortfall.

The Vatican asked many departments to keep a lid on spending this year, after its 1986 expected shortfall reached \$56 million. There is little fat to trim from the budget, the experts say — more than half the spending goes to salaries and retirement benefits, and individual office spending is at a bare-bones level.

While Church officials are careful to distinguish between the Vatican bank and the Vatican operating budget, they understand that the two tend to run together in popular thinking. Negative media coverage about the bank could taint all Vatican financial operations.

"That's only natural," commented Cardinal Giuseppe Caprio, head of the Prefecture for Economic Affairs. He has blamed a recent drop in the Peter's Pence collection partly on the bank's bad image.

An American priest who works at the Vatican said the reports about Archbishop Marcinkus, the bank president, would no doubt give Church finances a "bad image" back in the United States, where much of Peter's Pence is collected. But he and others emphasized that what really lies behind the Italian legal maneuvering is largely unknown and perhaps cannot be understood by Americans with no experience of Italy.

Vatican officials suspect the timing of the reported warrants — just before a predicted Italian government crisis — was significant. In early March, a five-party coalition government dissolved after Craxi resigned, setting off a period of political jockeying and possible elections.

As one Vatican official put it: "Whenever a government falls, a scandal erupts. In this case, the aim may have been to discredit the Catholic Church politically. This is a typically Italian affair and wouldn't have happened anywhere else in the world."



MONTANA'S CROSSES — A number of Montana ranchers and farmers march from St. Helena Cathedral past a row of crosses placed on the lawn of the Capitol in Helena. More than 100 crosses were placed on the lawn to represent the number of family farms and ranches that have closed in the state since Jan. 1.

Cathy Tilzey/N C News

USCC welcomes asylum ruling

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — The March 9 Supreme Court decision to relax the U.S. standard for deciding if an alien is eligible for political asylum ought to mean that more Salvadorans and Guatemalans will qualify as refugees, said a U.S. Catholic Conference official.

Whether it does, said Gilbert Paul Carrasco, director of immigration services for the USCC's Migration and Refugee Services, will depend on whether the Reagan administration continues to "inject foreign policy in the asylum decision-making process."

In a 6-3 decision, the court rejected the Reagan administration's position that, to qualify for asylum, aliens must prove a "clear probability" that they would be killed, tortured or otherwise persecuted for their beliefs if returned to their homelands.

The court said that the Reagan position was contrary to the intent of the Refugee Act of 1980, which specified that aliens are eligible for asylum if they are unwilling to return to their homelands "because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

To demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution, Justice John Paul Stevens said in the majority opinion, "an alien need not prove that it is more likely than not that he or she will be persecuted in his or her home country."

The decision upheld a lower-court decision requiring the Board of Immigration Appeals to reconsider the asylum application of Luz Marina Cardoza-Fonseca, a 38-year-old Nicaraguan who said she would risk torture

if returned to Nicaragua, because of her brother's political activism.

In an interview March 10, Carrasco said that, before granting asylum, U.S. immigration authorities ask the State Department for a report on the conditions in the applicant's country and the likelihood that he or she will face persecution.

"Under this administration, the State Department has taken a very callous view of the situation in El Salvador and the plight of those returning there," Carrasco said.

He said for some Salvadorans, choosing not to join government troops can mean persecution, and for others, deciding not to unite with guerrilla forces can guarantee a similar fate.

The State Department has failed to recognize, however, that "even remaining neutral in El Salvador can be a political statement" and lead to persecution, he said.

Studies show asylum is more frequently granted to applicants from nations "that aren't aligned with us ideologically — like Poland, Afghanistan and Russia," he said, than to applicants from nations whose "governments we support, such as El Salvador."

School Sister of St. Francis Darlene Nicgorski said she applauds the Supreme Court decision, but echoed Carrasco's concerns. Sister Nicgorski, a sanctuary worker, was convicted last year during a highly publicized trial in Tucson, Ariz., for illegally aiding Central Americans fleeing their countries.

Noting that more Nicaraguans are granted asylum than Salvadorans and Guatemalans, she questioned whether they have "more well-founded fear.... It would seem the law ought to apply equitably and fairly."

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We will be alphabetically listing the restaurants who participate in our guide, and tell a brief story about each establishment; their location, menu entrees, specialties, etc.

If you, or someone you know owns a restaurant, and would like to be included in our **Dining Guide**, call the Courier-Journal at 328-4340.

If not, look for our **Dining Guide** in the upcoming months, and pay a visit to the restaurant of your choice, and enjoy a pleasant evening of "Dining Around the Diocese."

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