

National/International Report

The Seattle story: A synopsis

● Oct. 26, 1983: A Vatican-mandated "visitation" to the Seattle Archdiocese by Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington is announced, so that the Holy See may "evaluate" criticisms of Archbishop Hunthausen "and support the archbishop in his ministry."

● Nov. 2-8, 1983: Archbishop Hickey visits Seattle, meeting privately with critics and supporters of Archbishop Hunthausen.

● Nov. 26, 1985: Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal pronuncio to the United States, declares the Hunthausen case closed. In a letter released in Seattle, he praises the Seattle prelate's "Gospel values" and "apostolic zeal," but cites such diocesan problems as moral teaching on homosexuality and contraceptive sterilization, liturgical abuses, archdiocesan marriage court practices, continuing education of priests, and selection and formation of priesthood candidates.

● Dec. 3, 1985: Rome-trained Father Donald Wuerl, former secretary to the late Cardinal John Wright, is named auxiliary bishop of Seattle.

● Jan. 6, 1986: Pope John Paul II personally ordains Bishop Wuerl.

● Sept. 4, 1986: Archbishop Hunthausen announces that, under Vatican instructions, he is ceding to Bishop Wuerl all his authority as bishop over the aforementioned problem areas. The announcement triggers protests locally and nationally.

● Oct. 28, 1986: Facing nationwide controversy over the division of episcopal authority in Seattle, Archbishop Laghi releases a statement summarizing the history of the case and explaining the Holy See's position on it.

● Nov. 11-12, 1986: At their yearly fall meeting in Washington, the U.S. bishops meet behind closed doors for more than four hours, in an effort to find a solution to the still-growing Seattle controversy. They offer any help the Vatican and the archbishop may seek.

● Feb. 9, 1987: A three-bishop commission is formed by the Holy See to study the Seattle situation and recommend a solution.

● May 19-20, 1987: The commission, meeting in Rome with Pope John Paul II and the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, gives its recommendations.

● May 27, 1987: Bishop Thomas J. Murphy of Great Falls-Billings, Mont., is named coadjutor archbishop of Seattle with right of succession.

The cast of characters

MURPHY: Reputed as pastoral, decisive

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy, new coadjutor archbishop of Seattle and the man called upon by the Holy See to help heal the wounds of a divisive conflict there, has a reputation as a pastoral, consultative bishop who is at the same time clear and decisive.



National Federation of Priests' Councils, who wouldn't mind him being my bishop," said Father Richard Hynes, president of the National Federation of Priests' Councils who has worked with the new archbishop on issues facing priests across the United States.

Archbishop Murphy, bishop of Great Falls-Billings, Mont., since 1978, is accustomed to traveling as much as 50,000 miles a year, or an average of nearly 150 miles a day, to meet his schedule of confirmation rounds, parish visits, and other meetings and events in a diocese that covers the eastern two-thirds of Montana.

Nationally, he is well known to bishops, seminary rectors and many priests for his work as chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Priestly Formation, 1981-84, and its Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry since last November.

In 1981 then-Bishop Murphy made headlines when, amid a nationwide debate over where and how to base the MX missile, he and Bishop Elden Curtiss of Helena issued a joint statement opposing "not only the deployment of the MX missile in Montana, but the MX missile system itself."

In the face of the growing priest shortage, which has affected all U.S. dioceses in recent years but has hit rural dioceses the hardest, he formed a planning task force, which in 1983 developed proposals to cluster, merge or otherwise regroup parishes to meet the changes.

While he has stressed evangelization and priestly vocations as central elements of Church life, he has also indicated strong openness to lay ministry, advocated minority rights and labor rights, and defended peace activists. In a 1979 speech to the National Catholic Educational Association, he said teaching should be officially recognized by the Church as a ministry.

Thomas J. Murphy was born in Chicago Oct. 3, 1932. He attended St. Mel's parish school and Quigley Preparatory Seminary, from which he graduated in 1950.

He was ordained a priest of the Chicago Archdiocese in 1958 after studies at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. After ordination he continued graduate theology studies at the seminary, earning a doctorate.

HUNTHAUSEN: Near legendary compassion

Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen of Seattle is a man whose "compassion has become almost legendary," said the three-bishop commission that asked the Holy See to restore the archbishop's authority.



Compassion and principle in balance could almost be the motto of the 65-year-old archbishop of Seattle, whose name has become a household word to American Catholics.

The Seattle archbishop, who has been the center of one controversy after another in the 1980s, is a relaxed, informal, fatherly figure known to his friends as "Dutch." At 65, he still likes to ski, hike, camp and fish.

National attention first focused on him in 1981 when, at a regional gathering of Lutheran church leaders in Seattle, he urged unilateral nuclear disarmament and "tax resistance" as a way to reverse U.S. arms spending. The speech led to a statewide interfaith effort by church leaders to promote among their people a new emphasis on thinking, prayer and action on peace issues.

The following year, Archbishop Hunthausen personally held back half the federal tax he owed, distributing the amount to charitable causes: He spoke out strongly against the building of a Navy base for nuclear-armed Trident submarines in Puget Sound, part of his archdiocese. When he called the submarine base "the Auschwitz of Puget Sound," Navy Secretary John Lehman called his remark a "deeply immoral" abuse of clerical power to promote pacifist views.

The archbishop has also espoused much stronger lay roles in the Church, the exercise of greater Church leadership by married couples and a greater role for women in the Church.

His cathedral was picketed by about 150 people in 1983 when he permitted a national convention of Dignity, an unofficial Catholic organization for homosexuals, to hold a convention Mass there. He publicly restated Church teachings condemning homosexual activity, but said the Church should "engage in a special ministry to persons of homosexual orientation."

Raymond G. Hunthausen was born in Anaconda, Mont., on Aug. 21, 1921, and was an all-around athlete as a youth. He rejected a professional sports career, however, to enter the seminary, and in 1946 he was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Helena, Mont. He became bishop of Helena in 1962, and was appointed archbishop of Seattle in 1975.

WUERL: 'Enriching' but 'glad it's over'

Auxiliary Bishop Donald Wuerl of Seattle, relieved May 27 of his controversial assignment there, said he had many "enriching" and "faith-filled" experiences with the people of the Seattle Archdiocese, but "I'm glad it's over, I'm glad it's settled."



In a telephone interview on May 27, Bishop Wuerl declined to discuss the difficulties of his situation in Seattle, except to say he agreed with the published assessment of the Bernardin commission. The commission praised his efforts to carry out his assigned responsibilities despite the circumstances. While the position he was placed in was awkward, he said, both priests and people of the archdiocese welcomed him and made him feel at home as an individual.

Another "very positive and heartening experience" was his dealing with priests, he added. "The priests have been able to dissociate me personally from the situation. The priests have responded to me with warmth, hospitality and understanding."

Asked if he felt any bitterness about how he was treated during the Seattle controversy, he said he was "glad it's over" but "I haven't felt any bitterness. This is not a question of personal animosity, but of issues. What we're talking about here, what this is all about from the start, is issues (of church life and law)...not personalities."

Born in Pittsburgh in 1941, Donald W. Wuerl was ordained a priest on Dec. 17, 1966, after philosophy studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington and theology studies at the North American College in Rome.

From 1967 to 1969 he was an assistant pastor in Pittsburgh and secretary to Bishop John Wright. In 1969 Bishop Wright, later named a cardinal, was called to Rome as head of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy. Father Wuerl accompanied him and spent the next 10 years in Rome as his personal secretary and a staff member of the congregation.

After Cardinal Wright's death in 1979, Father Wuerl returned to Pittsburgh as vice rector of St. Paul's College Seminary from 1979 to 1981, and rector from 1981 to 1985. In 1985, he was named associate general secretary of the Pittsburgh Diocese, but his appointment was cut short in December of that year when he was named auxiliary bishop of Seattle.

He was ordained a bishop by Pope John Paul II on Jan. 6, 1986.



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