

World & Nation

# Church-state tensions have minimal effect, priest says

By Laurie Hansen

Managua, Nicaragua (NC) — Church-state tensions do exist in Nicaragua, but mainly at the level of the hierarchy, and they seem to have little bearing on the Catholic in the pew, according to one priest involved in developing local Church leaders.

"The major conflict is not a conflict between the so-called 'popular church' and the traditional church, nor is it a conflict between the (Sandinista) revolution and Christianity," said Dominican Father Rafael Aragon, secretary of the independent Managua-based, Catholic-run Association for the Development of Peoples and a defender of the Sandinistas.

"Here in Nicaragua we see clearly that the problem we face is not a religious one, but an ideological, political problem. And this ideological political debate is being couched in religious terminology," said Father Aragon, whose association is involved in economic development and in training "delegates of the word" — leaders in communities where priests are scarce.

Signs of Christianity are everywhere in Nicaragua. Catholic Churches are filled on Sunday mornings. As in other Latin American nations, crosses and religious mementos decorate dashboards and dangle from rearview mirrors of privately owned vehicles.

In small-town restaurants, it is not uncommon to find a framed likeness of Jesus or the Virgin Mary hung on at least one wall. A large billboard atop a building in downtown Managua declares that "Nicaraguans Hunger and Thirst for the Gospel."

In a November meeting with U.S. diocesan social action leaders participating in a Catholic Relief Services study tour, Father Aragon said religious activism has grown rather than diminished since the 1979 Sandinista revolution.

He cited:

+ Increased numbers of "delegates of the

word," lay men and women who convoke liturgies and act as community leaders in areas where priests are few.

+ Religious radio programs aired on "almost every station" each Sunday from 6-8 a.m.

+ Statistics saying Nicaraguan membership in evangelical churches has increased 6 percent to 15 percent in recent years.

+ More religious oriented fliers and newsletters distributed throughout the country.

In addition, Father Aragon said, surveys show that 98 percent of the Nicaraguan people consider themselves "believers."

About 26 percent of primary and secondary education is "in the hands of the Church," he said, citing in particular the Jesuit-run, government-financed University of Central America.

"What Nicaraguans want to see here in this country is a new project — not communist, but independent of both the United States as well as of Russia," said the priest.

"The threat (seen by the United States) is that Nicaragua will become a model for Third World nations," Father Aragon said.

The bishops of the traditionally strong and authoritarian Nicaraguan Catholic Church also have seen the revolution as threatening, said Gilberto Aguirre Escobar, executive director of a Managua-based Protestant development association known as CEPAD.

"I think maybe the hierarchy is a little scared because the revolution is teaching the little people they're capable of making their own decisions," Aguirre said.

Since the revolution of 1979, originally supported by Managua's Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo, the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Church hierarchy have been at odds more often than not.

Critics say the Sandinistas practice religious persecution, pointing to the forced



UPI/NC News  
Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua greets Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (left) during a November meeting at the Vatican Embassy in Washington at which they discussed ways to implement the Central American peace accords.

exiles in 1986 of Nicaraguan Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega of the Juigalpa Prelature and Monsignor Bismarck Carballo, Managua's archdiocesan director of communications. In addition, they cite the fact that Radio Catolica, the archdiocesan radio station, was forced to shut down in January 1986 and that the Managua archdiocesan publication Iglesia was also closed.

The Nicaraguan government said the churchmen were exiled because they used their public positions to take sides with Nicaraguan rebels.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega took steps toward addressing the friction between the government and Church hierarchy in September when, on the heels of his decision to allow Bishop Vega and Monsignor Carballo to return home, he announced that Radio Catolica was free to resume broadcasting.

Sometimes, the junta's ideas lean toward violence. "Two years ago a Protestant pastor in Esteli was killed by a lieutenant," Aguirre said, adding that the lieutenant was found guilty of murder and imprisoned for 30 years.

"Frankly, the Sandinistas are a mixture of something really strange," Aguirre said. "Their 'junta' includes those with a nationalistic approach, those that adhere to the Marxist-Leninist line, and those with a Christian approach. Where their ideas converge, I don't really know."

Although he expressed concern about Sandinista abuses, Father Aragon said he thinks relations between church and state are on the mend, largely as a result of the Sandinista government's decision to ask Cardinal Obando Bravo serve as mediator in negotiations between the government and the contra rebels.



## DINING AROUND THE DIOCESE




Advertisement Advertisement

**Cannon's**  
1551 Mt. Hope Ave.  
(1 minute north of W. Henrietta Rd.  
exit of Rte. 390.)  
461-1026  
A Rochester favorite for 23 years, featuring a diverse menu including seafood, steaks, chops, veal, and Italian dishes. For the late night diner we serve until 1 am Mon.-Sat., and midnight-Sun. Lunches are served daily from 11 am till 3:30.

**Crystal Barn**  
Corner Clover & Jefferson  
at the Barn Bazaar in Pittsford  
(716) 381-4844  
A pleasant blend of crystal chandeliers and Victorian motif set in an authentic country barn, creates a memorable atmosphere... for lunch, cocktails or an enjoyable dining experience. Your hosts George and Katherine Gerakos and Chef Russell Brindisi pride themselves in presenting you with the most carefully selected and prepared lunches and dinners as well as unique special daily creations. We most sincerely hope that you'll find our quality uncompromising and our service unsurpassed. Reservations are appreciated.

**The Johnson House**  
19 South Main St.  
Churchville, New York (Exit 3 off 490 West)  
(716) 293-1111  
Open for lunch Monday-Friday from 11:30. Dinners, Monday-Saturday from 5:00. Sunday, 4:00-9:00. Twenty Seven entrees to choose from including Steaks, Chops, Veal and Seafood. All steaks and chops are cooked on our open charcoal hearth. Ban-

quet rooms available for 10-150 in our historic 1885 building. Outside catering for any size party. Dinners served in our lower level, "The Paul Revere Lounge"; music at the "Baby Grand" Friday and Saturday evenings.

**Fornataro's**  
1255 Long Pond Rd.  
(corner Longpond & Spencerport Rds.)  
426-1240  
Along the streets of Rome or in the Italian countryside, the word "trattoria" conjures up images of a family-like dining room just off a kitchen, fragrant with the rich aroma of simmering meat sauces, tomatoes and fresh peppers. Such could be a description of Fornataro's. Serving dishes like Filet Fornataro (beef dressed in a sweet sauce with melon balls and grapes), Saltimbocca, Veal Marsala and Madeira, Fettucine Alfredo in its golden cheese dressing, and Beef Tenderloin flavored with spices and cognac in a marinara sauce. Most pastas are homemade. Wines and liqueurs are used liberally in the cuisine as are artichoke hearts and fruits. Lunches served Monday through Friday, dinner seven nights a week. Banquet and private party rooms are available.

**(Oswald's) Hof Brau Haus**  
406 Lyell Ave.,  
5 min. from downtown  
254-9660  
Authentic German cooking in an olde world Gasthaus decor. Specializing in German wines, and featuring more than 50 imported beers. Special arrangements for groups. Serving lunch and dinner. Live Bavarian entertainment on weekends.

**National Hotel**  
Rte. 20A & 39  
Cuylerville, N.Y. 14481  
(716) 382-3130  
Built in 1837, the 150 year old National Hotel is a landmark in and of itself. Serving dinners only, Tues.-Sat. 4:30-10 p.m. and Sundays, 12-8 p.m. A special Senior Citizen menu is featured nightly and Sunday. From Rochester, take 390 South to exit 8. The National Hotel is located on Rts. 20A & 39 in Cuylerville just 3 miles south of Geneseo or 3 miles east of Letchworth State Park. Reservations are appreciated.

**Rund's On The Ridge**  
2833 Ridge Road West  
(In Ridgmont Plaza)  
Greece, New York  
(716) 227-2510  
"It's Rund's for serving the finest Seafood in Rochester since 1906." Four dining rooms, four fireplaces. Full seafood menu. Also serving steaks and chops. Open 7 days a week, noon to 9 p.m.

**Irondequoit Town Lounge**  
705 Titus Ave.  
342-3465  
Serving lunches 11:30-3 p.m. daily except Sunday. Featuring an Early Bird Special every night but Friday. Fish Frys every Friday. Our party room can accommodate up to 60 people for your next gathering. Clip out this ad and receive \$5.00 off two dinners (specials not included), offer good Sunday thru Thursday, during the month of January.

**New Sodus Pt. Fish & Crab House**  
Sodus Pt., N.Y. 14555 (on the Seaway Trail)  
(315) 483-2314  
Discover Sodus Pt. at its finest! The areas first waterfront fish and crab house serving breakfast, lunch and dinner on beautiful Sodus Bay. Surrounded with glass and decking, every seat has a breathtaking view second to none. Join us for dining or dancing in our authentic Cape Cod nautical atmosphere. Located on Greig St. in Sodus Pt. Reservations appreciated.

**Strebs Steak & SeaFood House**  
4464 Ridge Rd. West  
352-1400  
If it's succulent seafood or a thick, juicy steak you're craving, our name speaks for itself. But don't let our name fool you... We also feature a wide array of full course dinners including prime rib, veal and chicken. Daily and weekly specials. Set in a romantic, homelike atmosphere. Serving lunches Tues. - Fri., 11:30 - 2:30; Dinners Tues. - Thurs., 4:30 - 10:00; Fri. & Sat., 4:30 - midnight; Sun., 12:00 - 10:00. Major credit cards accepted.

**Dining Around the Diocese**  
The first issue of each month, the Courier-Journal will be featuring some prime dining spots in and around the Rochester diocese. If you, or someone you know would like to have your restaurant included in our Dining Guide, call the Courier-Journal at 328-4340.