

World & Nation

U.S. bishops begin journey to Rome for ad limina visits

By Agostino Bono
Vatican City (NC) — Another round of dialogue on the status of U.S. Catholicism began February 29, when the first group of U.S. bishops arrived in Rome to open a year-long series of meetings with Pope John Paul II and top Vatican officials.

Expected to be high on the list of agenda items are the controversial policy statement on AIDS issued by the U.S. Catholic Conference's Administrative Board, and pastoral means of combatting within U.S. Catholicism widespread dissent from Church teaching.

The series of meetings is a follow-up to the pope's U.S. visit last September. During the 10-day trip, he praised the generosity and dynamism of U.S. Catholicism, but also issued a stiff warning to the bishops that selective adherence to Church teachings cannot be tolerated.

The follow-up is made possible because 1988 is the year in which the heads of the 186 U.S. dioceses are scheduled to make their ad limina visits. Bishops are required to make these visits every five years to report on the status of their dioceses. Auxiliary bishops often accompany the ordinaries on these trips.

Starting February 29, regional groupings of

U.S. bishops will be traveling to the Vatican throughout the year for individual and joint meetings with the pope and heads of major Vatican agencies. The first bishops to make the visits are those of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska.

The meetings may also produce a decision to hold a summit gathering between Vatican officials and the leadership of the U.S. bishops, similar to a 1986 meeting with the top level of the Brazilian hierarchy. The Brazilian meeting helped air out problems and establish a framework for ongoing cooperation between the bishops and the Vatican.

During preparatory meetings for the U.S. papal trip, U.S. and Vatican officials held out the possibilities of a summit at the end of the ad limina visits.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has already given notice that the USCC's AIDS statement will be a topic for ad limina visitors to his office. The statement, issued by the 50-member Administrative Board, said the bishops, while not condoning contraception or extra-marital sex, would not oppose factual information about condoms in public education programs aimed at preventing AIDS.



Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

The Vatican has not taken a stand on the U.S. document, but Vatican officials have expressed concern over the poor image given the Church by a hierarchy publicly divided over a policy statement.

"We in the congregation have begun studying the matter," Cardinal Ratzinger said in a January interview in the United States. "It is difficult for me to express myself publicly on this before talking to American bishops. And this I will do beginning in March, as the American bishops begin their ad limina visits to Rome"

The problem of widespread U.S. dissent from Church teachings and some of the tensions this has caused between the U.S. bishops and the Vatican has already been a major topic of discussion between the pope and the U.S. bishops.

At a meeting in Los Angeles last September, the pope told the bishops it is a "grave error" to think "that dissent from the magisterium is totally compatible with being a 'good Catholic' and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments."

The pope singled out Church teachings on birth control, divorce and sexual morality, even though these may be unpopular in the general culture. He also reiterated the Church stand that women cannot be priests and urged prelates to talk with theologians "to show the unacceptability of dissent and confrontation as a policy and method in the area of Church teachings."

Vatican financial statement shows \$56.7 million deficit for 1986

By Jerry Filteau
Washington (NC) — The Vatican's first officially released annual financial report showed that its 1986 deficit was a record \$56.7 million — nearly 50 percent higher than the 1985 deficit.

To cover the new deficit, the Vatican had to use all \$32 million contributed to the pope by the world's Catholics in 1986 plus \$24.7 million that had been held in reserve from contributions given in previous years.

The statement said those reserves "are by now nearly exhausted"

The report, just recently sent to the world's bishops, was released in the United States February 25 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Accompanying the report was an appeal to bishops and bishops' conferences to let Catholics know about the situation and urge them to increase their contributions to the Holy See.

The report put in stark relief the growing financial problems that have been plaguing the Vatican since 1976, when it first announced an operating deficit. In that year, observers estimated the deficit at \$6.4 million. Actual figures were not released.

In 1986, according to the report, the total expenses of the Holy see were nearly \$114 million. Income was just over \$57 million, covering only 51 percent of expenses. The deficit of nearly \$57 million was made up completely by drawing on that year's contributions from Catholics and on reserves from previous contributions.

The contributions to the pope, called Peter's Pence, were used by the popes until the mid-1970s almost exclusively for such projects as disaster relief, charitable activities and as-

sistance to Church programs in missionary lands. Starting in the mid-1970s, they have been used increasingly — and in recent years, exclusively — to cover the operating costs of the Holy See.

Last year for the first time, the Vatican sent the world's bishops an audited financial report, covering operations in 1985, but it sent the report under strict secrecy. This year's report was the first the bishops were allowed to release.

The secret 1985 report, sent last March to the world's bishops and later obtained by National Catholic News Service, showed total expenses of \$83.7 million and income of \$44.6 million, for a deficit of \$39.1 million.

The Vatican's decision to permit release of the full report for 1986, rather than just summary figures as had been given out occasionally in the past, followed years of efforts by prominent Church figures — led by now-retired Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia — to convince Vatican officials to give a regular public accounting of its finances.

In 1985, nearly all of the deficit was covered by Peter's Pence and similar contributions during the year, amounting to \$36.9 million.

The decline in value of the U.S. dollar against other world currencies accounted for a large part of the dramatic 36 percent increase in the Holy See's budget and 45 percent of its deficit between 1985 and 1986.

Most of the Holy See's expenses are in lire, the Italian currency it uses to buy goods and services, and pay salaries. Its income, however, is weighted more heavily toward the dollar, particularly in its income-producing investments abroad and the contributions it receives from around the world.

At the end of 1985, one U.S. dollar would buy 1,678 lire. At the end of 1986, the exchange rate was 1,351 lire per dollar. In Italian currency, the Holy See's 1986 budget was 154 trillion lire, just 9.6 percent higher than its 1985 budget of 140.5 trillion lire.

The largest expense item in the 1986 report was \$57.9 million for personnel — \$50.6 million for wages and benefits of current employees and \$7.3 million for retirement benefits. The Vatican must pay retirement benefits out of its yearly budget because it does not have a separate retirement fund to cover those costs.

Other expenses, in rounded figures, included:

- Administrative expenses, \$9.7 million, including some \$1.5 million for transfers of

Church officials, \$1.1 million for telecommunications and \$600,000 for printing and publishing. Another chunk of administrative expenses, for which no figure was given, was for travel and lodging of participants attending Vatican meetings.

- Utilities, \$2.1 million.
• Maintenance expenses and taxes for properties owned by the Holy See, \$1.6 million.
• Expenses on investments, \$11 million.
• Vatican Radio, \$10.4 million.
• Publishing activities — the Vatican Polyglot Press, the Vatican Publishing Office and the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano — \$11.7 million.

On the income side, just over half of the Holy See's earnings came from investments — \$22.8 million of the \$57.3 million total. Nearly another third, \$17.1 million, came from its newspaper and book publishing activities.

Catholic high schools set two informational meetings

The Rochester-area Catholic high schools are sponsoring two evenings for sixth-grade and junior-high students and their parents to learn about Catholic education at the high-school level.

The meetings will take place on March 9, at

St. Theodore's School, 170 Spencerport Road, Rochester, and on March 23 at St. Ambrose School, 31 Empire Blvd., Rochester. Both programs will feature representatives from all Catholic high schools. The sessions will begin at 7 p.m. and conclude at 9 p.m.

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