

World & Nation

Panamanian churches feed families crippled by strikes

Washington (NC) — The Catholic Church has distributed food to more than 6,000 Panamanian families facing a crippling strike and cash crisis in their country.

Esther Kwaiben, treasurer of Caritas, a charitable agency of the Archdiocese of Panama, said her agency believes "that number will increase" because there is no way to predict when the turmoil will end.

"We are really not having any commercial transactions," Kwaiben said March 25 in a telephone interview from Panama City. She said that in the city, only one supermarket and two or three shops remained open during the strike.

"The thing is getting tougher and tougher by the minute, and we really have a lot of families involved," she said.

Thirty to 40 parishes are attempting to assist people desperate for food, she said. Caritas has asked those parishes to make sure peoples' requests are legitimate.

"We are getting very short on milk for babies — infant food," she said. She was checking information that Children's Hospital in Panama City also was running short of food.

At a Mass in the Panama City cathedral March 25, Archbishop Marcos McGrath said the nation's Jewish community had collected about \$10,000 and was donating it for food purchases.

Panamanian banks have been closed since March 4 because of a shortage of U.S. dollars, the country's legal currency. The opposition Civic Crusade alliance called an indefinite general strike March 21.

Both moves were an effort to force the resignation of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, head of the armed forces and the country's de facto ruler. Noriega has been indicted in Miami on several drug-related charges.

The following is a chronology of major events in Panama since the first of the year:

Feb. 4 — Federal grand juries in Miami and Tampa, Fla., charge General Manuel Antonio Noriega with violating U.S. racketeering and drug laws. Noriega denies charges.

Feb. 7 — Panamanian government recalls ambassadors from Washington, Organization of American States, United Nations.

Feb. 25 — President Eric Arturo Delvalle fires Noriega, who had refused to step down from office.

Feb. 26 — Panama's National Assembly ousts Delvalle and names new president, Manuel Solis Palma. Archdiocese of Panama's bishops emphasize need for non-violence, dialogue, reconciliation, as well as freedom of expression. The bishops say current events question

the government's credibility and pose "serious national and international problems."

March 4 — Panama's banking commission orders banks closed due to shortage of U.S. dollars, the country's legal currency.

March 8 — Archdiocese of Panama's bishops, priests' council call for civilian rule and restoration of human and civil rights. Statement also calls for "Panamanian solutions to our problems" without "undue foreign interference."

March 21 — Opposition Civic Crusade alliance calls indefinite general strike.

March 26 — Government raids mills that had pledged flour to church-run feeding program for families, primarily the poor, suffering from financial crisis.



UPI-Reuters/NC News
A Panama City resident and her daughter wait in line outside an emergency food-distribution center administered by the Catholic Church in the working-class neighborhood of San Miguelito. Thousands of poor and working-class families have suffered food and cash shortages during the general strike led by opposition groups demanding the ouster of General Manuel Noriega.

Nicaraguan cardinal to oversee compliance with treaty

Managua, Nicaragua (NC) — Nicaragua's Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo, mediator of early talks aimed at achieving a truce in his country, was named to a two-member commission to verify compliance with the cease-fire accord signed March 23 by U.S.-backed rebels and the Sandinista-led government.

Cardinal Obando Bravo will be joined by Organization of America States General Secretary Joao Baena Soares.

The cease-fire agreement calls for a 60-day suspension of military operations, during which time democratic reforms and further talks would take place in hopes of ending the war and gaining the release of political prisoners. Negotiations on an extended truce are to begin April 6. The initial cease-fire is to begin April 1 and, in the ensuing 15 days, contra forces are to move into geographic zones designated by commissions that were scheduled to meet March 28.

Cardinal Obando Bravo signed the nine-point accord as a witness to the talks held in

the Nicaraguan town of Sapoa, three miles from the Costa Rican border, March 21-23.

Prior to the signing of the agreement by Adolfo Calero of the Nicaraguan Resistance and Nicaraguan Defense Minister Gen. Humberto Ortega, Cardinal Obando Bravo led those present at the signing ceremony in a prayer of thanks.

"Thanks be to Our Lord for having illuminated the minds of those who during three days negotiated an end to the war in Nicaragua," the cardinal prayed. "Only united will we be able to build this country."

Calero, one of the directors of the rebel coalition, said the final result of the negotiations followed closely the agenda that Cardinal Obando Bravo had submitted early in the talks and which had previously been rejected by the Nicaraguan government.

The cardinal was dropped as a mediator by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega when the contras agreed to the government's suggestion of direct negotiations.

In Miami, self-exiled Bishop Pablo An-

tonio Vega of the Prelature of Juigalpa, Nicaragua, expressed deep skepticism about the accord.

A harsh critic of the Sandinistas, Bishop Vega said in a March 24 telephone interview that he believes the Sandinistas signed the cease-fire only to ease contra military pressure on the Managua government.

"They will reconsolidate their power (over the populace) because the only power they have is their military power," Bishop Vega said.

He speculated that the rebels signed because they felt international pressure "to give this other chance to the Sandinistas (and) to see if they at least will recognize part of the agreement they signed in Guatemala."

Nicaragua is part of a Central American

peace accord signed last year in Guatemala. The accord calls for an end to the region's civil wars, stoppage of foreign support for the opponents in those conflicts, non-aggression and democratization.

Bishop Vega was exiled from Nicaragua in June 1986 after the Sandinistas accused him of siding with the rebels and supporting U.S. military aid for them. Although the exile order was lifted in August 1987, the bishop has refused to return home while the Sandinistas, whom he regards as an arm of international communism, are in power.

"Peace is always an equilibrium," balancing political forces, he said. When communists use peace it "means submission" to their program, the bishop said.

U.S. bishops' June agenda includes 'open-ended' discussion of AIDS

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — Facing a highly publicized dispute over condoms and AIDS education, the U.S. bishops are to discuss AIDS issues when they meet June 24-27 in Collegeville, Minn.

The discussion is to be held in an executive session, from which the press and other observers are barred.

Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference, announced March 24 that the closed-door session in Collegeville will feature an "open-ended" discussion of AIDS issues, "with its direction determined by the will of the bishops."

He said the USCC Administrative Board, which met in Washington March 22-24, agreed to place the discussion on the agenda of the June bishops' meeting and wanted it to "focus on the pastoral, theological and moral dimensions of AIDS."

Last December a number of bishops publicly opposed or expressed reservations

about some portions of an AIDS statement issued Dec. 11 by the 50-bishop USCC Administrative Board.

The board statement covered a wide range of social, moral and pastoral concerns surrounding the spread of acquired immune deficiency syndrome, a fatal disease often contracted by homosexual or promiscuous heterosexual activity or by intravenous drug abuse.

The controversy surrounding the statement focused on language saying that, while the bishops rejected condom use as an AIDS preventive on both moral and medical grounds, they could tolerate the incorporation of information about condoms in public education programs about the prevention of AIDS.

The statement urged that such programs be set in a framework of a "broader moral vision" which would stress that "so-called 'safe sex' practices are at best only partially effective... (and) do not take into account either the real values that are at stake or the fundamental good of the human person."

FOR EASTER HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES

Enjoy
ZWEIGLE'S
Natural Casing
POP OPEN
TEXAS & WHITE
HOT DOGS
or
Delicious Skinless
TEXAS & WHITE
HOT DOGS

AVAILABLE AT YOUR
FAVORITE MARKET OR
NEIGHBORHOOD STORE.

Zweigle's
Famous for Quality
Sausage & Meat Products
Since 1890

ZWEIGLE'S INC. 651 Plymouth Ave. No. • 546-1740