

Parishioners occupy Connecticut church

By Laurie Hansen
NC News

WASHINGTON — Parishioners occupied a Polish national church in a primarily black and Hispanic neighborhood of Bridgeport, Conn., to protest what they called plans to open the parish to other ethnic groups.

Monsignor Nicholas Grieco, spokesman for the Diocese of Bridgeport, told National Catholic News Service in a Feb. 14 telephone interview that the diocese had assured protesters that St. Michael the Archangel Parish would remain a national parish and retain its Polish identity.

'Bloodbath' in Haiti?

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (NC) — A Haitian government official has alleged that Catholic priests are involved in organizing a peasant uprising in Haiti and said a "bloodbath" might be necessary to stop the movement.

Information Minister Anthony St. Pierre made the charges in a Jan. 13 memorandum to the Haitian president, Lt. Gen. Prosper Avril, urging increased military control in the interior of the country and "infiltration of intelligent and loyal spies," or "even a bloodbath" if necessary to stop the uprising.

Filipino bishop nominated

BACOLOD CITY, Philippines (NC) — Bishop Antonio Fortich, 75, recently retired bishop of Bacolod, has been nominated by religious and parliamentary groups around the world for the Nobel Peace Prize, said Philippine church members.

Bishop Fortich is known for his work toward ending the Philippine civil war, in land reform and in helping the poor. He headed a peace monitoring commission during a 1986-87 cease-fire between the communist National Democratic Front and the government.

In 1987, a right-wing anti-communist group tried unsuccessfully to kill him by lobbing a hand grenade into his residence.

Collection tops records

WASHINGTON (NC) — Last December's first-ever national collection for the retirement needs of religious is likely to take in more than \$20 million, topping all previous national church appeals, according to the collection's coordinator, Sister Mary Oliver Hudon, SSND.

The Diocese of Rochester opted not to participate in the national collection, deciding instead to sponsor its own fund drive, which is planned to take place this spring.

Detainees end fast

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (NC) — Political detainees in Johannesburg ended a mass hunger strike Feb. 16 after the government indicated it would free most of the 1,000 prisoners held without trial.

The announcement, made through the detainees' lawyers, came a day after South African religious leaders urged nearly 300 detainees to suspend a hunger strike for their release. Some of the hunger strikers had been hospitalized because of health problems resulting from their fast.

Soviets ready religion law

ROME (NC) — The Soviet government has nearly completed a redrafting of its laws governing religious liberty and practice, an Italian newspaper reported.

The Rome-based daily *Il Messaggero* said the Soviet Ministry for Religious Affairs was seeking reaction to the new draft from representatives of the country's religious bodies, including Catholics.

The proposed laws will grant new legal status to the churches and allow them to act within society more freely, according to the Feb. 14 report by the newspaper's Moscow correspondent.

But the group of parishioners, who began occupying the church Feb. 11, demanded the current pastor, Franciscan Father John Bambol, be removed and a popular former associate pastor, also a Franciscan, be allowed to return. The protesters said they objected to Father Bambol's plans to open the church to other ethnic groups and claim he was responsible for the associate pastor's move.

Monsignor Grieco said the transfers were made by the priests' order, the Conventual Franciscans, based in Baltimore. He said Father Roman Palaszewski, the associate pastor that the parishioners want back, had been asked to return to Poland by his superiors. All of the priests at the parish are Poles.

Four protestors threatened to begin a hunger strike by Feb. 18 if changes were not made. Monsignor Grieco said between 15 and 60 protesters are staying at the church in shifts.

The protest has "created an awful lot of tension in the parish; splitting families, and those who have been here for numerous years and the new immigrants," said Franciscan Father James Smyka, associate pastor at St. Michael the Archangel.

Father Smyka said the objections surfaced when Father Bambol, at a parish council meeting in November, suggested that new immigrants be admitted to the parish as members if they came. "We were not going to invite them in droves," said Father Smyka.

But parishioners "reacted violently," the priest said. After a meeting with diocesan officials, a decision was made to keep the parish a national Polish church, he said.

According to Monsignor Grieco, pastoral guidelines of the Diocese of Bridgeport say that in order to be a registered member of a national parish one must belong to the language group for which the parish was established.

Father Smyka said area Hispanics and



Genevieve Kozlowski, center, and others pray Thursday, Feb. 16, on the sixth day of their occupation of St. Michael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church in Bridgeport, Conn.

blacks had not reacted publicly to the protest.

Joseph J. Farley, a permanent deacon who is diocesan director of ethnic and cultural services, said the conflict was similar to many that have occurred at parishes in the Bridgeport diocese in the last decade as Hispanics, Southeast Asians and Haitians moved into areas where national churches exist for Irish, Polish, French and Italian Catholics, among others. He said the new immigrants were attracted by a growing number of unskilled and entry-level jobs available in the area due to growth of small manufacturing, construction and engineering firms, hotels, yacht and tennis clubs.

Farley said that a few months prior to the protest, some Hispanics living near St. Michael the Archangel Parish had requested membership in the church in order to receive a parish discount on tuition at the parish elementary school. He said he had not yet seen a need for a Spanish-speaking priest at St. Michael the Archangel Parish. He said there was another Catholic parish a short distance away.

Farley said that although St. Michael the Archangel is allowed to continue as a national parish "that does not mean it is going to be a Polish parish serving a Polish population only ... or that the Poles should be so dominant that they exclude others."

Iran asks pope to stop book's release

By John Thavis
NC News

ROME — Iran's Embassy to the Vatican has appealed to Pope John Paul II to help stop publication of *The Satanic Verses*, a book condemned as blasphemous by many Moslem leaders.

Calling the work "an insult to all the prophets," the embassy said the pope should demonstrate that he is a defender of religion by acting "energetically" to prevent the book from being released in Italy.



Thousands of Iranian students protest against the book "Satanic Verses" by British author Salman Rushdie.

The statement was released Feb. 15, the same day an aide to Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini offered a reward for the killing of the book's author, Salman Rushdie, an Indian-born author. The embassy statement did not mention the reward or the fact that Khomeini had earlier "sentenced" Rushdie to death.

The book has sparked a wave of recent protests by fundamentalist Moslems. Sec-

tions of the work are seen as denigrating the Prophet Mohammed, founder of Islam, and the Koran, Islam's sacred book of revelations.

The embassy statement said the book was not merely offensive to Islam, but depicted Mohammed in a way that "no believer who takes his faith to heart can ever accept." The "contempt for religion" demonstrated by the book's recent publication in England, it said, "cannot be repeated in Italy, close to the Vatican — the See of the pope and the center of Christianity."

"We ask the most holy pontiff, leader of Catholics worldwide, to act energetically to prevent this insult, showing from the threshold of St. Peter that he is a defender

of spirituality and religion," it said.

Vatican press spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the Vatican did not plan to comment on the statement. He noted that it was a public declaration and not a message personally delivered to the pope.

A spokesman for Italy's Mondadori publishing company was quoted in Italian newspapers Feb. 16 as saying the firm was reconsidering its plans to bring the book out in late February. The spokesman cited safety concerns for the publisher's outlets.

The Iranian Embassy statement said Moslems had reacted justly to the book in recent days, showing that "they are ready to sacrifice everything, and that they will not remain inactive in the face of plots of

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Newspaper defends church ban

By Greg Erlandson
NC News Service

VATICAN CITY — A front-page commentary in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano* defended the church's ban on artificial birth control and attacked theologians who publicly challenge it for "feeding doubts and creating confusion."

The commentary called the use of contraception an "intrinsically disordered act," but added that confessors must take into account the formation of a person's conscience in judging an individual's moral behavior.

The anonymous commentary, released Feb. 15 at the Vatican, concluded with three asterisks, denoting that the article had been reviewed by the Secretariat of State

prior to publication and written by an "authoritative source," most likely a Vatican official.

In January, a German moral theologian, Redemptorist Father Bernard Haring, asked Pope John Paul II to reopen church debate on birth control with a worldwide consultation of bishops, theologians and the laity.

A statement signed by 163 European theologians and made public Jan. 25 criticized the pope for making the church's birth control ban a "cornerstone of Christian teaching," declaring that such a ban was rooted neither in the Bible nor tradition.

Although no names were mentioned in the *L'Osservatore Romano* commentary,

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