

# Police end occupation of church

By Liz Schevtchuk  
NC News Service

WASHINGTON — About 80 dissidents, including two on a hunger strike in a confessional, ended their occupation of a Polish Catholic church in Bridgeport, Conn., Feb. 18 when Catholic officials closed the church indefinitely and asked police to ensure that protesters promptly departed.

About 100 protesters returned the next day to the church, St. Michael the Archangel, for an outdoor protest of song and prayer, said Monsignor Nicholas V. Grieco, communications secretary of the Bridgeport Diocese.

Monsignor Grieco said that two men were arrested for trespassing Feb. 18 when, unlike other protesters, they declined to leave the church voluntarily and engaged in passive resistance. The two, identified as Franciszek Wojenski, a parishioner, and Henry Chmiel, a resident of Milford, Conn., outside the Bridgeport Diocese, were given summons by police, he said.

Unhappy parishioners and sympathizers occupied the church in shifts to protest what they viewed as unacceptable plans to open the parish to non-Polish Catholics. St. Michael's is located in a predominantly black and Hispanic neighborhood.

The approximately 40 police present Feb. 18 "didn't go into the church to arrest people," Monsignor Grieco said. Rather, he said, they were called "to make sure that everything was done in order and without any problems."

Two unidentified men on a hunger strike, which lasted about two days before the occupation ended, had "sealed" themselves in a chamber made from an old confessional used for the sacrament of reconciliation, he said. They were among dissidents who left voluntarily, he said.

Monsignor Grieco said that the diocese and parish corporation, including Bishop Edward M. Egan of Bridgeport, resolved late Feb. 17, to end the occupation of the church, run by Conventual Franciscans.

"What the diocese and church corporation were concerned about was that they simply leave," he said.

According to a Feb. 18 diocesan state-



AP/Wide World Photos

**Policemen escort protesters out of St. Michael the Archangel Church in Bridgeport, Conn., bringing their weeklong occupation of the church to an end.**

ment, church functions were suspended until further notice and those occupying the church and its premises were told to leave "because of imminent danger of injury to persons and property," as well as "recent disruptions to the orderly and reverential conduct of church services and the disruption of day-to-day business of the parish."

Monsignor Grieco said that on Feb. 17, a delegation representing the parish corporation and diocesan officials, accompanied by Franciscan leaders, met with parishioners, including dissidents.

The dissidents, estimated by Monsignor Grieco as being about 20 percent of parishioners plus some other Poles, began oc-

cupying the church Feb. 11, demanding that the current pastor, Franciscan Father John Bambol, be removed and a popular former associate pastor, Franciscan Father Roman Palaszewski, be returned. They said they objected to Father Bambol's plan to open the church to other ethnic groups and claimed he was responsible for the transfer of Father Palaszewski.

"Actually, the people who were dissenting were reassured several times it would remain a national parish," Monsignor Grieco added. However, on the part of the protesters, "emotions had gotten to such a high pitch it was very difficult for them to hear what was being said," he added.

## Agenda weighs cultural conflicts

By Agostino Bono  
NC News Service

VATICAN CITY — Vatican officials expect their March 8-11 meeting with U.S. bishops to focus on the tensions between modern, pluralistic U.S. society and the often countercultural message of Catholicism.

This, more than specific problems between the Vatican and members of the U.S. hierarchy, is expected to dominate the formal speeches and more than 12 hours of open debate scheduled during the sessions, they say.

The meeting will bring together Vatican officials, including Pope John Paul II, and 35 U.S. bishops. It was planned as a follow-up to the pope's 1987 visit to the United States and the U.S. bishops' 1988 visits to the Vatican to discuss the status of their dioceses.

The overall theme is "Evangelization in the Context of Culture and Society of the United States with Particular Emphasis on the Role of the Bishop as Teacher of Faith."

Subthemes, however, leave the door open to raising controversial issues that at times have caused problems between the Vatican and U.S. church leaders. Among these issues are the relationship of bishops to dissenting theologians, the high number of annulments granted by diocesan marriage tribunals, and criticism by the U.S. hierarchy of Vatican draft documents on Catholic universities and the nature of bishops' conferences.

"It's an open forum. Anything can be discussed," said Joaquin Navarro-Valls, Vatican press spokesman.

At the same time, "any image that puts

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## CUF founder dies

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. (NC) — H. Lyman Stebbins, the founder and former president of Catholics United for the Faith, died Feb. 19 at age 77. Mr. Stebbins was also the founder of the Benedictine Monastery of Mt. Saviour near Elmira, N.Y. His death at his home in New Rochelle followed a long illness. The funeral Mass was to be celebrated Feb. 23 at Holy Family Church in New Rochelle. He is survived by his wife, Madeleine, who is chairman of the board of Catholics United for the Faith, known as CUF, a lay association of traditionalist Catholics founded in 1968.

## Station refuses messages

WASHINGTON (NC) — A CBS-owned radio station in Chicago has canceled a series of paid messages featuring Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin, saying the one-minute messages violated CBS Radio standards and practices. The station, WBBM-AM, which was to run the series of inspirational messages during Lent, notified the archdiocese of its decision Feb. 9, the day after Ash Wednesday, when the first message aired, said Mercy Sister Joy Clough, spokeswoman for the archdiocese. WBBM refused to run the remaining six messages, which were to air one time each during the Fridays of Lent.

## Survey shows identity loss

WASHINGTON (NC) — One of three Americans raised Methodist and one of 10 Americans raised Catholic no longer identify with the denomination of their childhood, according to Jim Castelli, author of the syndicated Gallup Religion Poll column. The decline among Catholics is seen particularly among the young and college-educated, Castelli said. The figures are taken from the Gallup Organization survey, "The Unchurched American, 1988." The survey, completed last spring, was funded by 22 Catholic and Protestant organizations

## Form of death threats varies

WASHINGTON (NC) — Brazilian bishops and priests targeted for assassination by death squads have received threats in a variety of ways, said an official of the Brazilian bishops' conference. The more common threats have come in the form of anonymous letters and telephone calls, but "sometimes threats are more concrete," said the official, Father George Boran. Earlier this year, Bishop Jose Ivo Lorscheiter, vice president of the conference, released a list of bishops, priests and religious on a 350-person "hit list," which also included labor organizers and small farmers.

## Court urged to rethink case


WASHINGTON (NC) — The U.S. bishops and Knights of Columbus Feb. 23 asked the U.S. Supreme Court to rethink its 1973 abortion ruling before it resolves a dispute over a Missouri abortion control law. The Knights and the U.S. Catholic Conference, public action agency of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, commented in separate friend-of-the-court briefs submitted on the Missouri case, *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services*, which is slated for court arguments later this year.

## Constitutionality argued

WASHINGTON (NC) — An attorney told the U.S. Supreme Court in oral arguments Feb. 22 that a local government's Christian nativity scene and Jewish menorah no more violate the Constitution than does declaring Dec. 25 a federal holiday, but an opposing attorney argued that such displays represent an "appalling" disregard for non-believers. The high court heard arguments in County of Allegheny vs. American Civil Liberties Union and two related actions pitting Allegheny County, Pa., and the City of Pittsburgh, joined by a Jewish group, Chabad, against the civil liberties union, which claimed that government involvement with the menorah and nativity scene is unconstitutional.



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