

**Bush seeks contra aid**

WASHINGTON (NC) — Bush administration officials have said they will ask Congress for more than \$40 million in U.S. humanitarian aid for the Nicaraguan rebels, known as contras. A peace plan adopted in February by the Central American presidents, however, called for disbanding the rebels. The U.S. Catholic Conference, public policy arm of the U.S. bishops, has consistently opposed sending military aid to the contras.

**Archbishop urges gun ban**

WASHINGTON (NC) — Archbishop Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, applauding a Bush administration decision to temporarily ban semiautomatic weapons imports, has urged a similar ban be placed on such weapons produced in the United States. "The streets of Los Angeles are filled with narcotics dealers who employ these weapons," Archbishop Mahony said in a March 15 interview in Washington. William J. Bennett, federal drug czar, requested the ban March 14. The move will immediately block an estimated 110,000 AK-47s, Uzis and similar assault rifles for which importers have sought permits to bring into this country. The ban, however, will affect only a portion of semiautomatic weapons used in the United States, since the majority of such weapons are manufactured here.

**Irish immigrants exploited?**

DUBLIN, Ireland (NC) — Irish clergy say some of the young, talented Irish illegally emigrating to the United States for work are exploited by employers and that many of the emigrants could have done better moving legally to Europe. Bishop Colm O'Reilly of Ardagh and Clonmacnois said the young Irish in America often end up with menial jobs for which they are over-qualified. They would have been more likely to get work in keeping with their qualifications if they had gone to continental Europe, he said.

**Czech diplomat 'lukewarm'**

WASHINGTON (NC) — Czechoslovakia's ambassador to the United States was "lukewarm at best" to the issue of religious liberty in his country during a recent meeting with U.S. Catholic officials, said Archbishop Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, head of the U.S. bishops' International Policy Committee. Archbishop Mahony met with Ambassador Miroslav Houstecky in Washington March 13 for what the archbishop described as a follow-up to the U.S. bishops' November statement on religious liberty in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. "He just never responded to the major issues that are in the document," Archbishop Mahony said March 14 in Washington.

**Sao Paulo diocese divided**

VATICAN CITY (NC) — The Vatican has cut four additional dioceses out of the populous Archdiocese of Sao Paulo, Brazil, in a controversial move that the head of the archdiocese has said would jeopardize existing pastoral programs. The Vatican announced the restructuring of the archdiocese, with its 14.6 million inhabitants, March 15. It said the new Sao Paulo Archdiocese would have 7.1 million inhabitants. The remaining Catholics were divided into four dioceses, with Sao Paulo as the metropolitan See of the ecclesiastical province.

**Principals discourage trips**

NEW ORLEANS (NC) — Claiming that teen-agers on spring break in Florida engage in illegal drug use, drinking and sex, principals at New Orleans archdiocesan high schools urged parents to prohibit such trips over the Easter holidays. In an open letter, the principals said they "strongly encourage all parents to say no to their children's requests for an unsupervised trip to Florida during Easter vacation." The letter was published in late February as an advertisement in the *Clarion Herald*, newspaper of the New Orleans archdiocese.

**Parish closings a 'tragedy' for community, bishop says**

By Catherine Haven  
NC News

DETROIT (NC) — The closing of some 30 Detroit parishes is a "very real tragedy" for the communities, Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton told the Detroit City Council at a recent hearing.

"It is the loss of yet another building block in the already difficult task of rebuilding the city of Detroit," Bishop Gumbleton said in a statement he made before the City Council March 9.

The bishop said he was speaking not for the Detroit archdiocese, but for Core City Neighborhoods, a community-based economic development organization that operates out of the former St. Casimir Parish convent. St. Casimir is slated to close, but the school's future is uncertain and the bishop said it is difficult to operate a Catholic school without a parish's support.

The hearing was conducted despite criticism by the Detroit archdiocese that it was anti-Catholic and in violation of church-state separation. The archdiocese did not send a representative to the hearing, a move criticized by one councilman, the Rev. John Peoples, who said the city cooperated for Pope John Paul II's 1987 visit to Detroit by providing extra police for protection and the barricading of streets.

"We do not see ourselves as against the church but we want to do the job we are elected to do," said Mr. Peoples, a Baptist minister, in his opening remarks.

Jack Kelley, the only Catholic member of the council, was not present. He said earlier that while he did not feel the hearing was anti-Catholic, he did not support it.

Bishop Gumbleton joined about 150 representatives of Detroit's Catholic parishes and community organizations to testify before the City Council on the impact of the closings on neighborhoods and the future of the parishes' social programs.

Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka of Detroit announced in early January that some 30 parishes would close by June 30.

"We view the closing of any church in a neighborhood as a negative matter," he

said. "It is like taking out a piece of the mortar in the structure which holds the people of a neighborhood together. It is our view that the closing of the parish is a very real tragedy for the people of the area."

Marian Gabriel of Black Lay Catholics compared the closings to a nuclear fallout, saying that "people die and the buildings remain."

She said the closings will force volunteers to leave the parishes' programs, forcing discontinuation of services.

Loma Pointer, a parish council member at Visitation Parish which is slated to close, said the parish now helps single parents, the displaced, the poor and the homeless. In 1988, the parish food program provided more than 25,000 meals and parish services were used by 1,827 people, up from 744 people using the services in 1987. She said about 2,500 people are expected to seek parish services in 1989.



Megan Chateau recently attended a Detroit hearing with a sign reading "I'm Small and I'm Viable."



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Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton addresses the Detroit City Council. Bishop Gumbleton called the closing of some 30 parishes a "very real tragedy" for the communities.

**Detroit parishes file appeals with Vatican**

By Catherine Haven  
NC News

DETROIT — Fifteen of the 30 Detroit parishes slated to close by June 30 have filed formal appeals with the Vatican, hoping to keep their churches open and to overturn the criteria archdiocesan officials used to decide which parishes were no longer viable.

Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka of Detroit announced in January that because of declining numbers of parishioners and staff and increased costs, 31 parishes would be closed, with two of the 31 reopening as a single, consolidated parish.

Four parishes delivered their appeals to Cardinal Szoka March 3 for him to present to Cardinal Antonio Innocenti, head of the Vatican Congregation for Clergy. Bob Van Cleef, a member of the legal team volunteering to help city parishes, said they will "wait and see" what happens now in Rome.

"We want to be sure that the parishes have the opportunity to exercise their full canonical rights before we take our next step," Van Cleef told *The Michigan Catholic*, archdiocesan newspaper.

The Congregation for Clergy — of which Cardinal Szoka is a member — is expected, but not required, to deal with each parish's appeal individually. The congregation may reject the appeal, accept the appeal and suspend the suppression of a parish, or accept the appeal but not suspend the closure.

It is unclear what action is likely, since the congregation, unlike the Vatican courts, is not required to document its cases. Also, the large-scale closings slated

for Detroit present "a wholly unprecedented situation," said Father Anthony Kosnik, a former teacher of canon law.

"Church law, unlike civil law, does not work on precedent, but on a case by case basis," said Father Ricardo Bass, a canon lawyer and pastor of Our Lady of Loretto Parish in Redford.

While the congregation rarely intervenes in diocesan matters, it does have competence to overrule the local bishop on the suppression of a parish.

Van Cleef said the parishes are in the process of finding an advocate experienced in dealing with Vatican congregations, as well as looking for local canon lawyers who would assist with hearings, should the Congregation for Clergy decide they are needed.

**Pope calls for greater dignity for women**

VATICAN CITY (NC) — Pope John Paul II marked International Women's Day with a call for the "defense and the promotion of the dignity of woman."

The pope made his comments during his regular Wednesday general audience March 8 while greeting two groups of Italian women.

In his formal audience speech, the pope continued his discussion of the Resurrection, declaring that it was a fulfillment of Jesus' promises and proof of his divinity.

International Women's Day is celebrated throughout Europe March 8.

The pope expressed his hope that the "indispensable contribution" of women to church and society would be better under-

stood and appreciated. "The active presence of women in the structures of political and social life of every country is certainly a 'sign of the times,'" the pope said.

He asked for the "commitment of all to the defense and promotion of the dignity of woman, of her equality" and of her "inalienable human rights."

The recognition of the "sublime vocation of woman" in civil and ecclesiastical life must lead to greater participation by women in the development of the common good, the pope told them.

In Rome, International Women's Day is marked by demonstrations, speeches and the symbol of the day: the bright yellow flowers of the mimosa tree.