

# Vatican panel ends work in archdiocese

By Cindy Wooden  
NC News

WASHINGTON — Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal pronuncio to the United States, announced April 11 that a Vatican commission appointed to assist Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen of Seattle has completed its work and has had its mandate terminated.

The three-member commission was appointed by the Vatican in January, 1987, to "assess the situation" in Seattle and resolve the controversy created after Archbishop Hunthausen was ordered to give final decision-making authority over several areas of archdiocesan life to his auxiliary bishop.

The commission members, Cardinals Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago and John J. O'Connor of New York and Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco, recommended that Archbishop Hunthausen's authority be restored, that then-Auxiliary Bishop Donald W. Wuerl be reassigned, and that a coadjutor archbishop be appointed.

## Kamp Koinonia available for not-for-profit groups

Kamp Koinonia, which is located near Naples, is seeking not-for-profit groups interested in using the facility for several weeks/weekends still available this spring and summer.

Koinonia is a large conference center complex, which consists of 22 buildings. It has a large central meeting/dining hall which can seat 150 people for meals and has a large kitchen as well. In addition, the 296-acre camp has a chapel, infirmary, arts and crafts building, 10 cabins, a pool and more.

Reservations can be made by calling 716/374-6371 or by writing Lane Clute, R.D. #2, Naples, 14512.

The commission was asked to continue advising Archbishop Hunthausen and Coadjutor Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy, who was appointed in May, 1987. Bishop Wuerl was later named head of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Commission members and the Seattle archbishops focused their work on concerns about the archdiocese outlined in a 1985 letter from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Cardinal Ratzinger's letter came two years after the Vatican appointed Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington to conduct an apostolic visitation of the Seattle Archdiocese. The Vatican concerns included issues in the areas of liturgy, education of seminarians, clergy formation, the marriage tribunal, and ministry to homosexuals.

Archbishop Laghi's April 11 announcement, released by the U.S. bishops' Office for Media Relations in Washington, said the Seattle archbishops "will continue to address the issues which have been of concern to the church in the Archdiocese of Seattle by implementing the changes in pastoral care of the archdiocese which have already been initiated."

In a statement released in Seattle, Archbishop Hunthausen expressed gratitude for Archbishop Laghi's announcement and for the work of the commission members.

"Both Archbishop Murphy and I acknowledge the trial the church has faced over the past several years, yet we are also able to view the whole experience as a time of grace," Archbishop Hunthausen said.

"With the Lord's help," he said, the experience "will enable us to offer our leadership to the church in western Washington in the years ahead with renewed dedication and commitment to the Gospel and the universal church under our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II."



Friends and relatives mourn the death of 19 victims killed Sunday, April 9, in a bloody clash with police during a pro-independence rally in Tbilisi, USSR.

## Woman awakens from coma days before removal of food

ALBANY (NC) — Doctors and lawyers are confounded by the awakening of an Albany woman who had been diagnosed as being in a permanent vegetative state and was scheduled to have her feeding tube removed in mid-April by court order.

Carrie A. Coons, 86, ate some food, later told a doctor that she did not know if she would agree to removal of the tube, then lost consciousness.

She had regained consciousness during a two-week waiting period imposed by Justice Joseph Harris of the State Supreme Court in Albany County, who had ordered April 3 that the tube feeding Coons be removed upon expiration of the waiting period. Doctors had testified that Coons would almost certainly die within two weeks after the tube was removed. On April 12, Justice Harris rescinded his earlier order.

"I think judges in New York State will think twice before doing this kind of thing again," said Kathleen Gallagher, a legislative associate with the New York State Catholic Conference who has been following the case closely.

"It highlights the fact that medicine is an inexact science, and there is no way to be sure a prognosis is 100 percent accurate," she said.

The case also highlighted legal and moral questions that have occurred with increasing frequency across the nation, as doctors, courts and relatives of comatose patients debate whether artificial feeding and hydration fall in the same category as extraordinary medical treatment that can be terminated in some instances.

### Service group for needy seeks volunteer assistance

Mercy Corps, a volunteer program connected in values and mission with the Sisters of Mercy, needs volunteers to give 12 months of service with needy people across the country.

Call or write Loretta Siegele, 1701 South 72nd St., Omaha, NE, 68124, or call 402/393-4287 for information.

The boundaries of the moral and legal issues also were pressed by the fact that Coons was not diagnosed as dying, but only as irreversibly vegetative and unconscious. Doctors testified that if feeding was continued, she could remain in that condition for a few days or several years before dying.

Coons was admitted to Albany Memorial Hospital Oct. 21, 1988, after suffering a massive stroke. Since November she had been unconscious and receiving food and water through a gastrostomy tube. In January, her sister, 88-year-old Edith I. Gannon, went to court to have the tube removed.

The Supreme Court, which is New York's lowest court, heard the case March 2.

In his decision a month later, Harris said physicians on both sides agreed that Coons' condition was "irreversible." One geriatric specialist, Dr. Michael L. Wolff, had said her chances of regaining consciousness were "nil."

Harris said testimony by Gannon and a niece, Hazel Gregg, provided "convincing evidence" to the court that for the past 50 years Coons had consistently opposed artificial life maintenance for irreversibly vegetative patients.

"There is no doubt that if Carrie Coons were competent at this moment she would order the removal of the gastrostomy tube," he said.

Despite the doctors' predictions, Coons began showing signs of consciousness a few days after the court ruling. When nurses reported her improvement to Wolff, he visited her April 10.

He said he found her alert and discussed her condition with her. He said that when he asked her what she would wish to be done, she replied, "These are difficult decisions." Before the discussion could be carried further she lost consciousness, he said.

The ambiguity she expressed while conscious about removal of artificial sustenance is expected to be a major factor in any future decisions on her situation.

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## A sign of GOOD NEWS



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