

Pope praises Walesa at meeting

By John Thavis
NC News

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II met with Solidarity leader Lech Walesa at the Vatican and said he hoped Poland had embarked on a new course of social transformation.

The 30-minute encounter April 20 was a richly symbolic one, crowning a series of Polish political changes that have made Walesa and his once-outlawed labor union key players again in the life of the country.

Walesa said he had come to personally thank the Polish-born pope for his unwavering support of Solidarity and social reform in their common homeland. "I cannot imagine my own life or the life of Solidarity without the existence of this great man," Walesa said before the meeting.

The pope greeted the labor leader with unusual warmth. When Walesa walked into the pope's study and fell to his knees, the pope drew him up, pulled him back in front of photographers and hugged him. "We need to show them how Mr. Walesa greets me and how I welcome him," the pope said.

During the private meeting, a Vatican spokesman said, the pope praised all those who have worked for reconciliation in Poland. The pope re-emphasized a point he made the previous day during a general audience talk, saying that he hoped the country "will have a new opportunity" to trans-

form "the social, political, economic and moral life of the entire society," the spokesman said.

The legalization of Solidarity, an independent trade union, was announced in Poland April 17 — one of a series of reforms worked out in round-table talks involving government and opposition leaders. Other announced steps include elections under a multiparty system. The pope said the changes in the country were due to "the efforts of those who have overcome prejudices, resentments and mistakes which have divided them."

After the meeting, a pleased Walesa said he felt like he had "recharged his batteries" and was ready to "tackle any problem."

Walesa also met for 45 minutes with the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli. Walesa, his wife Danuta, and several advisers later lunched with the pope.

Walesa gave the pope a book titled "How Solidarity was Born." The pope, in presenting Walesa with a mosaic depicting Mary, said he wanted it to be "a memento for a reborn Solidarity."

It was Walesa's first visit to the Vatican since 1981, the year martial law was declared and Solidarity was closed down by the government. The two leaders have met during the pope's visits to Poland in 1983 and 1987.

In a talk shortly before the papal au-

dience, Walesa said the pope's moral support had been essential for Solidarity's hard-won success. He said that if the pope had not lived following a shooting in 1981, Solidarity would not have survived either. Walesa was speaking at Rome's Sacred Heart University, home of Policlinico Gemelli Hospital, where the pope was operated on after the shooting. "Precisely here the life of Solidarity was saved, because here the life of our great Polish pope was saved," Walesa said in a poignant meeting with doctors and nurses of the hospital staff.

Immediately after he arrived in Rome April 19, Walesa said the pope "has always been at our side" in the past.

"I want to ask the pope to give his blessing to this difficult road of reform," he said.

Other Polish church leaders have already expressed strong support for the round-table results. Among those accompanying Walesa on his trip to Italy was Bishop Tadeusz Goclowski of Gdansk, the shipbuilding city where Solidarity was born in 1980, and where Walesa still lives and works. Vatican sources said the bishop's presence in the official delegation demonstrated the church's direct interest in Poland's social reform.

Introducing Bishop Goclowski at Sacred Heart University, Walesa described him as "one of the authors and planners of the round-table talks" between government



AP/Wide World Photos
Polish Solidarity leader Lech Walesa kneels to kiss the hand of Pope John Paul II as they meet in a private audience at the Vatican Thursday.
and opposition representatives.

A few days before his visit to the Vatican, Walesa met with Polish leader Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski for the first time since 1981, a sign of his new standing in the country.

When he arrived in Rome, Walesa was met at the airport by Poland's ambassador to Italy, who gave the labor leader two roses — one red and one white, Poland's national colors.

A Polish Vatican official said Walesa's meeting with the pope, coming after the recent flurry of political gains, represented a "personal triumph" for the Solidarity leader.

The official also noted that the pope had met five days earlier with Jozef Czyrek, a top member of Poland's Communist Party hierarchy and a foreign affairs official. That meeting, the official said, in a sense balanced that of Walesa and showed that the Vatican is working with both sides.

The Walesa meeting came at a promising moment in Vatican-Polish relations. Poland's bishops and state representatives recently agreed on a proposed law that would give the church and its organizations legal standing for the first time under Poland's communist regime. Vatican officials have said the move opens the way to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Poland. Diplomatic relations have been sought for years by the Polish government.

One reason for Walesa's visit to Italy was to open up trade and economic aid possibilities with the West, which is considered essential for Poland's economic survival. During his visit, Walesa said Solidarity now wanted to help the government obtain Western help for the economy.

Women ministers draw 'double takes' in Rome

By Greg Erlandson
NC News

VATICAN CITY — When the Rev. Julia Gatta called on Pope John Paul II as a member of a delegation of the National Council of Churches, she turned more than a few heads, including the pope's.

The Rev. Gatta's dark skirt, blouse and jacket were topped by the collar of an Episcopalian priest.

"It seemed the pope looked over at me a few times as he spoke," she said after the April 14 audience.

The Rev. Gatta is a member of the Faith and Order commissions of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches and a lecturer in medieval spirituality at Yale Divinity School.

She said she was impressed by the "gracious reception" she was accorded everywhere in the Vatican, though there were a few "double takes" as, in skirt and collar, she visited several curial offices during the delegation's April 10-14 stay in Rome.

She said it was a "great privilege" to meet the pope.

"As a (female) Anglican priest, I think I represented that possibility to the Catholic world," she added.

The Rev. Gatta was joined in the delegation by the Rev. Patricia A. McClurg, a Presbyterian minister and NCC president; the Rev. Eileen Lindner, also a Presbyterian minister; and the Rev. Melanie May, a minister in the Church of the Brethren.

The women were together as they walked into the audience with the pope, and the Rev. Gatta said she was "touched" when the pope referred to all of them as "my sisters."

When the Rev. May was introduced to the pope, he asked why the Church of the Brethren was not called the Church of the Sisters and Brothers.

"Melanie has heard that before, but she never expected to hear it from the pope," the Rev. Gatta said, laughing.

Despite the presence of women ministers

in the delegation, the Vatican discussions never touched on women's ordination, the delegates said.

The Rev. Arie Brouwer, a former (Dutch) Reformed executive who serves as the NCC's general secretary, said the delegation "was not entrusted by the council's member churches to talk about women's ordination."

In part this is because the National Council of Churches is divided on the issue of women's ordination, with Orthodox and Eastern-rite churches particularly opposed.

"Some of us" in the council "in a sense would not recognize someone else's ordination whether a man or a woman. The issues here are tremendous," said the Rev. McClurg.

"What we have shared across communion lines, Roman Catholic and others, is the rich gifts of women to be brought. When we get to the matter of offices, we have significant disagreements," she said.

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