

Poland, Vatican instate full diplomatic relations

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Poland has become the first Soviet-bloc country to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

The decision caps years of often tense negotiations during which the church, led by Polish-born Pope John Paul II, was a major spark for political reforms leading to the current multiparty Parliament.

A joint announcement was made July 17 at the Vatican and in the Polish capital of Warsaw and restores the diplomatic ties broken by Poland in 1945.

The decision recognizes the "noble traditions of many centuries" that unite the two states and expresses a desire "to develop mutual friendly relations," said the joint statement.

The statement said the Vatican planned to establish a nunciature in Warsaw and that Poland planned to establish an embassy to the Vatican. It did not say who would head the diplomatic missions.

A Vatican source said these would be announced at a later date.

The decision came several months after Poland passed a law granting legal status to the Catholic Church. The lack of legal status was the last major stumbling block to restoring diplomatic ties.

The law was approved in May after agreement had been reached with church leaders. It granted the church legal status for the first time since the communist takeover in 1944 and made Poland the first Soviet-bloc country to reach a formal reconciliation with the Catholic Church.

The law restores church property confiscated in the 1950s and gives the church the legal right to build churches, teach religion and establish and operate Catholic schools. The church also can broadcast religious programming, establish radio and television stations, and publish newspapers and books.

The law "speeds the negotiations for



In Gdansk, Poland, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa (right) salutes President Bush with the "V" sign after Bush's recent speech in front of the Lenin Shipyard and the monument to the workers who died in the 1970 strikes in Poland.

diplomatic relations," Joaquin Navarro-Valls, Vatican press spokesman, said at the time.

Vatican sources say the law was followed by an intense series of meetings in Warsaw and the Vatican to reach agreement on diplomatic relations.

The establishment of diplomatic relations keeps Poland in the forefront of Eastern European nations seeking better ties to the Catholic Church. Hungary, another Warsaw Pact nation, also is in favor of diplomatic relations, but had yet to reach agreement with the Vatican.

Reform may legalize church of Mexico

By Mike Tangeman
Catholic News Service

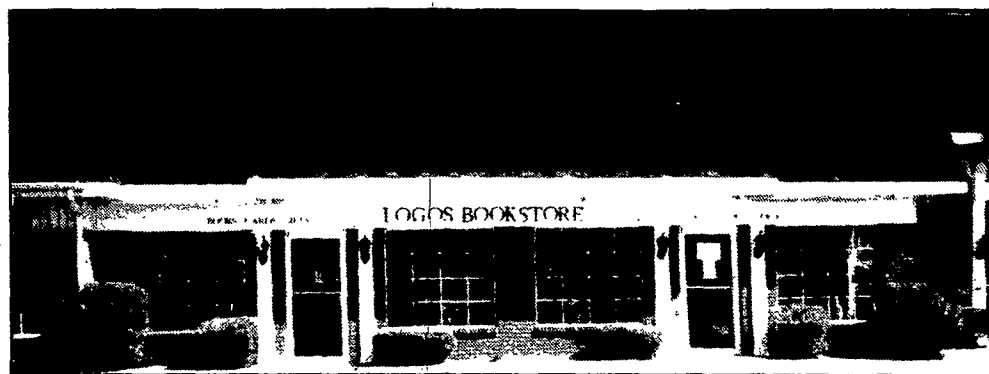
MEXICO CITY — Mexico's hierarchy and officials of the Mexican interior ministry have been meeting regularly to discuss a possible reform of the country's constitution that would grant the church legal recognition, according to the abbot of Mexico City's most important church, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Father Guillermo Schuleberg Prado, abbot of the basilica since 1963, told the daily newspaper *La Jornada* that the church-state meetings have been taking place regularly since President Carlos Salinas de Gortari took office Dec. 1. The object of the meetings is to work out a reform of the Mexican Constitution's Article 130, which states that churches are not to be granted recognition as institutions under Mexican law.

Father Schuleberg also said the Vatican's apostolic delegate to Mexico, Archbishop Girolamo Prigione, is participating in the talks as an observer.

The Catholic Church has been a legal non-entity since after the 1910-1917 Mexican Revolution when anti-clerical language, including nationalization of church property, was written into the Constitution.

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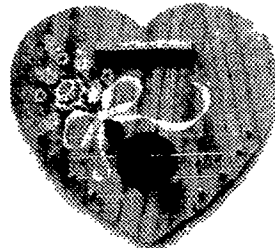
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