

Official: Ukrainian church will be legalized

By Bill Pritchard
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A Soviet parliamentarian says he believes President Mikhail Gorbachev will promise Pope John Paul II the legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church when the two leaders meet at the Vatican in November.

Volodymyr Yavorivsky, representing the Kiev region of the Ukraine in the newly created Congress of People's Deputies, said, "I think this is the exact type of gift Gorbachev will bring the pope. He will bring a firm promise of the Soviet president."

The 47-year-old Ukrainian novelist-turned-politician said Gorbachev gains politically by allowing the Ukrainian church, outlawed since 1946, its freedom.

Speaking through an interpreter in an interview Oct. 24 at the Ukrainian Catholic Holy Family Shrine in northeast Washington, Yavorivsky said in return for legalization the Soviet president gets a "twofold advantage:" he satisfies a huge number of Ukrainian Catholics who have not let him sleep for more than a year in their campaign for legalization and he gets good relations with the worldwide Catholic Church — "a very large and powerful body."

"If millions of believers win," Yavorivsky said, "the government wins."

The pope and Gorbachev are expected to meet during the Soviet leader's scheduled Nov. 29-Dec. 1 visit to Rome.

Yavorivsky said he believes that despite ancient rivalries between Ukrainian Catholics and Russian Orthodox in the Ukraine, the re-emergence of the Ukrainian church would be peaceful.

Yavorivsky was in the United States at the invitation of New Jersey Democrats Sen. Bill Bradley and Rep. James Florio.

In addition to his parliamentary post, Yavorivsky heads the Kiev regional branch of the Popular Movement of Ukraine for Restructuring, a political reform organization similar to those which have emerged in the Baltic Soviet republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The congress he was elected to last spring is a popularly chosen body which elects members of the Supreme Soviet, the USSR's principal lawmaking assembly. Spokesmen for the Soviet delegate have declined to comment on whether he is a Catholic, noting that he belongs to the officially atheist Communist Party.

But Yavorivsky spoke of "our faith" in comments on the continuing "tragedy" following the partial meltdown at the

Chernobyl nuclear plant in 1986. The plant is located in the Kiev region.

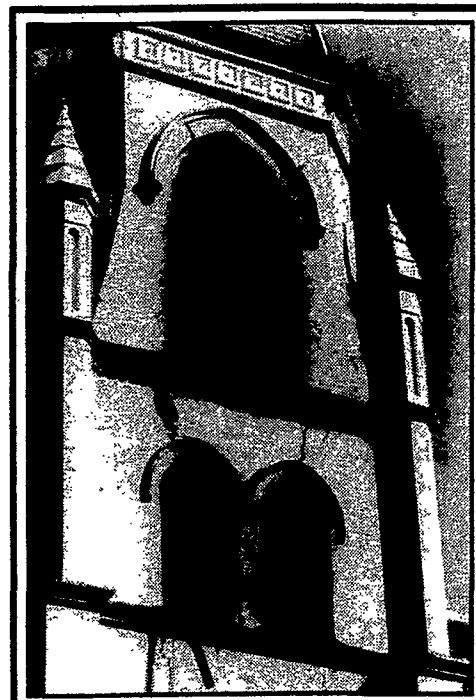
The Soviet deputy said that churches and cemeteries within the contamination zone around the plant have been laced with radiation and stand abandoned. Despite that, he said, on major holidays "people still sneak back into this zone to commemorate their ancestors ... and to pray at their churches."

The Chernobyl accident propelled Yavorivsky into politics, said Ukrainian American spokesmen. The popular novelist had led a relatively quiet literary life until then. But the nuclear disaster and what Ukrainians considered the central government's inadequate response catalyzed him and thousands of other Ukrainians into political activism, they said.

But even before the nuclear accident, Ukrainian Catholics were well-organized activists, according to the Soviet deputy.

That organization has been crucial in the effort to liberalize Soviet regulation of religion, he said. The campaign has included hunger strikes in Moscow aimed successfully at drawing the world's attention, as well as the Kremlin's, to the issue, Yavorivsky said.

"The people themselves are pushing the government to enact these laws," he said.



CNS
Cracks in the right tower of St. Francis de Sales Cathedral in Oakland, California, following the Oct. 17 earthquake have forced the diocese to close the building.

Mercy sisters plan retreat for High Acres in Geneva

The Sisters of Mercy will offer a retreat on vocation discernment, entitled "Discovering God's Presence and Movement in Your Life," from Nov. 10-12, at High Acres in Geneva.

The weekend is open to single women 18 years of age and older who would like to join other women who are searching to discover God's direction in their lives.

The presenter for the retreat will be Sister Therese Richardson, RSM, a sister on staff at the Mercy Prayer Center, 65 Highland Ave., Rochester.

The weekend will begin with supper at 7 p.m. on Friday, and close Sunday at 1 p.m. Contact Sister Mary Fran Wegman, Mercy vocation director, at 716/342-9594.

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