

Havel meets cardinal; pope will visit Prague

NEW YORK (CNS) — Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel conferred briefly Feb. 22 in New York with an ecumenical delegation that included Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York and Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick of Newark, N.J.

The private meeting occurred at the cardinal's residence following presentation of the 1990 Appeal of Conscience Award to Havel, according to Joseph Zwilling, spokesman for the Archdiocese of New York. The content of Havel's discussions with the religious leaders was not made public.

Also participating, along with Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop McCarrick and other Jewish and Christian leaders, was Jesuit Father Joseph A. O'Hare, president of Fordham University, Zwilling said.

Havel, who earlier during a U.S. visit had addressed the U.S. Congress and met with President Bush, was honored with a Steuben crystal glass star from the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, an ecumenical organization that promotes religious freedom around the world.

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, said in his statement for the award presentation that his organization began working in Czechoslovakia in 1966, a year after the group was founded.

Its efforts on behalf of religious believers throughout the 1970s and 1980s included a visit in 1989 by the Rev. David H.C. Read of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York and Jesuit Father Michael J. Lavelle, president of John Carroll University, Cleveland.

During that period, "we pressed our case for the right of religious education, the appointment of priests and other religious officials," Rabbi Schneier said. "We were handed crumbs instead — a few concessions here and there. But we persisted and drew plans to do more."

"It was less than a year ago, Cardinal O'Connor, that we sat here together agonizing how we could help to strengthen religious freedom in Czechoslovakia," the rabbi said in the statement. "Now a miracle has taken place ... the tyrants have been ousted and the people of Czechoslovakia know a new birth of freedom."

Havel, a playwright and former imprisoned dissident, was chosen as president of Czechoslovakia as a part of that move toward democracy, following the public overthrowing of Czechoslovakia's communist regime.

Rabbi Schneier, who is senior rabbi at Park East Synagogue in New York, prais-



Catholic News Service
During a recent U.S. visit, Czech President Vaclav Havel received the 1990 Appeal of Conscience Award.

ed Havel as "a moral voice in the tradition of the prophets, the conscience of his countrymen during the darkest days of oppression, a noble symbol of hope as Czechoslovakia re-enters the free world."

In a related matter, Pope John Paul II will make a quick visit to Czechoslovakia April 21-22, the Vatican announced last week.

The trip will mark the first papal visit to East Europe since the weakening of communist control over the region. It will also be the pope's first trip to a Warsaw Pact country other than his native Poland.

The Feb. 22 Vatican announcement said the pope will visit the national capital of Prague, the main religious shrine at Velehrad and the city of Bratislava.

Velehrad is important because it is the burial place of St. Methodius. St. Methodius and his brother St. Cyril are known as the "apostles of the Slavs"

because they brought Christianity to much of central Europe. St. Cyril is buried in Rome.

The Vatican announcement comes after rapid improvements in church-state relations since December when massive street demonstrations toppled the communist government.

Earlier in February, the Vatican named five new bishops for Czechoslovakia, filling all the nation's sees with resident ordinaries.

Vatican officials said the papal decision to make the "lightning trip" into Czechoslovakia was caused by his desire to thank the country's Catholics for remaining faithful despite four decades of communist repression.

The pope also wanted to make the trip during the lifetime of Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek of Prague as a homage to the 90-year-old churchman.

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Vatican data show ordinations on rise

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican said the number of priests ordained worldwide in 1988 jumped by about 10 percent, the biggest increase in at least two decades.

There were 7,998 ordinations in 1988, 747 more than the previous year, the Vatican said Feb. 22.

The figure included 5,750 new diocesan priests and 2,248 new religious priests, representing, proportionally, nearly equal gains in both categories.

At the same time, the Vatican said the number of the church's seminarians increased nearly 2 percent in 1988 to about 92,000.

There was also an increase of about seven percent in the number of permanent deacons, which totaled 15,686.

The statistics, released by the Vatican press office, were included in the 1990 Vatican yearbook, which was presented to Pope John Paul II.

The number of priestly ordinations has steadily increased during the 1980s after decreasing during the 1960s and '70s.

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