

# Contraception teachings won't be declared infallible

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania — Vatican sources said Sept. 1 that Pope John Paul II is nearing completion of a document that will consider general moral issues without entering into such specific questions as birth control.

One informed Vatican official also dismissed reports that the pope may be preparing to declare as infallible the church's ban on artificial birth control.

The new document, expected to be issued as a papal encyclical or an apostolic

letter, will be a philosophical treatise on the foundations of moral theology, the official said as the pope began his tour of African nations.

The pope is expected to explore the role of the individual conscience in the formation of moral awareness, as well as the roots of theological thinking.

"This is the pope's field. He used to teach ethics and morality," the official noted. The document might be ready by the end of the year.

The *New York Times* reported Aug. 29 that some theologians think the document

will declare the church's teaching on contraception to be infallible. The paper said speculation about the document's content already is generating "rumors and anxiety" among theologians.

The Vatican official predicted that some theologians may feel inspired by the pope's new statement, while others may feel constrained.

He said, however, that the pope's document would be less "disciplinary" in content than an instruction issued earlier this year by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. That instruction strongly

criticized public or organized dissent by theologians who do not agree with church teachings.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation, was asked in July if the Vatican was preparing to declare the birth control ban infallible. He replied that he was unaware of any such step.

Some theologians have argued for years that *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life"), the 1967 encyclical that condemned contraceptive birth control as well as abortion, should be raised to the level of dogma to preclude any doubt about its authority.

## Chaplains called up to accompany units shipping out to Mideast

SILVER SPRING, Md. (CNS) — The Archdiocese for the Military Services has contacted its 497 reserve chaplains to inform them what processes to follow should they be called to "temporary active duty" in the Persian Gulf.

Dominican Father Michael McCormick, a spokesman for the military archdiocese, said "temporary active duty" was "probably going to be for the duration of this."

In addition to the 497 priests in the chaplain reserves, Father McCormick said, 697 priests are on active duty in all branches of the armed services.

As of Aug. 29, 24 Catholic chaplains have accompanied their units to the Middle East.

Among them is Father Richard Mattie of the Diocese of Rochester, who was on active duty prior to the invasion of Kuwait. Newly assigned to the naval hospital in Oakland, Calif., Father Mattie has

been deployed as chaplain on the hospital ship Mercy bound for the Persian Gulf, diocesan officials said.

If called to duty, chaplain reserves must make ecclesial and military provisions for their return to active service. The ecclesial part, Father McCormick said, "does not take very long." Once the chaplain makes all provisions, he added, "he's ready to move out."

"We know they're prepared for this type of thing," Father McCormick said.

The military archdiocese will also assist chaplains in securing supplies when they are deployed. The archdiocese does not stockpile such items.

"It is a very common thing that the men and women are about to go out on deployment and they bring along with them a rosary, medals or a prayer book," Father McCormick said.

And while the military archdiocese has not intensified efforts to recruit chaplains,

the Gulf crisis shows in dramatic terms the need for more chaplains, he said.

The individual service branches recruit chaplains from the active priesthood, while the military archdiocese co-sponsors seminarians with individual dioceses.

Under the co-sponsorship program, a newly ordained priest serves for three

years in the diocese for which he was ordained, then 20 years on active chaplain duty before returning to the diocese. The first priest to participate in the plan, which started in 1985, was ordained this summer.

To date, Father McCormick said, no priests have volunteered to serve as chaplains in the wake of the Gulf crisis.

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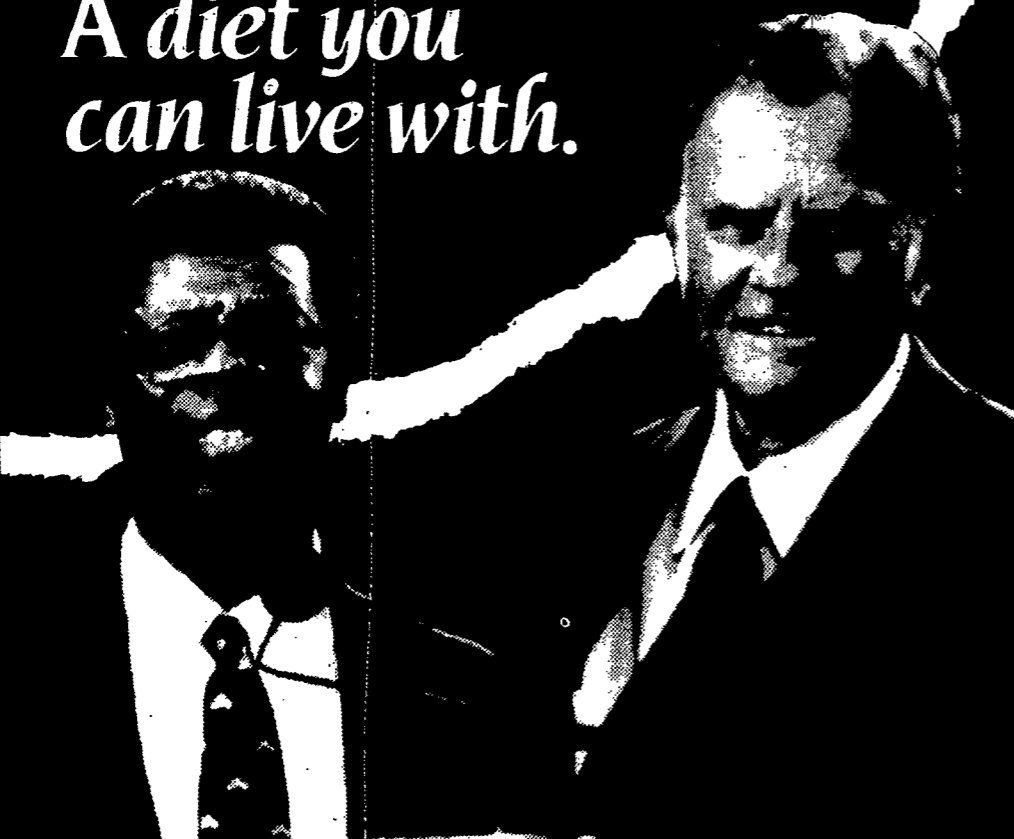
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