

Vatican deficit tops \$91.5 million

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — With a record Vatican deficit of \$91.5 million predicted for this year, church leaders from around the world pledged to raise more money for Rome.

The deficit figure was released two days after presidents of national bishops' conferences ended an unprecedented assembly at the Vatican April 8-9. The bishops were summoned to Rome by Pope John Paul II to begin studying a more systematic solution to the Vatican's chronic operating deficit.

In a concluding letter, the bishops said they had agreed to "work together to cover what is necessary, in order to guarantee the work of the Apostolic See."

The letter, without specifying possible solutions, said participants had examined "various proposals to help bring a stable solution to the present financial condition of the Holy See." The letter was addressed to fellow bishops worldwide.

According to Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the bishops agreed that they must do more to help the Vatican weather its annual fiscal storm.

Most prelates, however, would rather increase contributions to Peter's Pence than begin a second special collection for the Vatican, he said. Peter's Pence is an annual collection for the pope's use, and in recent years it has been applied to the deficit.

Archbishop Pilarczyk noted that in the United States, contributions to Peter's Pence had increased some 30 percent over the last five years — a heartening figure, but "obviously, everybody can be doing more," he said.

One of the Vatican's main concerns is that Peter's Pence alone is no longer able to cover the annual shortfall, which continues to increase. The \$91.5 million deficit predicted for 1991 is about 6.5 percent greater than the previous year.

The final deficit figure may be even higher because the Vatican must still find a way to finance a pension fund, which until this year has been paid out of operating expenses. The Vatican hopes to meet the 1991 deficit through an increase in Peter's Pence, plus surplus income from Vatican City-State operations. The city-state makes money on properties, museums, and the sale of stamps and coins.

In their meeting with heads of bishops' conferences, Vatican officials hinted that,

ideally, they would like to see Peter's Pence returned as a special discretionary fund for papal use. They indicated that the pope would especially like to see such aid go to churches in Eastern Europe.

U.S. Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka, head of the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See, said the deficit required a more permanent solution, one relying more on financial certainty than on a "methodology of hope." The amount of Peter's Pence has varied greatly in recent years, and is also subject to exchange-market fluctuations.

But for the short-term, Peter's Pence will no doubt continue to go for the deficit.

The Vatican officials opened the meeting with episcopal representatives by stating, in no uncertain terms, that it was up to local dioceses to help the Holy See run its operations.

Archbishop Angelo Sodano, Vatican secretary of state, said the Vatican's precarious financial condition made it "more urgent than ever" to find a new and practical solution that involves dioceses around the world.

"The church of Rome gives much to the particular churches throughout the world, and it is therefore fair that it expects much from them in return," he said.



AP/Wide World Photos
CRYING REFUGEES — After crossing the Iraqi border into Iran on April 9, a Kurdish woman holds her crying children as they wait to enter a refugee camp. Despite international efforts, Kurdish and Iranian officials say little aid is reaching the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Iraq's army.

Morale of young priests up; linked to good first post

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Recently ordained priests today are generally happier than their counterparts of 20 years ago, but a bad first assignment may hurt their morale for years, according to a newly published study of U.S. priests who have been ordained five to nine years.

The study, funded by the Lilly Endowment and sponsored by the Seminary Department of the National Catholic Educational Association, was based on responses made in early 1990 by more than 1,500 priests ordained in the years 1980-84.

A key lesson for future church policy in the United States could be the study's finding that many priests reporting morale

problems several years after ordination also described their first pastoral assignment as having been detrimental or not very helpful.

The high morale figures — 90 percent of the priests surveyed described themselves as happy, and 80 percent said they were satisfied with their work — contrasted sharply with wide speculation in recent years that the growing priest shortage has undermined morale of today's priests.

It also contrasted with morale findings of a 1970 national study conducted for the U.S. bishops by sociologists Richard Schoenherr and Father Andrew Greeley.

The 1990 study, released March 19, was conducted by U.S. Catholic Conference research director Father Eugene A. Hemrick and Catholic University of

America sociologist Dean Hoge. It repeated three key morale questions asked in 1970 and compared the results.

"On all three the levels were higher in 1990 than in 1970," Hoge and Father Hemrick reported.

Hoge and Father Hemrick said the survey did not reveal the reasons for differences in morale between 1970 and 1990, but the researchers speculated that "the year 1970 was a particularly bad one for morale" because of the wide turbulence in the church after the Second Vatican Council and the high numbers of priests resigning at that time.

Ironically, some factors connected with the priest shortage today could be contributing to higher morale. A lack of priests means younger priests are given greater responsibilities and promoted more quickly.

Both the 1970 and 1990 studies found substantially higher morale among pastors than among associate pastors, and in 1970 Father Greeley cited as important factors the dissatisfaction of newly ordained priests a lack of prospects for promotion and a sense of frustration that their abilities were underutilized.

In other topics addressed by the survey, newly ordained priests reported a strong eucharistic and biblical spirituality, but that they tend to ignore such traditional prac-

tices as regular spiritual direction, frequent confession and daily prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours.

When respondents were asked to rate a list of 18 pastoral activities in terms of their importance to the priesthood, Scripture was the focus of three of the four activities cited as a strong or primary ideal by more than 90 percent of the priests.

"Preaching the Gospel consciously through personal witness" was cited by 98 percent as one of their strong or primary ideals.

More than five in every six respondents agreed that — whatever else he does — the most important thing about a priest is that he "proclaims God's word and provides for sacramental encounter with God in Christ."

On the other hand, some practices traditionally considered an important measure of a priest's spirituality are not a regular part of the life of many of the priests surveyed.

Only 5 percent of diocesan priests and 2 percent of religious said they go to confession weekly. Another 19 percent in each group said they receive the sacrament monthly. About one-third said they go to confession "every couple of months," and 44 percent said they go "once or twice a year" or "never."

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