

Pope watching talks with concern

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — President George Bush plans to give Pope John Paul II a personal briefing Nov. 8 on the Mideast peace conference, the Vatican announced.

The briefing will take place during a private meeting at the Vatican and is part of the pope's efforts to "follow closely" the progress of the conference, said Joaquin Navarro-Valls, papal spokesman.

Although not a participant in the conference, the Vatican has made its positions known to U.S., Israeli and Arab officials, Navarro-Valls said. He made the statement Oct. 26 four days before the talks were scheduled to begin at the presidential palace in Madrid, Spain.

Navarro-Valls said the Vatican's main concern is the status of Jerusalem and access to holy sites.

- Among other concerns, he said, were:
- Peace and security for Lebanon.
 - Permanent security for Israel.
 - Recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

"The Mideast crisis involves dimensions vaster than territorial conflicts. Also in play is the problem of religious freedom," Navarro-Valls said.

"The pope has welcomed with satisfaction" the news of the conference, the spokesman said. "He hopes it is the start of a process that brings lasting peace to the Middle East."

The conference was organized by the United States and the Soviet Union. It will mark the first time Israeli officials, Palestinian representatives and authorities of Arab countries have gathered in direct negotiations.

"This is a road that must be walked," said Navarro-Valls.

As the conference progresses, the pope "will express at the proper times his support and concerns," he said.

Navarro-Valls denied Italian press reports which cited unnamed sources saying that Israel vetoed Vatican participation in the talks because the Vatican does not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

"The Holy See has not asked any of the parties to participate at the Madrid conference," he said. "No one has vetoed Vatican participation."

During the conference's initial phases, there are "too many technical questions" involving territorial disputes for the Vatican to participate, he said.

But the church hopes to have a role once negotiations turn to Jerusalem and access to holy places considered sacred by Jews, Christians and Muslims, he said.

The Vatican's long-standing policies on Mideast controversies show how it avoids

getting involved in technical issues, especially those with partisan political overtones.

The Vatican wants international guarantees for Jerusalem protecting free access to holy sites, but it does not take a position on political control over Jerusalem — a main controversy among Arabs and Israelis. It says this must be worked out in negotiations among the parties directly concerned.

Israel has declared Jerusalem — including parts taken over in the 1967 war with several Arab neighbors — as its capital.

The Vatican favors a homeland for Palestinians, but it does not say where that homeland should be.

It favors secure borders for Israel, but it does not take a stand on its boundaries.

The Vatican wants an end to foreign domination in Lebanon and a continuation of a major Christian role in society, but it does not take a stand on how political power should be divided between Christians and Muslims.

Prior to the Madrid conference, the pope received several briefings on the Middle East.

On Oct. 26 he met privately for 20 minutes with Lebanese President Elias Hrawi, whose administration is closely linked to Syria. At the departure ceremony, the pope told Hrawi that "your country has been very tried."

The issue of Syrian occupation of much of Lebanon and of Israeli occupation of a strip of southern Lebanon are expected to surface during the Mideast peace conference.

Lebanon is of special concern to the pope because of his commitment "to defend the weakest" in the Middle East, Navarro-Valls said after the meeting.

The Vatican did not provide information on what was said in private by the pope and Hrawi.

On Oct. 28, the pope met privately with Latin-rite Patriarch Michel Sabbah. The Vatican announced the meeting, but did not say what was discussed.

In an Oct. 22 Vatican Radio interview, Patriarch Sabbah, a Palestinian, said a successful Mideast conference must find a solution "for all the pending problems among Israelis and Palestinians and the problems of the holy places."



AP/Wide World Photos
SORRY SIGHT — Fran Solomon weeps Oct. 22 amid the rubble of her burned home in Oakland, Calif. She had not seen the house since fire swept the area Sunday, Oct. 22, forcing evacuations, destroying nearly 3,000 residences and killing 24 people.

New split develops in breakaway church

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Archbishop George Stallings, who founded the breakaway African-American Catholic Congregation, has suffered another break in the ranks of priests he recruited to join him.

Two of his clergy members, the Rev. Trevor Bentley, a former Episcopal priest who was ordained in September, and Monsignor H. Randolph Caines, a formerly lapsed priest of a splinter group known as Christ Catholic Church, have left.

Last year, former Salvatorian priest Father Bruce Greening split from the church and later was ordained a bishop of a church he founded.

The latest split developed when the Rev. Bentley told the *Los Angeles Times* Oct. 21 that the African-American Catholic Congregation had no fiscal accountability or doctrinal responsibility, charging that one of the church's rites was "voodoo."

He had been scheduled to open an Imani Temple in Los Angeles in November and be made a bishop shortly thereafter.

The "Pouring of Libation," the rite to which the Rev. Bentley referred, asks the intercession of deceased ancestors. While "Christianized" from the African prac-

tice, it is "no more voodoo than calling on St. Joseph or St. Paul," Archbishop Stallings said at an Oct. 22 press conference in Washington.

Monsignor Caines, meanwhile, was made an honorary bishop for the American National Catholic Church by its head, Archbishop Richard Bridges, at an Oct. 13 service moments after Archbishop Stallings had made him a monsignor at the same service.

Archbishop Bridges was the prelate who elevated then-Father Stallings to bishop and archbishop in the African-American Catholic Congregation, but who has since repudiated Archbishop Stallings' ministry.

Although all the breakaway churches claim valid apostolic succession and call themselves "Old Catholic," the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, Netherlands, recognizes the Polish National Catholic Church as its only U.S. member.

Archbishop Stallings said he bore no animosity to those priests who have left him. "If we have difficulty with them splintering from us, then we'd have to question our own splintering" from the Roman Catholic Church, he said.

He added he might not have left the Catholic Church had he been elsewhere in the United States or had a bishop other

than Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington.

But the die was cast, he said, when Cardinal Hickey turned down his request for an African-American rite in 1989.

In a 1989 statement, Cardinal Hickey said, "No one should mistake this independent and heedless personal initiative for progress in deepening the African-American expression of the Catholic faith."

With the emergence of an "infrastructure" for his new church, Archbishop Stallings said, there's "no turning back."

Archbishop Stallings said that his church may be better off training its own priests. "We cannot afford to accept any Roman Catholic priests that have come to us," he said.

Of Archbishop Stallings' remaining six clergy members, only Fathers Glenn Jeanmarie and August Griffin were priests in good standing when they announced their intent to leave Roman Catholicism.

Of the others, one cleric was a priest nearing expulsion from his religious order; one was a permanent deacon on leave of absence; another was a former seminarian; and one, the Rev. Rose Vernell, is a former nun.

DEMOCRAT FOR CITY COURT JUDGE



Frank P. Geraci, Jr. has been a lifelong resident of the City of Rochester. He grew up in the 19th Ward and currently resides in the Browncroft neighborhood with his wife Karla and three children, Kimberley, Pamela, and Michael. The Geraci family is a member of St. John the Evangelist Parish on Humboldt Street. Frank is currently serving as Chair of the Southeast Quadrant Governing Board of the Diocese of Rochester, and was formerly President of the St. John/Blessed Sacrament School Board.

FRANK P. GERACI, JR.
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