

Pope: Trip is witness against world violence

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT TO JAMAICA (CNS) — Pope John Paul II said his trip to Jamaica, Mexico and Denver would be a witness against violence, drugs and war — all parts of a "culture of death" with particularly devastating effects on young people.

The pope spoke during a press conference Aug. 9 en route to Jamaica, the first stop on an eight-day trip which would include the Mexican Yucatan and World Youth Day in Denver.

The pope was asked about recent violent killings of young people in Denver, about drug trafficking in Mexico and the related death of Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo of Guadalajara, and about the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In contrast to the weighty issues of violence around the globe, the 73-year-old pope took a lighter approach to continuing questions about his health. The trip took place almost a year after the Jamaica and Mexico stops were postponed because of surgery to remove a non-cancerous colon tumor.

"I'm still walking on my own two feet, even in the mountains," said the pope, who spent his July vacation in the Italian Alps and planned to spend part of Aug. 13 hiking in the Rocky Mountains.

"I'm doing all I can to stay in shape, to not create any problems," he said.

Pope John Paul said the recent gang violence in Denver is a shocking event in a developed and progressive country such as the United States.

"It is necessary to ask clearly, 'who is responsible for this degradation of young people?'" the pope said.

"The orientation, the climate" of the media contributes to an overall lack of respect for and devaluing of human life, he told reporters.

Pope John Paul said he was looking forward to his first meeting with President Bill Clinton in Denver Aug. 12. He said he had met Clinton's three predecessors, so could tell him, "I am an old pope and you are a young president."

The pope said that although his and Clinton's views on abortion are opposing and well known, it will still be on the agenda for their private meeting at Jesuit-run Regis University.

Three months after the killing of Cardinal Posadas Ocampo, who apparently was caught in the cross fire of rival drug gangs, the pope said he would remind the Mexican people of the hope that always has been part of their culture.

The pope said drug trafficking and the related violence "is another aspect of the degradation" of a culture and the devaluation of human life.

When asked about humanitarian intervention in Somalia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the pope said it is a Gospel-based principle, although the practical aspects of that intervention are not always clear.

"Certainly, if I see another — my neighbor, a fellow citizen or who is not a fellow citizen — persecuted or downtrodden, I must do something," the pope said.

While a repetition of the moral obligation to provide assistance in "sad situations" such as Somalia and Bosnia are not always welcome, it is an obligation of the church, he said.

But Pope John Paul declined to comment on the morality of proposed NATO air strikes against Serbian artillery units.

"This question, I think, is mostly up to the politicians," the pope said.

"It would not even be useful to ask the pope this question, because he has a responsibility proper to a pastor."

Arresting activists



AP/Wide World Photos

Rescues target clinic in Pa.

An Upland township police officer takes a pro-life activist's hand before the protester was carried away from an abortion clinic near Chester, Pa. July 9. The pro-life movement is changing the face of civil disobedience, fusing Reagan-era values with liberal protest tactics from the 1960s.

Committee outlines agenda

By Steven Sims
Catholic News Service

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — An ad hoc committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has outlined four areas on which it will concentrate while considering problems of sexual abuse in the church.

The committee, established during the bishops' June meeting in New Orleans, will focus on:

- Appropriate church response to guilty or accused priests, victims or potential victims and their families.
- Preventing future abuse through screening of seminary candidates.
- Reassignment of priests who have been involved in sexual abuse.
- Education of clergy and the public about sexual abuse.

Bishop John C. Favalora of St. Petersburg, Fla., a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, outlined those priorities in an interview with his diocesan newspaper, *The Florida Catholic*, after the committee's first organizational meeting Aug. 3 in Chicago. He said the eight-member committee hopes its work will benefit the general public as well as the church.

"There is probably no single institution or agency in the country that has gathered more information on this subject," he said.

"We're probably the only major group discussing this topic, as such. Hopefully our work will better educate Catholic people."

Pedophilia has been a subject of particular embarrassment to the church recently. But Bishop Favalora said estimates that 2 percent of priests may be involved in sexual abuse of children mirror statistics for pedophilia in the general public.

"Regardless of the percentage, this is a violence to the human person and needs our serious attention," he said.

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