

Draw strength from faith, pope says

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Leading a two-day celebration that mixed liturgy with a sound-and-light show, Pope John Paul II encouraged families from around the world to draw strength from the faith and resist the "social decay" of contemporary culture.

The Oct. 8-9 ceremony, the culmination of the International Year of the Family, was marked by a festive mood as more than 150,000 people from 150 countries packed St. Peter's Square for an evening of singing and dancing and for Sunday Mass the next morning.

The pope, looking refreshed and beloved by the crowd, joked about his age and spoke off-the-cuff about a topic dear to his heart: the family in modern society. Despite the good efforts of many, he said, "today's family is seriously threatened. And how could the church not be worried?"

In his evening talk Oct. 8, the pope said the church was working to protect couples from a "hedonistic selfishness" that drains the vitality of families and makes some marriages "almost sterile." On the international level, he said, church leaders are trying to counter a "deceptive form of neo-colonialism which imposes projects of the systematic limitation of births."

He criticized a tendency, which he said was evident at a recent U.N. conference on population, to distort the meaning of the family by removing it from the context of marriage.

All this represents a danger for humanity because of the family's role as the basic cell of society and the first place of formation for individuals, he said.

Faced with the cultural and social decay presently taking place, in the presence of the spread of ills such as violence, drugs and organized crime, what

better guarantee of prevention and liberation is there than a united family, morally healthy and socially involved?" he said.

Looking out on the tens of thousands of families in St. Peter's Square, the pope said that never before has the "heroism of everyday life" been so required of believers, who are asked to go "against the current with regard to the world's way of thinking."

He said he would add his own contribution soon in publishing a long-awaited encyclical on human life, expected to deal with abortion and other pro-life issues. Vatican officials said the encyclical, expected toward the end of the year, will be titled, "Evangelium Vitae" ("The Gospel of Life.")

The pope's remarks were frequently interrupted by applause and cheering from the international audience. At one point, as the chant of "Viva il papa!" went up, the pope bantered back, "Up to now he's still living" — a good-natured reference to recent speculation about his age and mobility problems.

The pope improvised much of his speech, and as he worried aloud about exceeding his time limit, two small children interrupted the ceremony by walking up to his chair. The pope, smiling broadly, hugged them and asked them where they were from, and said his speech could wait.

The program included testimonies from several couples, who explained in simple terms some of the everyday problems they faced in raising children and

keeping their families together.

One couple that did not make it to the platform were Cyprien and Daphrose Rugamba, who were killed along with six of their 10 children in Rwanda last April. Organizers had originally expected the Rugambas to share their reflections on raising a big African family. Two of their survivors, Olivier and Dorcy, sat in the front along with other guests of honor, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

As darkness fell upon the square and a silver of moon rose above the curved colonnade, tens of thousands of candles were lit for an unusual "Ave Maria" performed by a Jewish singer from Israel, Achinoam Nini, better known as Noa. The pope, wrapped in a red cloak against the evening cold, listened attentively to the words, which were written during the Persian Gulf War.

"Mary, I know you hear the sounds of war. Look at the torches we're lighting in the search for peace and freedom."

In a Mass broadcast to some 30 countries the next morning, the pope led couples in the renewal of their marriage vows, then greeted families in 31 languages. In English, he asked families to "live your vocation day by day" and to "build your family life on the solid rock of prayer and the observance of God's commandments."

The pope clearly enjoyed the sunlit ceremony, as he lingered with families at the offertory procession and gazed over a massive crowd that spilled out past St. Peter's Square.

Activists see little hope for World Bank reform

WASHINGTON — The 50th anniversary meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which ended Oct. 6 in Madrid, Spain, represent a "missed opportunity" for much-needed reforms, according to social justice advocate Jo Marie Griesgraber. Griesgraber talked about the meetings at a Washington press briefing Oct. 6 after her return from Madrid. She directs the Rethinking Bretton Woods project for the Center of Concern, a Jesuit-founded ecumenical think tank on social justice issues. The World Bank and IMF — both founded in Bretton Woods, N.H., in 1944 to assist European recovery after World War II — "are long overdue for major overhaul involving a thorough critique accompanied by fresh proposals and political will to implement them," she said.

Catholic paper urges Casey to run in 1996

PHILADELPHIA — The Catholic weekly newspaper of the Philadelphia Archdiocese has urged Pennsylvania Gov. Robert P. Casey to run for president in 1996 Democratic primaries. A Casey candidacy could "jar the party's consciousness and restore its traditional 'presumption of life' for all," *The Catholic Standard and Times* said. It made its comments in an unsigned editorial headlined "Run, Bob, Run" in the Sept. 29 issue. The Sept. 17 issue of *America*, a national weekly magazine published by the Jesuits in New York, carried an essay by Catholic sociologist-politician David R. Carlin proposing Casey as the "obvious candidate" of pro-life Democrats who find the Clinton presidency "a complete disaster."

Church heads accused of fraud in S. Africa

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — The general secretary of the southern African bishops' conference and other top officials of an interdenominational program for resettling South African exiles have been accused of failing to prevent rampant fraud, corruption and mismanagement in the program. A two-member investigating commission concluded that the amount of money stolen through fraud and embezzlement from the interdenominational National Coordinating Committee for the Return of Exiles was immeasurable.

Bishop suggests naming women lay cardinals

VATICAN CITY — An African bishop said he hopes the church will consider naming women religious as lay cardinals and assigning them to high church posts. Bishop Ernest Kombo of Owando, Congo, told the world Synod of Bishops he hoped it would be inspired with "a prophetic attitude, which could lead to the nomination of women — an important portion of consecrated people, numerically and qualitatively — to positions of responsibility, including to the highest posts in the hierarchy, as lay cardinals if possible." The bishop's Oct. 10 speech focused on the gifts of consecrated men and women in Africa.

Possible end seen to Belfast line

LUXEMBOURG (CNS) — British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd indicated peace efforts and the Irish Republic Army cease-fire in Northern Ireland could lead to dismantling the so-called peace line dividing Protestant and Catholic areas of Belfast.

Asked by reporters Oct. 4 whether it was now time to tear down the peace line's physical barriers, Hurd said: "All this has to be taken step by step. It is going slowly but well. We are very anxious to keep the process going and that means getting the timing right. Up till now we've done that."

Hurd, attending a meeting of European foreign ministers in Luxembourg, also said he supports European Com-

mission plans to direct more aid to urban renewal projects, which he said could include some derelict housing around the confrontation line between the two communities.

"Anyone who sees the television pictures of the peace line, all those boarded up houses, knows what I mean," said Hurd.

British officials said the aim is to get more funds spent next year.

An International Fund for Ireland was set up in 1986 to promote dialogue and reconciliation between Northern Ireland's Protestant and Catholic communities.

At present, the European Community gives about 15 million European currency units, or Ecus, (U.S.\$18 million) a year to the fund. The European Commission, a component of the European Community, has plans to increase this to 60 million Ecus (U.S.\$72 million) over the next three years.

Revival rescheduled

ROCHESTER — The Black Catholic Revival, originally scheduled for Corpus Christi Church last Sunday, Oct. 9, has been rescheduled for next spring, according to Jacquelyn Dobson, director of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries.

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