

WORLD & NATION

Papal visit to United States tops list of 1995 stories

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — For five days in October Pope John Paul II drew the nation's attention to the Catholic Church as he visited four U.S. dioceses and addressed the United Nations.

The pope, who turned 75 in May, remained the world's foremost religious figure in 1995 — and his activities topped the list of news events for the year.

Overcoming health problems he had suffered with a slow-healing broken leg in 1994, he resumed his world travels with renewed vigor and spoke out forcefully on major issues confronting the church and the world.

He issued "The Gospel of Life," affirming the sacredness of all human life and condemning abortion and euthanasia.

The pope also issued "That All May Be One," in which he praised 30 years of ecumenical progress, called for a new commitment to Christian unity and asked other churches to share with him their ideas on how a renewed papacy might serve a ministry of unity to all Christians.

In the United States Oct. 4-8, Pope John Paul repeatedly urged Americans to be faithful to their traditions of openness to immigrants and care for the needy, of respect for human dignity, family values and the sacredness of life.

At the United Nations he urged an international agreement on "the rights of nations" recognizing national rights in much the same way that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized the rights of individuals. He also called for an international "ethic of solidarity" moving the world toward a future of "participation, economic growth and a just distribution of goods."

Among the other events of religious interest to U.S. Catholics in 1995 — arranged by month — were:

JANUARY: Pope visits Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, Sri Lanka. Boston Cardinal Bernard F. Law calls moratorium on abortion clinic demonstrations. Sierra Leone rebels kidnap seven missionary nuns. World marks 50th anniversary of liberation of Auschwitz.

FEBRUARY: Pro-government demonstrators in Chiapas state, Mexico, call for



Thousands of people pray in the rain at Giants Stadium during Mass with Pope John II in East Rutherford, N.J., Oct. 6.
CNS/Michael Okoniewski

death of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia, advocate of poor and peace mediator in Zapatista rebellion. U.S. federal appeals court upholds law against blocking access to abortion clinics. Teary statue of Mary in Italy draws pilgrims, investigation by church officials.

MARCH: Pope issues encyclical, "The Gospel of Life," on abortion, euthanasia, embryo experiments. World Summit on Social Development is held in Copenhagen, Denmark. Planned release of "Priest" movie draws Catholic protests. Demonstration by 15,000 Indians in Chiapas backs Bishop Ruiz. Sierra Leone missionaries kidnaped in January are released unharmed after 55-day ordeal.

APRIL: Catholic aid agencies ask help for refugees in Burundi to stave off catastrophic ethnic violence. Austrian Catholics start gathering 500,000 signatures asking changes in selection of bishops, priests. St. Meinrad Seminary dismisses Irish Mercy Sister Carmel M. McEnroy from the theology faculty for signing ad questioning pope on women's ordination.

MAY: Pope opens month with "The Light of the East" urging East-West church unity; ends month with "That All May Be

One" urging new efforts to reunite Christianity. Pope visits Czech Republic.

JUNE: Chicago Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin has surgery for cancer of pancreas. Pope, in Belgium, beatifies "leper priest" Damien de Veuster. U.S. bishops meet in Chicago, debate liturgy changes, approve guidelines for sacraments with those with disabilities, dismantle their telecommunications network, discuss restructuring National Conference of Catholic Bishops-U.S. Catholic Conference. Mexico arrests, deports three missionaries working in Bishop Ruiz' diocese. Pope and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople meet in Rome, urge church unity.

JULY: Pope, in Slovakia, prays at monument to Protestant martyrs. In "Letter to Women" and series of talks, pope urges advance of women in church and society. Heat wave kills hundreds in Chicago. Rome asks Irish bishop to explain his call for open discussion of celibacy. Pope calls Bosnian Serb attacks on Muslim "safe" zones "barbaric" crimes.

AUGUST: Federal judge calls Oregon assisted suicide law unconstitutional. Clinton-ordered memo outlines religious

access rights in U.S. public schools. National conference marks 25th anniversary of Campaign for Human Development. Vatican says grape juice, low-gluten hosts can be used for Communion in rare cases. Vatican sets U.S.-Canadian norms for Scripture in liturgy.

SEPTEMBER: Fourth World Conference on Women is held in Beijing. Pope visits three African countries, issues apostolic exhortation "The Church in Africa." Hurricanes Luis and Marilyn devastate Caribbean islands. Vatican seeks to resolve centuries-old East-West controversy over "Filioque" in Nicene Creed. Christian Coalition forms Catholic Alliance for like-minded Catholics. Steven Cook, reconciled with church after withdrawing false charges against Cardinal Bernardin, dies of AIDS.

OCTOBER: Pope visits United Nations, four U.S. dioceses. First merger of a U.S. Catholic hospital system with a for-profit conglomerate is announced. Vatican urges total, permanent nuclear test ban. U.S. Catholic parishes are asked to combat child sexual abuse. U.S. canon lawyers' report says church can ordain women deacons. Million Man March in Washington gives black men new sense of pride and purpose.

NOVEMBER: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is assassinated. USCC Administrative Board issues political responsibility statement. Vatican Congregation for Doctrine of Faith says church teaches "infallibly" that women cannot be priests. U.S. bishops meet in Washington, challenge U.S. economy and federal budget and welfare reform plans, adopt statements on laity and Hispanics, elect Cleveland Bishop Anthony M. Pilla as NCCB-USCC president. National Catholic Youth Conference draws 10,000 youths. Irish voters narrowly approve referendum to legalize divorce.

DECEMBER: Lebanese bishops, in synod with pope, seek social and religious peace for their country. Clinton vetoes GOP seven-year plan to balance budget, calling social program cuts too deep. Pope canonizes St. Eugene de Mazenod, 19th-century bishop who founded Oblates of Mary Immaculate. German Catholics present bishops with 1.4 million signatures on petition for changes in church.

Pope's brief bout with flu draws worldwide attention

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II's Christmas bout with the flu was over in about 24 hours, but it reverberated much longer in the world's press, on the Internet and in the prayers of the faithful.

Sick with an upset stomach and a light fever, the 75-year-old pope canceled his participation at Christmas morning Mass in St. Peter's Basilica for the first time since his election in 1978.

When he tried to pronounce the traditional blessing and message for a worldwide TV audience later in the day, he was visibly shaken by an attack of nausea and had to walk away from his apartment window. He reappeared 20 minutes later to explain briefly that even the pope gets sick.

Vatican officials said the pope was feeling much better the next day, and by the end of the week he was walking in the central Italian mountains. But once again papal health had become an issue in the world forum.

During Pope John Paul's 17-year pontificate, his medical travails have brought a new era of public disclosure at the Vatican. From his assassination attempt in 1981 to his hospitalization for falls and intestinal surgery in the early '90s, the

world has been able to follow his recoveries in daily medical bulletins that have spared no details.

That's a revolutionary concept for the Vatican, which for centuries considered papal health a state secret. Popes were always in good health until the day they died; if they needed an operation — like Pope Paul VI did for prostate problems — they had it inside the Vatican.

But what if the pope's illness does not require hospitalization? For the pope's flu, the press office statements were reassuring but lacked the completeness of full medical reports.

Off-the-record, more detailed explanations were offered for the pontiff's fever and nausea: He stayed up too late for midnight Mass the night before, he caught a chill after sweating in St. Peter's Basilica under heavy vestments, he was feeling the cumulative effects of a very heavy schedule in 1995, or he caught a virus going around Italy.

Rome's Polish community was convinced it was something he ate, though no one seemed to want to pronounce the words "food poisoning."

Whatever the precise cause, the pope could not have chosen a more public place to feel sick, and the feedback was instant. The press was alarmed; the faithful were sympathetic.

He led the news around the world on Christmas, and the next day's papers were full of dire headlines. Several quoted the pope as saying, "I cannot go on," a bit more dramatic than what he actually said in Italian: "Excuse me, I have to interrupt." Frame-by-frame photos of the pope feeling progressively lousier at his apartment window were widely published.

Meanwhile, the Vatican switchboard was jammed with callers wondering about the state of the pontiff. But that was nothing compared to the traffic at the Vatican's new Internet site.

Inaugurated Christmas day, the Internet "home page" welcomed online visitors with illustrated texts of the papal Christmas message and greetings in more than 50 languages. It also offered an e-mail box for messages, and several hundred people left them — many giving advice to the ailing pope.

One U.S. girl named Sarah, for example, told him he should take her father's remedy: Drink chicken broth and plenty of other liquids. Get some rest and don't worry, she added. Others offered prayers for the pope. The response delighted Vatican officials, who said they were copying many of the messages for the pope's perusal.

By Dec. 26, when the pope appeared

for another blessing, the alarm about his health had largely subsided at the Vatican. He left the next day by helicopter for his summer villa outside Rome, looking a bit wan but obviously feeling better.

The global reaction, however, was still echoing. French Bishop Jacques Gaillet, a controversial figure who had met with the pope a few days before to discuss his ambiguous role in the church, said that, in retrospect, he found the pontiff fatigued and looking swollen in the face.

Others wondered whether he would be up to another year of global traveling: He had scheduled trips to Latin America in February, and later to France, Germany, Hungary and Slovenia.

As the questions lingered, the pope did not. According to Vatican sources, he walked for three hours on central Italy's tallest mountain Dec. 29. Witnesses quoted by Italian newspapers said the papal entourage built a big fire and had grilled steaks, cooked peaches and Barbera wine.

Like all the pope's previous mountain excursions, this one was considered "private" by the Vatican press office, which would not officially confirm or deny the reports. But no one at the Vatican was unhappy to see headlines the next day about the "mountain man" pope back in form.