

# WORLD & NATION

## Pope calls for renewed Catholic, Jewish efforts

VATICAN CITY — The recent terrorist attacks in Israel make it vital for Catholics and Jews to renew their commitment to prayer, to mutual understanding and to peace in the Middle East, Pope John Paul II said during a March 11 meeting with an international delegation from the Jewish organization B'nai B'rith.

"The significance of your visit lies in the fact that it is an opportunity for us all to recommit ourselves to the joint efforts needed to build ever greater understanding and solidarity between Catholics and Jews," the pope said.

Tommy P. Baer, president of B'nai B'rith International, said his was the first Jewish organization to meet with Pope John Paul after four suicide bombing attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in late February and early March killed 57 people.

## U.S. observes March 17 as prayer day for Irish

WASHINGTON — Religious leaders in the United States echoed calls from Northern Ireland to set aside a day of prayer for peace in that country.

"By joining in prayer on March 17, Americans will be offering spiritual and moral support to the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland who yearn to be free from violence and to build a lasting and just peace," the leaders said in a statement. "We urge Americans to offer special prayers on this day for an end to violence and progress toward peace in Northern Ireland."

Irish religious leaders called for a day of prayer on March 10. Leaders of the Presbyterian, Catholic, Church of Ireland and Methodist congregations also asked people to pray "that all who have great responsibilities in seeking a political settlement will be guided by the spirit of God."

## Ordinations' slight rise lifts optimism at Vatican

VATICAN CITY — Priestly ordinations continued to increase slightly in 1994, leaving Vatican officials hopeful about the future of the global pastoral workforce.

According to the latest statistics, ordinations were up nearly 1 percent in 1994 over the previous year. The biggest percentage increase was in ordinations of members of religious orders, while the rise in diocesan clergy has been smaller but steady.

The statistics were released March 8 at the Vatican, the same day the Vatican's annual yearbook, the *Anuario Pontificio* for 1996, was presented to Pope John Paul II.

## Papal advice for Lent: Switch off TV and talk

VATICAN CITY — During Lent, people should try turning off their TV sets and talking with family members, Pope John Paul II said.

"In how many families television seems to replace dialogue between people rather than favor it," the pope said during a Sunday blessing March 10. He suggested that the traditional church practice of fasting during Lent should extend to the mass media, which "have an undeniable usefulness but should not take over our lives."

"A certain 'fasting' in this area can be helpful in order to give more time to reflection and prayer and to cultivate human relationships," he said.

# Kevorkian acquitted; suicides legal

PONTIAC, Mich. (CNS) — The Michigan Catholic Conference urged a "tough new law" against assisted suicide after a jury acquitted Dr. Jack Kevorkian March 8 of two charges of assisting at suicide.

Cardinal Adam Maida of Detroit said that "assisted suicide violates the common principles of a civilized society."

He called the verdict "a continuation of the struggle for the minds and hearts of the people of the state of Michigan."

"We have our work cut out for us," he said.

Kevorkian, a retired pathologist who has acknowledged assisting in 27 suicides since 1990, was on trial for the 1993 deaths of Merian Frederick, 72, and Dr. Ali Khalili, 61.

Both committed suicide in Kevorkian's apartment, using equipment he provided to poison themselves with carbon monoxide.

The acquittal was Kevorkian's second — he was found not guilty in another case in 1994 — but he still faces trial this spring for assisting in the deaths of two women in 1991.

Dr. Thomas Reardon, chairman of the American Medical Association's Task Force on Quality Care at the End of Life, said the acquittal was "a serious blow to quality, compassionate patient care. It sends a message that the dignity and value of human life at its end stages is irrelevant."

The Kevorkian verdict came just two days after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco issued a first-ever federal appellate ruling that physician-assisted suicide is a constitutional right for the terminally ill.

The court's 8-3 decision invalidating a Washington state law against assisted suicide drew sharp criticisms from many religious, medical, legal and pro-life leaders.



Reuters/CNS  
Dr. Jack Kevorkian (right) and his lawyers respond to reporters' questions in an Oakland County, Mich., courtroom, March 8. Kevorkian was acquitted of charges involving two assisted suicides.

It was the first time in the United States that a federal appeals court has asserted a "constitutionally protected liberty interest in determining the time and manner of one's own death."

"This ruling paves and broadens the road to a complete culture of death," said Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities.

"This is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer and caregiver," Reardon observed.

Despite the court ruling, it remains "unethical for a physician to intentionally cause the death of a patient," he added.

Mark Chopko, general counsel of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the new decision "expands the law in new and dangerous ways."

"Our law and culture have always out-

lawed murder and, for that reason, have outlawed assisting another in suicide," he said. "We need not wonder if there is a 'slippery slope' in the law. We are on it."

Chopko urged the Supreme Court to reverse the decision as soon as possible.

Burke Balch, director of medical ethics for the National Right to Life Committee, said the Michigan jury and San Francisco judges have made second-class citizens of "countless people with disabilities."

He urged new laws that "would allow relatives of potential suicide victims to get injunctions against people like Kevorkian."

Kevorkian was tried under a temporary state law, which expired in November 1994, that set penalties of up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine for assisting in a suicide.

The Michigan Legislature passed that measure in 1992, specifically to stop the kinds of assisted suicides Kevorkian was involved in, after a court ruling that the state had no law prohibiting assisted suicide. When the temporary law expired, the House and Senate could not agree on permanent legislation.

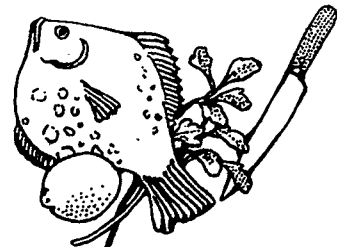
The decision to try Kevorkian for two 1991 deaths was the result of a Michigan Court of Appeals ruling in 1994 ordering murder charges reinstated in those cases.

Paul A. Long, public policy vice president of the Michigan Catholic Conference, an agency of the Michigan bishops, said the conference "regrets that the jury has chosen to ignore the facts in this case. The law is very clear on the illegality of assisting someone in killing themselves."

"We urge the Michigan Legislature to continue to protect those who are most vulnerable at the last stages of life by passing a tough new law that will end this heinous practice once and for all," he said.



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