

WORLD & NATION

Bishops schedule vigil, plead for veto override

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities will lead an ecumenical prayer vigil at the U.S. Capitol Sept. 12 as part of a relentless "struggle for life," according to the head of the committee.

"It is imperative that we do all within our power to ensure a congressional override of the presidential veto of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act," said Boston Cardinal Bernard F. Law, chairman of the pro-life committee, in an Aug. 23 letter to bishops nationwide. He invited them to join the committee for the hourlong service beginning at 2 p.m.

President Clinton vetoed the bill April 10. Override votes in the House and Senate are expected to occur after Sept. 15.

On behalf of the committee, Cardinal Law also urged that dioceses mark Sept. 13 "as a day of prayer, fast, abstinence and other penance" for the intention of overcoming "the culture of death, particularly with regard to partial-birth abortion and physician-assisted suicide."

The committee enclosed with the letter recent comments by former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop "that partial-birth abortions are not medically necessary," along with the results of two polls indicating that support is growing among Americans for a ban on the procedure.

"The struggle for life, in which we are engaged, is relentless," Cardinal Law said. The committee will report more fully to the bishops at their November meeting, he added, but for now, "we beg your wholehearted cooperation as we seek to bring focus to our pro-life efforts."

The Sept. 12 prayer service, which is open to everyone, is the latest in a series of actions by the bishops to fight partial-birth abortions. In April, the eight active U.S. cardinals, all members of the pro-life committee, and Cleveland Bishop Antho-

ny M. Pilla, president of the bishops' twin conferences, sent Clinton a letter protesting the veto. The same group sent a letter to members of Congress Sept. 10 urging an override of the veto.

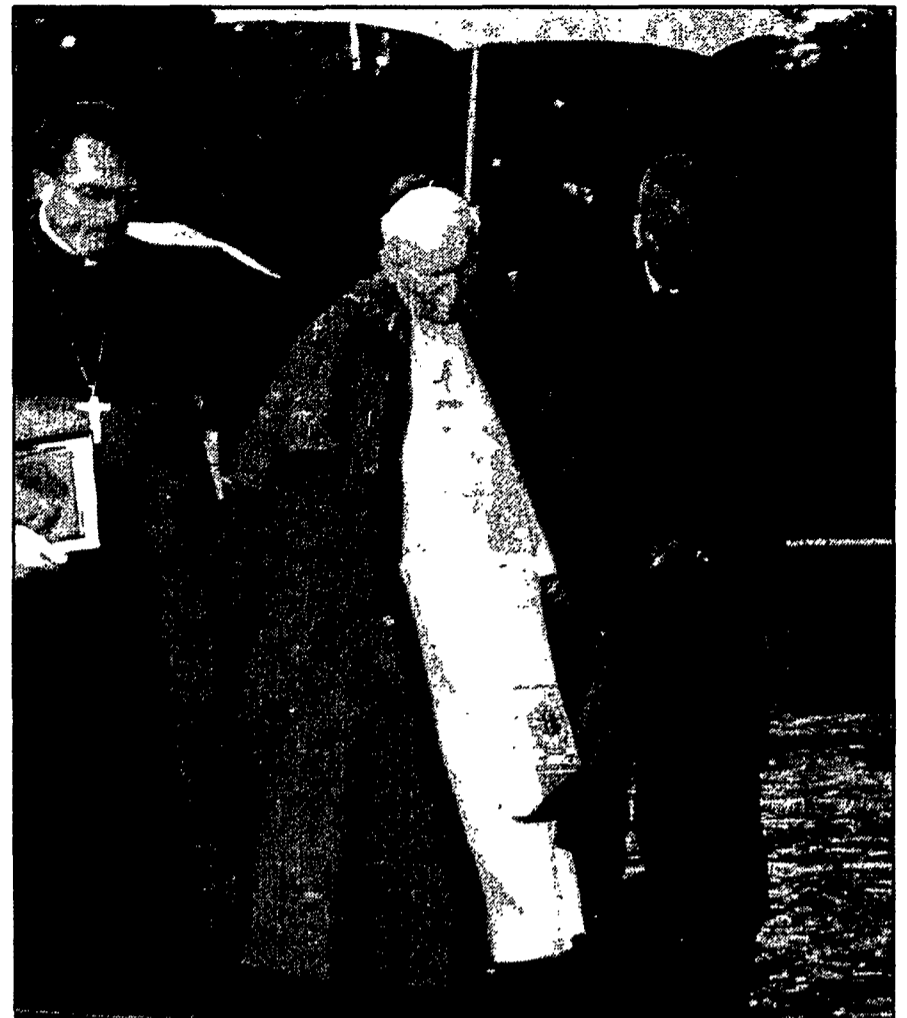
During June, Catholics began to flood Congress and the White House with postcards as part of a campaign to override the veto, and bishops called a National Day of Prayer and Fasting for Life for July 11.

Because the vigil is scheduled between the conclusion of the bishops' Administrative Committee meeting in Washington and a 5 p.m. Mass to mark the 50th anniversary of ordination of Washington Cardinal James A. Hickey, staff at the bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities said many bishops are expected to join in the vigil.

Cardinals Law and Hickey, Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, and William H. Keeler of Baltimore, as well as Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., already have confirmed their participation, staff members told CNS Aug. 28.

Gail Quinn, executive director of the secretariat, told *The Catholic Transcript*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Hartford, that the idea for the vigil came from discussions at a recent committee meeting.

Members indicated "they wanted to do something a little more public and a little more dramatic" to demonstrate opposition to partial-birth abortions, she said.



CNS/Reuters

A Vatican official holds up the cape of Pope John Paul II in heavy rain on the way to the Cathedral Gyor, Hungary, Sept. 7. The cathedral was one of the pope's last stops in a two-day visit to Hungary. His planned Sept. 19-22 visit to France has spurred protests.

Protesters invade French church, oppose papal visit

By Lynne Weil
Catholic News Service

ROME — A dozen pie-throwing protesters who interrupted a Sunday Mass in the northwestern French city of Nantes joined a lengthening list of those who have dramatically made their views known in the weeks before Pope John Paul II visits France Sept. 19-22.

The Vatican offered no reaction to the incident, which occurred at Saint-Pierre de Nantes cathedral Sept. 8.

The demonstrators charged onto the altar, knocked over one priest and hurled pies made with cold cream at others who were conducting Sunday morning services, hitting some of them.

They also tossed water-filled condoms

down the central aisle and threw sheaves of leaflets to the 500 parishioners present.

The papers said "other Masses will be creamfully sabotaged in the coming days in large French cities as a precursor to the annoyances that await John Paul II if he does not cancel his visit."

Some male members of the congregation detained a few of the protesters, while police arrived to round up others who were waiting outside. They confiscated signs with slogans that translated roughly as, "Condoms, not skullcaps."

Several other incidents in recent weeks have drawn attention to the dissent in France over the upcoming papal trip.

In early August an unexploded bomb was found in a church in Reims that the pope is scheduled to visit. A message had

been scrawled on one wall: "In the name of the father, boom."

Throughout the summer various groups have protested the use of public funds to help finance events related to the visit, forcing parishes to make additional collections.

Others have objected to what they consider inappropriate mixing of church and state in a ceremony at which the pope is to commemorate the baptism 1,500 years ago of Clovis, a Frankish king credited with founding France.

In response to this issue and other disagreements over church matters in advance of the papal visit, hundreds of Catholics across France reportedly have been asking to be removed from parish rolls.

Thoughts to Consider



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