

FEATURE

Vatican re-opens Web site as form of 'pastoral trip'

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The three computers being used for the Vatican's Internet and e-mail services have been "baptized" Raphael, Michael and Gabriel.

As of Easter Sunday, anyone with a computer, modem and Internet server is able to see what the archangels' namesakes have to offer: some 1,200 papal and Vatican documents on the World Wide Web site at <http://www.vatican.va>.

"We named them after the archangels: A little extra protection always helps," said Sister Judith Zoebel, a U.S. member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, who serves as technical director of the Vatican's new Internet office.

At a March 24 Vatican press conference officially unveiling the Vatican's Web site, Sister Zoebel explained the role of each computer:

- Raphael stores the texts, which include all the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the papacy of Pope John Paul II and documents of Pope John Paul I. Raphael also will hold graphics from the Vatican Museums and sound clips from Vatican Radio.

- Michael, whose patron is usually painted with a sword in hand, is the system's "firewall," regulating access and protecting the system from hackers.

- Gabriel, named after the patron of messengers, communicates with the outside world and holds the software that helps people access the documents.

The new and improved Vatican Web site, which succeeds the temporary Internet offering unveiled on Christmas Day 1995, is part of the church's "centuries-long dialogue with the world and with men and women of every continent and language," said Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, secretary of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See.

The opening screen of the Web site says, "The Holy See" in German, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. The instructions, lists of contents and most documents are available in all six languages.

"This is a continuation of the Holy Father's pastoral trips," Archbishop Celli said. With the new Web site, "he can be in contact not with a sea of people, but with individuals. It is more intimate and more personal."

After users choose a language, the screen changes to offer six main options:

- The Holy Father, where papal biographies and documents are stored.

- The Roman Curia, with documents and announcements from the congregations and councils of the church's central offices.

- News Services, which contains the Vatican Information Service, the daily bulletin of the Vatican press office, articles from the Vatican newspaper and stories from Vatican Radio.

- Vatican Museums, which eventually is expected to contain articles and graphics regarding the museums' collections.

- The Jubilee Year, containing articles from the magazine published by the Vatican committee coordinating the Holy Year 2000 celebrations, a calendar of events and the text of the pope's letter on preparing for the celebration.

- Archives, including all the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Texts from earlier councils will be added over time.

Sister Zoebel said the Vatican hopes to add several of the papal documents and texts in Chinese and Arabic, languages spoken in places where Catholic documents are not readily available.

Archbishop Celli told reporters that Pope John Paul, who is known to not use a computer, "is fascinated" by the Web site project.

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