

WORLD & NATION

Quakes rock Assisi, cause deaths, damage to sites

ASSISI, Italy (CNS) — Assisi, the Italian town of St. Francis, frescoes and prayers, was transformed into a town of tears by two powerful earthquakes that struck hours apart.

Two Conventual Franciscan friars and two experts from Italy's Culture Ministry were killed when sections of the vaulted ceiling of the upper Basilica of St. Francis collapsed during the second tremor Sept. 26. The victims were buried in debris up to 10 feet deep.

Serious damage was also reported to other religious monuments in the central Italian hill town.

Pope John Paul II sent his condolences for those killed — including seven others in the regions of Umbria and Marche — and said he was deeply concerned about damage to the artistic patrimony in one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the world.

The quakes destroyed two frescoes by the 13th-century master's Giotto and Cimabue, but left relatively intact Giotto's famous 28 frescoes depicting the life of St. Francis, which line the walls of the upper church. Workmen piled chunks of stone and masonry on the lawn outside, separating those that held colored fragments of the wall paintings. Most were tiny pieces, but one block bore the painted head of a cherub.

The tragedy in the basilica prompted a global lament.

"It's as if a giant hand grabbed Assisi and shook it, first up and down and then from side to side," said Antonio Paulucci, art historian, as he gazed up at a large crack in the basilica bell tower. One eyewitness said the tower had swayed several feet during the second tremor.

Two days after the quakes struck, the mood in the town was somber as church officials and religious orders assessed the damage and made tentative plans to car-



Reuters/CNS

Firemen work at the main entrance of the Basilica of St. Francis following an earthquake Sept. 26 in Assisi, Italy. At least two people died when the roof collapsed.

ry out repairs. Sunday Masses were celebrated outside, in courtyards and squares next to the churches, all of which remained closed for safety reasons.

Father Giandomenico Nicola, top Franciscan official in Assisi, said one of the few areas relatively untouched by the tremors was the crypt of St. Francis in the lower basilica, where the saint's body rests. The friars had just finished celebrating morning Mass there when the second, stronger quake hit.

Father Nicola was upstairs at the time

with a group of about 20 people, including friars, Culture Ministry experts and journalists, inspecting the minor damage caused by the first quake, when he felt the church shake violently and saw part of the painted inner ceiling crumble and explode to the ground some 60 feet below.

"Everything was jumping around and the dust was flying. There were piles of debris in front of me. The people standing near me were completely white; they looked like plaster statues," he said.

Father Nicola and most of the group managed to make their way out of the church without serious injury. The two friars killed near the main altar and pulled out shortly thereafter were 48-year-old Italian Father Angelo Api, a seminary instructor, and Borowiec Zdzislaw, a 25-year-old Pole who recently made his profession to the order and who had arrived in Assisi 10 days earlier. The bodies of the art experts, Bruno Brunacci and Claudio Bugiantella, were pulled out several hours later.

Father Nicola said the basilica had been closed to most visitors as a precaution following the first tremor, which struck at 2 a.m. He decided to open it to the group of experts after Italian civil protection officials said the risk of a second major quake was remote.

Several of the priests had to move out because their rooms were damaged, along with other historic sections of the monastery.

Father Pasquale Magro, who runs the monastic museum, said the significant frescoes irretrievably lost were Cimabue's ceiling portrait of St. Mark and an early Giotto depiction of St. Jerome. The other frescoes in the church probably have small cracks or other repairable damage, he said.

But experts also suspected structural damage to the walls of the complex, which has stood on the site for 700 years.

Throughout the medieval town, sadness, sympathy and faint hope were evident. Although police were discouraging tour groups from visiting, several hundred pilgrims wandered along the narrow stone streets, glancing up at the cracked walls, reading the death notices and stopping outside the locked churches. Many of the narrower streets were littered with fallen masonry and were blocked off.



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DAY/DATE	LOCATION	TOPIC	PRESENTER(S)
Tues., Oct. 7	St. John's, Greece 2400 Ridge Road	Juggling: Family, Jobs, Schedules & God	Dr. Patricia Schoelles, SSJ & Deacon Michael Piehler
Tues., Oct. 7	St. Paul's Webster 783 Hard Road	Back to the Future Part I: Our Changing Church	Rev. Dr. Joseph Hart
Wed., Oct. 8	St. Louis, Pittsford 46 E. Main St.	The Exercise of Pastoral Leadership	Most Rev. Matthew Clark
Thurs., Oct. 9	Most Precious Blood 179 Stenson St.	Questions About Death & God	Dr. Roslyn Karaban
Tues., Oct. 14 1:30 p.m.	St. Ann's Community 1500 Portland Ave.	God & Me & Life After Fifty	Dr. Nathan Kollar
Wed., Oct. 15	St. Lawrence 1000 N. Greece Rd.	Longings of the Heart	Rev. John Colacino
Thurs., Oct. 16	St. Anne's 1600 Mt. Hope Ave.	The Christian in the Workplace	Deacon Michael Piehler & Dr. Marvin Mich
Mon., Oct. 20	St. Helen's 310 Hinchey Road	How is Jesus Present in Our Lives Today	Dr. PHEME PERKINS
Tues., Oct. 21	Holy Trinity, Webster 1456 Ridge Road	Back to the Future Part II: Strategic Planning	Dr. William Pickett
Thurs., Oct. 23	Queen of Peace 601 Edgewood Ave.	The Christian at the End of Life	Dr. Marvin Mich & Mary Labanowski, MD
Mon., Oct. 27	St. John the Evangelist 545 Humboldt St.	Developing Human Relationships	Dr. Dennis Boike
Mon., Oct. 27	St. Mary's, Bath 32 E. Morris St.	Balancing Obligations to: Family, Jobs & God	Dr. Patricia Schoelles, SSJ & Deacon Michael Piehler
Wed., Nov. 5	St. Mary's Downtown 15 St. Mary's Place	The Exercise of Pastoral Leadership	Most Rev. Matthew Clark
Thurs., Nov. 6	Assumption, Fairport 10 Baumer Place	Falling in Love Again Part I: Jesus & His Mission	Rev. Dr. Joseph Hart
Thurs., Nov. 13	St. Cecilia 2732 Culver Road	Developing Human Relationships	Dr. Dennis Boike
Tues., Nov. 18	St. John of Rochester, Fairport 8 Wickford Way	Falling in Love Again Part II: Our Response in Worship & Community	Rev. Robert Kennedy

Cleric urges nuclear ban

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican said it was encouraged by tighter controls placed on nuclear weapons in recent years, but eventually wants to see their "total elimination."

Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, an assistant secretary of state, made the remarks Sept. 29 at a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Austria. A text of his talk was made public at the Vatican.

The U.N. agency, of which the Holy See was a founding member, was celebrating its 40th anniversary. Archbishop Tauran said the agency had helped regulate environmental aspects of nuclear energy production, promoting an indispensable "culture of safety" for nuclear power.

He also praised its work in erecting effective barriers to nuclear weapons proliferation, through treaties and other curbs.

Still, he said, the Holy See "shares the sentiments of the majority of men and women of goodwill who aspire to the total elimination of nuclear weapons."

The Vatican encourages nations to stop their nuclear arms production, reduce current stockpiles and eliminate the risk of another nuclear arms race, he said. A good step would be for countries to implement all the provisions of the 1995 extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, he said.

He called on nuclear powers to show foresight in designing further agreements to guarantee the conversion of military nuclear materials for peaceful uses.