

WORLD & NATION

Vatican official decries growing refugee woes

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The world's refugee situation has worsened with changes in warfare, and tactics such as those used in Kosovo have become more common, a Vatican official said.

"War today targets civilians more than ever before," U.S. Divine Word Father Michael A. Blume, who heads the office for the pastoral care of refugees at the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, said in a June 25 interview. "In turn, larger parts of these populations are forced to flee their homes and even their countries."

Late cardinal urged healing of divisions

WASHINGTON (CNS) — In a speech given posthumously, British Cardinal George Basil Hume of Westminster urged American Catholics to end divisions and refocus on "Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life."

Cardinal Hume, 76, died of cancer June 17. Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, Ala., read the cardinal's speech, finished on his deathbed, before a standing-room-only audience June 25 at Washington Theological Union.

Among divisive issues in the church today the cardinal cited the role of women, the role of the laity, liturgy, religious education and questions of faith, morals and church authority.

Session draws hundreds of priests

JERUSALEM (CNS) — Hundreds of Catholic priests from around the world gathered in the Holy Land to celebrate their priesthood and prepare for the church's celebration of Holy Year 2000.

The June 22-27 international gathering was the fourth meeting for priests sponsored by the Vatican Congregation for Clergy to help the world's 404,000 Catholic priests prepare to celebrate the Holy Year.

Latin-rite Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem welcomed the 750 priests, saying it was appropriate they began the renewal of their priestly lives in contact with the Holy Land. Patriarch Sabbah is head of the Latin-rite Catholic Church in Israel, the Palestinian territories, Cyprus and Jordan.

"Everywhere you go, continue to announce the Life and the Resurrection," Patriarch Sabbah told the priests.

Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, dean of the College of Cardinals, in his opening Mass homily June 22 at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, noted the great importance of priests' service to the needs of the faithful.

"Christ did not come to be served but to serve," Cardinal Gantin said. "Men expect priests who really serve, who are coherent with their identity. The priest should be recognized as the other Christ."

On June 25, a group of 520 priests made their way onto six boats to celebrate Mass on the Sea of Galilee.

As the boats pushed off from the shore, the priests began to sing hymns from their native countries, first in English, then in French.

"This gives us a sense of the universality of the church and its service around the world," said Father Jerome Thompson of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, who is currently working in Cyprus with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. "It gives you a sense



Debbie Hill/CNS

Priests pray during Mass celebrated aboard several boats on the Sea of Galilee June 25. An international gathering of Catholic priests embarked early in the morning on the lake where Jesus called forth disciples.

of the commonality and yet the great diversity within the church."

The Mass on the sea where Jesus practiced much of his ministry was the culmination of three days the priests spent in Nazareth. They later traveled to Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

During a candlelight procession June 23 around Nazareth's Basilica of the Annunciation, Auxiliary Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo of Jerusalem thanked some 520 visiting priests, cardinals and bishops.

"The Christians of Nazareth said they have been reborn with the discovery that Nazareth will always occupy a special place, so thank you in their name for having come in such large numbers to visit Nazareth."

The city's Christian community has been living "moments of great difficulties" over the past few months, Bishop Marcuzzo said.

Ongoing animosity between local Christians and Muslim fundamentalists has continued for more than a year and a half.

During the meeting, the priests sent Pope John Paul II thanks for his words of blessing. They told him they had renewed themselves "fully and joyfully" and rediscovered the "splendor" of their vocations.

In his message, Pope John Paul urged the world's priests to face the challenges of the coming millennium with confidence in Christ, "who conquered the world and has given us his (commitment) to be with us to the end."

"We need not be afraid. We only need be afraid of not being real witnesses of Jesus Christ. The only question for us is our fidelity to renew ourselves every day in our identity ... from which comes our pastoral ministry," the pope said.

California bishops support initiative to define marriage

Sharon Abercrombie
Catholic News Service

SAN FRANCISCO (CNS) — The California Conference of Catholic Bishops has issued a statement supporting the Definition of Marriage Initiative that will appear on the ballot for the March 7, 2000, primary.

The initiative would place California's current ban on same-sex marriages in the state constitution by adding a provision to the state's family code, saying that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

Advocates of the initiative want to add the "or recognize" concept to law as a buffer against the potential of California being forced by federal law to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states by the U.S. Constitution's requiring states give "full faith and credit" to other states' laws.

The bishops join numerous other churches, organizations and individuals voicing support for the initiative which, state the bishops, "reaffirms the profound importance of marriage and the family in contemporary society."

"Catholic tradition maintains that marriage is a faithful, exclusive and lifelong union between one man and one woman joined in an intimate partnership of life and love," the bishops wrote in their June 18 statement. "This union was instituted by God and by its very nature exists for the mutual fulfillment of the husband and wife as well as for the procreation and education of children."

Underscoring that Jesus raised the natural contract of marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, the bishops said, "This special marital union thus becomes for the married couple their fundamental way of at-

taining holiness of life."

Their statement affirms the theology of marriage articulated by Pope John Paul II in his 1994 Letter to Families and on many other occasions.

The pontiff has emphasized that the marital union between a man and a woman in a "partnership of their whole life" is "ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children"

"Other interpersonal unions which do not fulfill the above conditions cannot be recognized, despite certain growing trends which represent a serious threat to the future of the family and of society itself," the California bishops' statement said.

The bishops also note that in caring for and educating their children, "a mother and father serve not only their family but also expend personal resources and energy for the common good of society. Marriage and family life lived generously anticipates and prevents many of the social problems which plague society today."

An April poll of 1,200 Californians who said they were "likely" to vote showed that 55 percent were in support of the Definition of Marriage Initiative. The poll was commissioned by the San Francisco-based Horizons Foundation, which is helping finance opposition to the initiative.

Republican Sen. Pete Knight from Palm-dale is the initiative's sponsor. The proposed legislation is called the Knight Initiative by some. Many proponents, however, are calling the ballot measure the Protection of Marriage Initiative, including the state's bishops.

The official ballot title will be Definition of Marriage Initiative. Still others have referred to the initiative by the term used to describe federal legislation on the issue, Defense of Marriage Act.

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