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Father Daniel P. Coughlin, vicar for priests in the Chicago Archdiocese, was appointed chaplain to the U.S. House of Representatives March 23.

Speaker names Catholic chaplain

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON - House Speaker Dennis Hastert named a Catholic priest, Father Daniel Coughlin, as the new House chaplain March 23, ending a four-month political quagmire over who would get the position.

Father Coughlin, vicar for priests in the Chicago Archdiocese, was sworn in by Hastert moments after he announced the appointment.

Applause for the 65-year-old priest belied the division that had been building behind the scenes for the job that requires opening each daily session with a prayer and providing counseling to House members.

Father Coughlin called his appointment as the first Catholic House chaplain "terribly unexpected." He had not even applied for the position that had stirred up so much political controversy on Capitol Hill in recent months.

Just two days earlier, the Rev. Charles Wright, a Presbyterian minister and the primary candidate for House chaplain, offered to withdraw his name for consideration for the post.

He said in a letter that he was withdrawing because of the dissension among House members over his appointment.

"Let us be thankful that God is not an independent, not a Democrat and not a Republican. He is for us all," he wrote.

In announcing Father Coughlin's appointment on the House floor, Hastert,

R-Ill., accused Democrats of playing an "unseemly political game," and said he did not "easily take in stride carelessly tossed accusations of bigotry."

The dispute over who would replace the retiring chaplain, the Rev. James Ford, began in December when House leaders announced their selection of Rev. Wright for the job even though a bipartisan selection committee had voted in favor of Father Timothy O'Brien, a Marquette University professor of political science.

The selection committee, charged with submitting three final candidates to the speaker's office, did not officially rank the candidates, but committee leaders personally told Hastert that they considered Father O'Brien to be the best qualified.

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Pope creates new pilgrim's path

Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II gives a blessing as he arrives for an outdoor Mass on the Mount of Beatitudes near the Sea of Galilee March 24. The pope told a crowd estimated at 50,000 that the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount offer the road map of Christian life.

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

Walking at last amid the ancient stones where Jesus lived and died, Pope John Paul II created a new pilgrim's path by reaching out to other religions and to the divided peoples of the Holy Land.

His March 20-26 visit to Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories will be remembered as an interfaith journey that, despite some notes of dissonance, struck a spiritual chord among those who watched and listened.

In sharing prayer and emotions with Christians, Muslims and Jews at places of deep religious significance, the pope was clearly trying to set an example of harmony in a land beset by political conflict and religious turf-guarding.

"Our gaze directed to Jerusalem, let us



Reuters/CNS

Young Catholic women on the Mount of Beatitudes throw palm branches.

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lift up our prayer to almighty God for all the peoples living in the lands of the promise. ... They share the same place of blessing, where the history of salvation has left an indelible trace," he said at the start of his long-awaited pilgrimage.

But he also spoke with realism, telling interfaith leaders in Jerusalem: "Not everything has been or will be easy in this co-existence."

At the heart of the pope's message was the conviction that the Holy Land can and must be a homeland for all its faiths and for all its peoples.

His path of prayer took him from Moses' mountain in Jordan to the river where St. John performed the first baptism.
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