

WORLD & NATION

Papal Jubilee message revisits year's themes

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In a final document on the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pope John Paul II revisited highlights of the Holy Year and suggested how its spiritual gifts can help lead others to the Gospel.

The apostolic letter, titled *Novo Millennio Ineunte* ("At the Beginning of the New Millennium"), offered some last words on several controversial jubilee themes, including the tension between mission and proclamation.

It also sketched out the pope's vision of church priorities in the third millennium, emphasizing that the personal encounter with Christ should ultimately influence the economic and social behavior of modern society.

The pope signed the 84-page document Jan. 6 on a small table brought to him in St. Peter's Square, where he had just celebrated a Mass to close the jubilee.

The document calls for a "new sense of mission" built on the enthusiasm of the jubilee, one that leads people to holiness and finds new ways to proclaim the Gospel in a culture marked by diversity and globalization.

After the jubilee, it said, there is "no time for looking back, even less for settling into laziness."

"A new millennium is opening before the church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ," it said.

In the context of religious pluralism, the pope pointed to the importance of dia-

logue with non-Christians and respect for their beliefs, especially in warding off the "dread specter of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history."

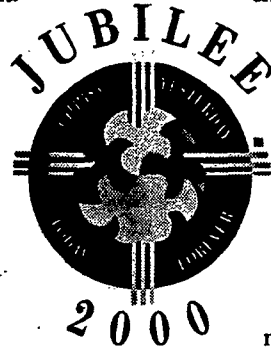
But for the church, he said, interreligious dialogue can never be understood as negotiation, as if the faith were a matter of mere opinion. Likewise, the Christian's joyful proclamation of the Gospel should not be considered "an offense to the identity of others," he said.

Citing the recent and controversial document, *Dominus Iesus*, the pope said interreligious dialogue cannot simply replace proclamation.

The pope delivered a realistic assessment of the state of ecumenism, saying Christians had carried into the third millennium the "sad heritage of the past" and that there was "still a long way to go" before Christian unity can be attained.

But he noted with joy that for the first time in 2000, a holy door was opened together by leaders of the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches. He also looked

ahead to planned trips to Ukraine, Armenia and Syria later this year and said he had great hopes for relations with Eastern churches.



In describing the unity of the church of Christ, the pope appeared to choose his words carefully, especially after ecumenical tensions in the wake of *Dominus Iesus*.

"This unity is concretely embodied in the Catholic Church, despite the human limitations of her members, and is at work in varying degrees in all the elements of holiness and truth to be found in the other churches and ecclesial communities," he said.

The document defended the jubilee's running theme of individual and collective repentance, saying that the church's examination of conscience and admission of historical faults had humbled Christians and "strengthened our steps for the journey toward the future."

Under the heading, "Stake everything on charity," it closely examined the link between individual faith and social justice.

The church's social teachings are an essential part of Christian witness, it said, and "we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity."

The document drew a stark picture of the modern economic reality, saying immense possibilities are offered to a fortunate few while millions are left in degrading conditions. It called for a "new creativity in charity," to find ways that get close to those who suffer and ensure that aid is not seen as a "humiliating handout."

The pope said he wanted to leave a concrete sign of the church's commitment, designating excess jubilee funds for a permanent charity program. Vatican officials said the money would finance a new house for disabled pilgrims in Rome.

The pope called on local churches to come up with pastoral plans that capture the spiritual energy of the jubilee. He acknowledged that programs and structures are no guarantee of reaching people in their hearts and stimulating holiness.

He said the dramatic need for new priests in the coming years should prompt an extensive global plan of vocational promotion.

Gold medal goes to John Paul II

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — More than a dozen members of the U.S. Congress traveled to the Vatican Jan. 8 to present Pope John Paul II with the Congressional Gold Medal in honor of his efforts to defend human dignity and promote peace.

In the Clementine Hall, under frescoed figures representing the virtues of religion, justice, charity and mercy, the bipartisan delegation gave the pope a standing ovation as well as the heavy gold medal and a framed copy of the bill.

Sen. Sam D. Brownback, R-Kan., told the pope, "In a world that has become darkened in many places by a culture of death, you stand in contradiction, fearlessly proclaiming a culture of life."

"I am honored, honored by the gracious gesture which brought you here. It is not for the successor of the Apostle Peter to seek honors, but I gladly accept the (medal) as a recognition that in my ministry there has echoed a word that can touch every human heart," the pope said.

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