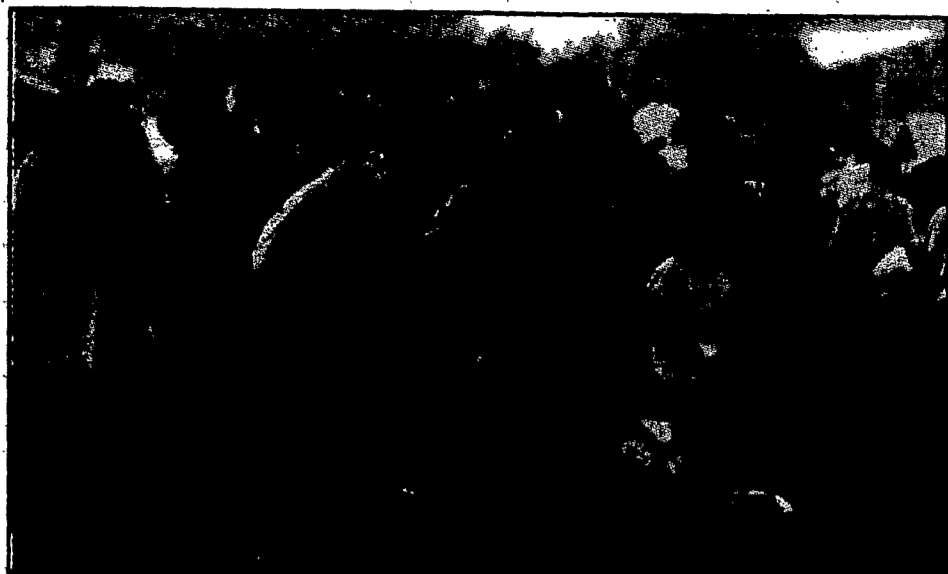


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CNS Reuters
Congoese carrying their belongings walk across still-warm lava flows from the Nyiragongo volcano eruption in Goma, Congo, Jan. 20. Citizens fled to nearby Rwanda, but U.N. officials hoped to resettle people in temporary camps.

Pope prays for Goma

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II urged humanitarian aid for more than 300,000 Congoese left homeless by Africa's worst volcanic eruption in 25 years.

A telegram sent in the pope's name to church leaders in Goma, Congo, said Pope John Paul was praying that those deprived of shelter, food and water would receive the necessary assistance from international agencies.

The telegram called the eruption a "terrible drama" for people of the region.

U.N. officials estimated that 45 people were killed when the volcanic eruption sent up to 6 feet of lava flowing in a path that overran several villages before cutting through Goma. The eruption filled the air with ash and released toxic gases,

polluting water supplies.

Aid workers outside of Goma were trying to set up food and water distribution points for the displaced after molten lava literally divided the city and swept through homes Jan. 17. The city's cathedral was destroyed by the flow.

But the aid agencies also had to deal with an unexpected reverse exodus as many of the homeless returned to pick through the ruins in Goma, braving tremors and new eruptions in the hope of salvaging something.

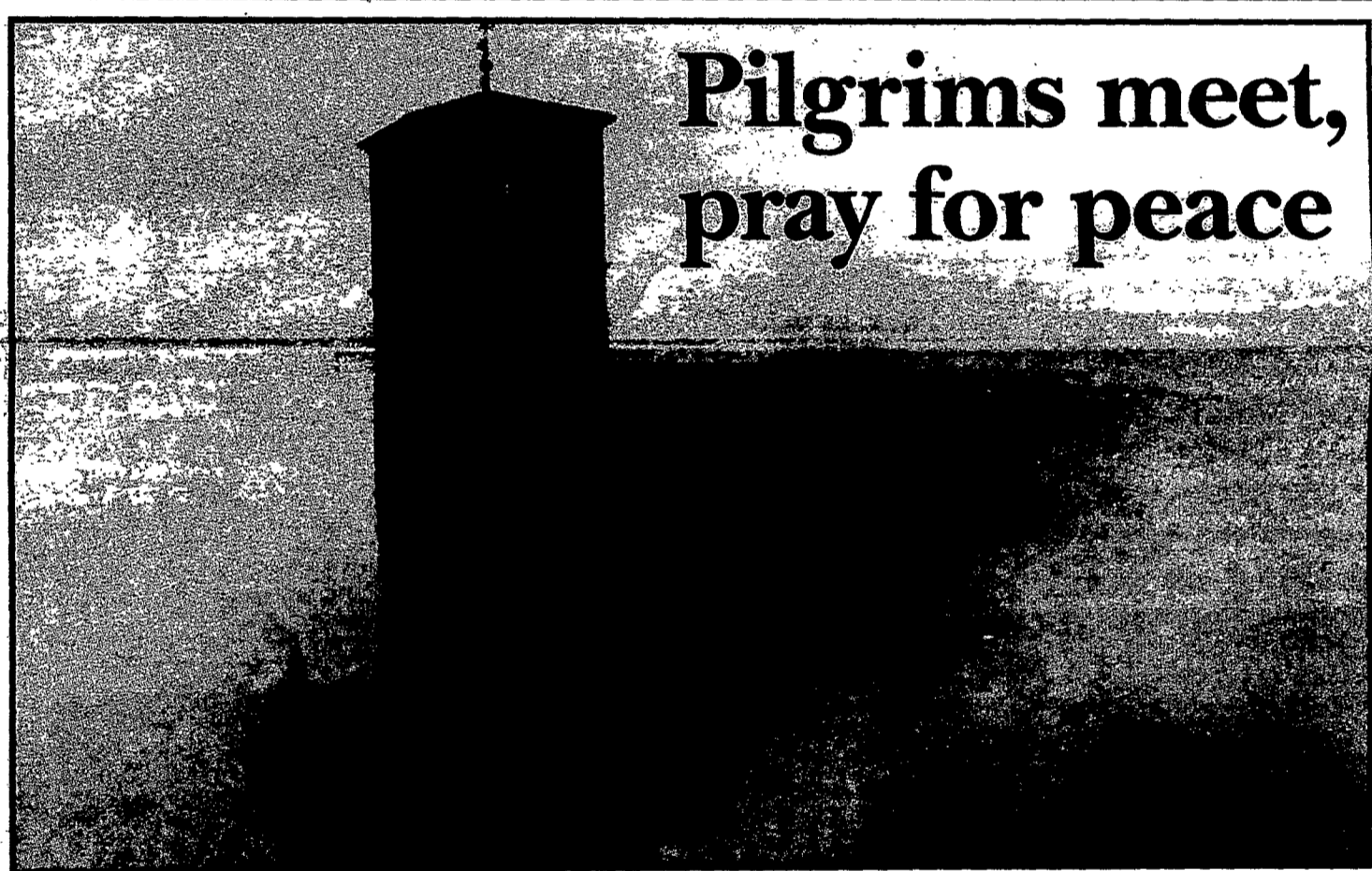
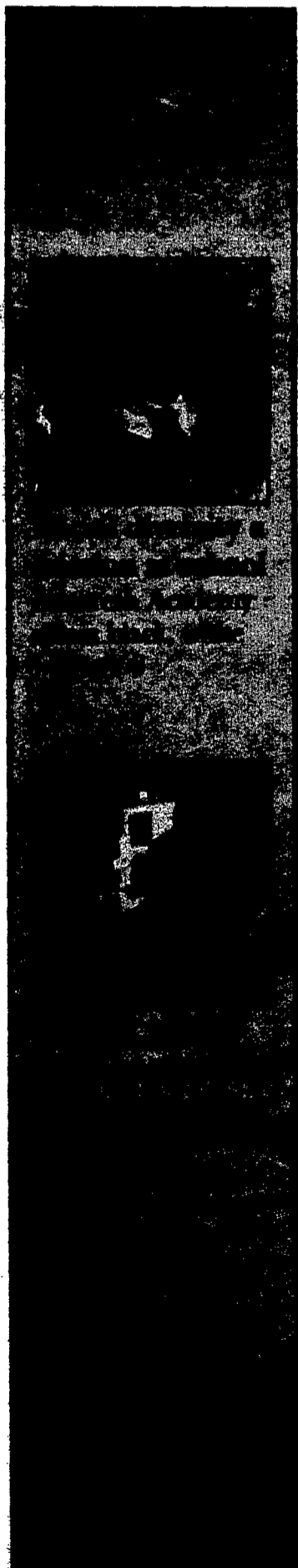
Some of the refugees said they were not comfortable remaining in neighboring Rwanda, which has given aid to Congoese rebels.

Congo, formerly Zaire, has been torn by civil strife since 1998.



Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 113 NO. 15 ■ THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2002 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES



Reuters/CNS

The Basilica of St. Francis is shrouded in fog in this file photo. Pope John Paul II and other religious leaders will meet at the church Jan. 24 for prayer and testimonials on peace.

VATICAN CITY — More than 150 representatives of 11 world religions, including about 30 Muslims, were to join Pope John Paul II in a pilgrimage to Assisi, Italy, Jan. 24 to pray for peace and condemn violence committed in the name of religion.

The pope was to be joined by Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the worldwide spiritual leader of the Orthodox, in leading the pilgrimage of religious representatives to Assisi.

At the same time, in dioceses throughout the world, Catholics have been hosting ecumenical prayer services to ask God for the gift of peace and interreligious meetings to make commitments to use faith to foster peace. In the Diocese of Rochester, parishes from St. Michael's in Union Springs to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Hamlin were joining with neighbors for celebrations of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The pope's pilgrimage, a two-hour train journey from the Vatican, was to include other Christian leaders, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and followers of traditional African religions, as well as the Muslims.

The leaders planned to share reflections on peace during a morning gathering before going to separate places to pray for peace in the rites of their own traditions.

In the Basilica of St. Francis, the pope would pray with Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant representatives and with

Catholic bishops from several countries, including Pakistan.

Pope John Paul announced the meeting in mid-November as a religious response to terrorism and the threat of new conflicts in the world.

It would help show the world that religious belief creates solidarity, not conflict, he said recently. And he defended the event against charges of religious relativism, saying participants would invoke peace from God according to their own traditions and without jeopardizing their religious identity.

"The day of prayer for peace does not intend in any way to indulge in religious syncretism," the pope told pilgrims during a midday greeting at the Vatican Jan. 20. "What will unite all the participants is the certainty that peace is a gift from God. As a believer, each knows himself called to become an agent of peace."

The daylong Assisi meeting is expected to close with the reading in Arabic, English and Italian of the religious leaders' "common commitment to peace."

Cardinal Francis Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and an organizer of the Assisi event, said the meeting "will say 'no' to religious wars and to all acts of violence and terrorism, especially when they are perpetrated in the name of religion."

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