

WORLD & NATION

European church leaders appeal for flood aid

By Jonathan Luxmoore
Catholic News Service

WARSAW, Poland — Church leaders from Eastern and Central Europe have appealed for help in a massive cleanup following the worst floods in a century.

Lawrence Cada, Czech bishops' spokesman, said "The church is urging everyone to do what they can for their neighbors."

Cada told Catholic News Service that the Czech Catholic Charita organization had opened crisis centers around the country, including 13 in Prague. Prague's historic Old Town was swamped when the Vltava River burst its banks Aug. 14.

Bishop Leopold Nowak of Magdeburg, Germany, set up several aid collection centers and special funds for cash donations.

Thomas Lazar, Magdeburg diocesan spokesman, said "Catholics are doing the same as everyone, filling sandbags and securing what they can. There are many churches in flooded areas, and it's too soon to estimate the damage."

Pope John Paul II, speaking during his Aug. 16-19 trip to Poland, urged support for Europeans affected by the floods, which claimed at least 100 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands.

In eastern Germany, where the military deployed 19,000 soldiers for rescue work, losses in the state of Saxony were listed at 15 dead and 26 missing Aug. 19. Some 180 bridges were destroyed and 800 miles of rail and road were swept away.

In Dresden, Germany, the rampaging Elbe River flooded art treasures in the Zwinger museum and Seperoper opera



Reuters/CNS

Residents of Wesenstein, Germany, watch raging floodwaters of the Mueglitz River, about 12 miles south of Dresden Aug. 18. The worst floods in 150 years drove tens of thousands from their homes in eastern Germany.

and was threatening the 18th-century Protestant Our Lady Church, reopened this year after being ruined in World War II.

Church sources said floods had severely damaged the city's Catholic Holy Cross Church and washed away crypt sarcophagi in the Holy Virgin Catholic Cathedral.

Churches on high ground offered shelter to homeless people, but some buildings had been cut off by flood waters.

Bishop Joachim Reinelt of Dresden-Meissen warned in a statement that tens of thousands of flood-hit families had lost livelihoods. He called on the German bishops' conference to ensure unaffected dioceses stepped in to help.

"The means at the disposal of the victims are small compared to this great damage and won't cover even a tenth of the needs," Bishop Reinelt said. "Just repairing the roads and bridges will require enormous sums of money."

In the Czech Republic, the Catholic bishops of four dioceses appealed for help to clergy and faithful. The Czech bishops' conference planned a nationwide collection in all churches Aug. 25.

Cardinal Miloslav Vlk of Prague, who was repeatedly rerouted while returning by train from Switzerland, visited damaged churches in Prague and other towns after addressing a special message to Czechs.

In his CNS interview, Cada said several Prague Metro stations were still flooded from the Vltava, which swelled to 20 times its normal water content in mid-August. He added that numerous churches were still closed or without electricity.

Cada said the Charita group had been "cooperating very closely" with the Red Cross and other agencies, adding that a spot collection among 5,000 Catholics in Zdar, who had not been able to afford tickets for World Youth Day in Toronto, had raised U.S.\$7,600.

"Besides sadness and misery, these floods have brought out the best in people," Cada told CNS Aug. 21.

Floods have also caused damage in Russia's Black Sea region as well as in southern Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia, where the Danube rose to record levels.

Romania's ecumenical aid association, AIDROM, said displaced people needed food, accommodation and hygiene items.

In Austria, church sources said news of the floods had been met with "immediate offers" of rescue and salvage assistance, but warned that victims need "spiritual support and the presence of psychologists."

They added that wrecked churches included St. Niklaus' in Obersdorf, where "Silent Night" was first performed in 1818.

Polish Bishop Adam Dyczkowski of Zielona Gora-Gorzow, whose diocese was ravaged by floods in 1997, called on local Catholics to help neighboring countries, saying, "From our ... experiences, we know clearing wreckage, renovating houses and re-equipping homes is a process that takes long months after the waters subside."

Cardinal Christoph Schonborn of Vienna warned that dramatic climate changes had been caused by "man's irresponsible abandonment of nature."

Pope cancels trip to Manila

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II has decided not to make a trip to the Philippines in January, another sign that age and infirmity are curbing papal travel.

A letter from the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, informed the Archdiocese of Manila that the pope would not be able to attend the Fourth World Family Meeting in Manila Jan. 23-26, Vatican sources said Aug. 27.

The office of Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila said the decision was "sad news" and asked for prayers for the pope's health.

The Vatican press office did not officially confirm that the pope would not be going, but informed sources who asked not to be identified said the trip was off.

"The pope was disappointed to give up this trip. But it doesn't mean he'll stop traveling. There are tentative plans for Croatia next year and an endless number of other invitations," said one Vatican official.

Earlier this summer, Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the pope wanted to make the trip to Manila.

Vatican aides were concerned, however, that the 13-hour flight to the Philippines and the six-hour time difference could take a heavy physical toll on the 82-year-old pontiff, who suffers from a nervous system disorder.

On Aug. 23, the Vatican an-

Hispanic judge serves on abuse review board

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Justice Petra Jimenez Maes, the first Hispanic woman to sit on the New Mexico Supreme Court, has been named to the U.S. bishops' National Review Board on sexual abuse.

Her appointment was announced Aug. 23 by Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Maes is the 13th and final member of the board established by the bishops in June to monitor the compliance of all U.S. dioceses with the bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

Gov. Frank Keating of Oklahoma is chairman of the review board.

Maes attended the board's first meeting

July 30 as an observer. Bishop Gregory had already invited her to serve, but she was awaiting confirmation that she would be able to do so.

A New Mexico native, Maes was active in the movement for Hispanic-American civil rights as an undergraduate and graduate student in the 1960s and '70s. When she graduated from the University of New Mexico law school in 1973, she was one of the first two Hispanic women to earn a law degree there.

After two years in private practice, in 1975 she went to work for Northern New Mexico Legal Services. In 1981 she was appointed to the 1st Judicial District Court in Santa Fe and served on the court's civil and criminal divisions and its Children's Court. In 1984 she established its Family Court.

Maes was elected to the five-justice state

Supreme Court in 1998.

The National Review Board was formed by the bishops June 14 in Dallas when they adopted the child protection charter. Under the charter, the board is to work with and oversee a national Office for Child and Youth Protection at USCCB headquarters in Washington.

The office is to assist dioceses in implementing the charter and help provincial and regional groupings of dioceses develop mechanisms for auditing diocesan compliance. It is to publish an annual report, reviewed and approved by the National Review Board, on each diocese's compliance or noncompliance with the charter.

Among the board's first tasks is completing a search for the director of the national office and commissioning two in-depth studies on the clergy sexual-abuse problem in the U.S. church.

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