

WORLD & NATION

Congress meets in N.Y.; priest gives invocation

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The chaplain of the House of Representatives opened the special session of Congress in New York Sept. 6 with an invocation asking for the blessing of God on the historic occasion and acknowledging that "you alone can renew us."

Recalling "the tragic events that occurred here," Father Daniel P. Coughlin also prayed that "the vision of the founding fathers" would live again to "assure the freedom of the law-abiding people of this nation."

In a ceremonial one-hour session, Congress gathered on the site where the Continental Congress met from 1785, the new Congress elected under the Constitution continued to meet until 1790 and George Washington was inaugurated as the first president in 1789.

The current Federal Hall was built in 1842, and after use for customs and other government purposes was made a museum in 1955.

House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., recalled that Congress had met outside Washington only one other time — a 1987 meeting in Philadelphia in observance of the bicentennial of the writing of the Constitution there.

After the session, the visiting senators and representatives were guests at a luncheon hosted by New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

In the afternoon, they went to the site of the World Trade Center, where the Senate chaplain, the Rev. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, offered prayer and presided at a wreath-laying ceremony.

Father Coughlin said in a telephone interview as the visitors were returning to Washington that the special session was great for Congress and great for New York.

"As things unfolded during the day, I became more and more moved emotionally and convinced this was a wonderful thing to do," he said.

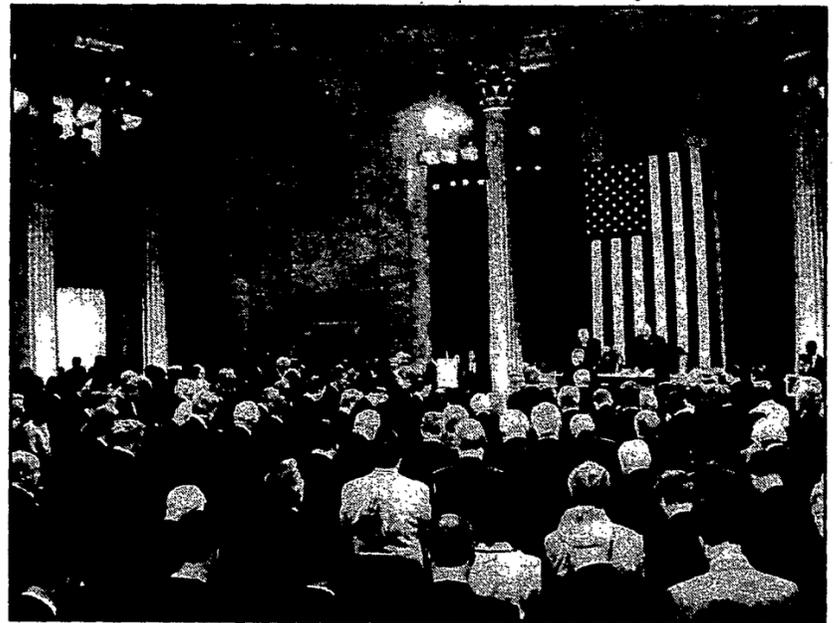
He called it "a stroke of genius" to conclude the session with a choir of young people whose "faces were a map of the world" singing "God Bless America," which members of Congress then joined them in singing.

"Everyone was emotionally moved," he said.

His invocation commended to God's mercy "the victims, survivors and their families," and gave honor to "those public servants and ordinary citizens who joined professionals in healing wounds and rebuilding lives."

Father Coughlin said that while he was working on the invocation "one of the members from New York drew my attention to the fact that the Bible in Federal Hall was used by George Washington at his inauguration."

So the invocation came to include a reference to that Bible and the consoling words from chapter 28, verse 20 of



Reuters/CNS

U.S. lawmakers bow their heads as House Chaplain Father Daniel Coughlin leads a prayer during a joint meeting of Congress at Federal Hall in New York Sept. 6. Several hundred members of Congress traveled to New York for the special session to solemnly mark the first anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Matthew, "I am with you always."

Father Coughlin said he also felt he should make reference to Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year, which was to begin at sundown that day.

Citing a Jewish prayer for "a good and a sweet" new year, he prayed in the invocation "not only for a year of good things, but a year of sweetness."

He asked for that sweetness to include "a chance to relish the blessings of the world and the freedoms you give us, and to enjoy the sweet kindness and love of

each other."

Father Coughlin's selection as the first Catholic to serve as House chaplain came after a dispute in which some people charged that an anti-Catholic bias led to rejection of a Catholic candidate. In a compromise, the entire list of those who had been considered was set aside, and the job was given to Father Coughlin.

He said he sensed no residue of bad feeling from that controversy, and found the House members "very affirming."

Mass marks fifth anniversary of Mother Teresa's death

CALCUTTA, India (CNS) — Hopes for Mother Teresa's canonization ran high as hundreds gathered to pay their respects on the fifth anniversary of her death.

"The eagerness with which people would like to see her beatified shows how her message of love has been accepted," Archbishop Lucas Sirkar of Calcutta said during a Sept. 5 anniversary Mass, reported UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand.

Hundreds of people from various religions attended the anniversary services that began with a morning Mass in the

chapel of the Missionaries of Charity headquarters.

For the first time, the nuns allowed the press into the chapel to witness the entire proceeding. Hindu devotees joined priests, nuns and overseas volunteers at the chapel.

During the Mass, Archbishop Sirkar reiterated the message of the late nun, who founded the Missionaries of Charity in 1950 for "service to the poorest of the poor."

"We globalize poverty, especially the poverty of spirit, but Mother Teresa glob-

alized the vocation or the call to preach God's wisdom and spirit of love," he said.

Sister Nirmala Joshi, Mother Teresa's successor, said that her congregation is opening a new house in Minneapolis to mark the anniversary.

In a message, Sister Nirmala reminded people of the nun's love "for the poorest of the poor" and thanked God for "the gift of Mother Teresa."

Other nuns told UCA News that the first to arrive for the Mass was a sweeper woman, who came at 4 a.m. to clean the road outside the convent. She also

brought along a garland of lilies to honor the late nun.

Others paid their respects in various ways. A hearing-impaired boy laid two roses on the tomb, while children and groups of people from various religions sang songs.

Mother Teresa was born of Albanian parents in Skopje, now in Macedonia, in 1910, and joined the Loreto order in 1928. She came to India the following year. She based her work in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta until her death in 1997 at the age of 87.

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