

In Milan, the next pope?

John Thavis/Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — On Sept. 29, Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi took up his new post as head of the Archdiocese of Milan, and with it the unofficial baton as the Italian front-runner in a future papal conclave.

Two of the last six popes have passed through Milan, and Cardinal Tettamanzi's transfer there from the smaller Archdiocese of Genoa was seen as a sign of favor by Pope John Paul II. Rarely is a cardinal moved from one diocese to another.

Two weeks before leaving Genoa, Cardinal Tettamanzi, 68, bequeathed a parting gift to his faithful: a pastoral letter on the family. An instructive document, it offers insight into what to expect if he is one day elected to St. Peter's throne.

In a nutshell, the church could expect a continuation of Pope John Paul II's legacy — with an Italian accent.

Indeed, Cardinal Tettamanzi's letter draws its deepest inspiration from two major documents of the current pope: his 1981 encyclical on the family and his 2001 apostolic letter on the future of the church.

The cardinal's letter begins by emphasizing one of Pope John Paul's favorite points, that the family is not just the basic building block of society but also the fundamental agent of the church's evangelization.

But he says this missionary priority is meaningless unless the family lives the faith deeply. That's another tenet he shares with the pope.

Both focus on key elements for progress: the essential role of par-

ents in the religious education of children; the value of example over preaching; the importance of personal prayer; the duty to attend Sunday Mass; the centrality of the Eucharist; the need to welcome and protect human life; and an absolute commitment to the traditional family, based on permanent marriage between a man and a woman.

They also agree on social trends that are oppressing the modern family, from a "divorce mentality" to the exploitation of human sexuality.

But Cardinal Tettamanzi shows a more cutting verbal style, honed perhaps by the particular challenges posed by Italian society — a society that is Catholic by tradition, but where faith is superficial and most families, he says, "live like pagans."

He describes the "dominant culture" in strikingly negative terms. He says it rejects the Christian idea of self-giving in marriage because it has so elevated the ideal of individualistic self-gratification.

The cardinal sees Italy's low birth rate, high cohabitation rate and increasing tolerance of homosexual unions as signs that the country has accepted the "privatization of marriage," in which anything goes.



Reuters/CNS

Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi of Milan prays during his inaugural Mass at the cathedral in Milan, Italy, Sept. 29.

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Ruling covers unborn

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The general secretary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops praised a new federal rule that makes it easier for states to provide health coverage for unborn children.

The final rule issued Sept. 27 by Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson "should be welcomed by all who care about the health of pregnant women and their children," Msgr. William Fay said in a statement. The rule was to be published in the Federal Register Oct. 2.

Msgr. Fay also said he was "delighted to see" that the final rule incorporated a USCCB recommendation that the unborn children of immigrant women also be made eligible for such coverage.

"States taking advantage of this new option are to provide health care to mother and child irrespective of the mother's immigrant status," the general secretary said.

Under the new rule, states may use the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP, to provide health coverage for prenatal care and delivery to mothers and their unborn children.

"This is a common-sense, compassionate measure to make sure

that all children born in this country come into the world as healthy as possible," Thompson said in issuing the new regulation. "It's another way to secure a safety net of care for our children and their mothers."

Two states — New Jersey and Rhode Island — already have obtained waivers to cover pregnant women using SCHIP funds, but the change would allow states to implement that option faster.

"With this new regulation, states can offer prenatal coverage immediately — without waiting for HHS to consider and approve a waiver," Thompson said. "It represents a speedy new option for states that want to do more to ensure that women get critical prenatal care that will increase the chances that their children are born healthy."

When the regulatory change was proposed in May, the USCCB said it reflects "medical reality" and is consistent with legal precedent.

A coalition that included the National Abortion Federation, American Civil Liberties Union, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and a number of Protestant denominations and Jewish groups opposed the change.