

RECORD ABUSE LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST DIOCESE

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Two sexual-abuse lawsuits, one for a record \$1.15 billion, were filed April 14 against the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y. The second suit seeks \$300 million.

The suits, filed on behalf of a total of 34 alleged abuse victims, mark the largest claims against any U.S. diocese in history.

The lawsuits accuse 17 priests and two religious brothers who worked in the diocese of sexually abusing minors.

CARITAS TO DELIVER AID, SUPPLIES TO IRAQ

BALTIMORE (CNS) — Caritas Internationalis is planning to deliver \$500,000 worth of medical supplies and food aid to Iraq, an aid agency official said.

The shipment, which will contain enough medicine to treat 25,000 people and enough supplementary food for 10,000 malnourished children, is expected to be delivered to Baghdad by April 27, said Joe Carney, communications associate for the Middle East for Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services.

SARS FEARS ALTER HOLY WEEK SERVICES

TORONTO (CNS) — The Archdiocese of Toronto altered Holy Week services as a response to the deadly severe acute respiratory syndrome, known as SARS.

The archdiocese suspended sharing of consecrated wine and requested that the Eucharist be received in the hand and not on the tongue. It also suspended hand shaking during the sign of peace, asked that Catholics refrain from touching and kissing the crucifix during the veneration of the cross on Good Friday.

POPE PLANS TO GO ON 100TH FOREIGN TRIP

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — History's most-traveled pontiff will pass yet another milestone in June when he makes his 100th trip outside of Italy and Vatican City to visit Croatia.

Every time the pope gets on a plane these days, he sets a bunch of new records. He's visited 131 countries, given 2,389 speeches on foreign soil and logged more than 700,000 miles.

Pope issues new encyclical

Says the Eucharist is the greatest gift from Christ

Cindy Wooden/CNS

VATICAN CITY — The Eucharist is the greatest gift Christ left his church, a gift that makes the sacrifice of his life present for all time and gives strength and hope to the world, Pope John Paul II wrote in a new encyclical letter.

The pope said he issued the letter, his 14th encyclical, in the 25th year of his papacy as a sign of his gratitude and with the desire to share his faith in the sacrament.

The letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, on the Eucharist and its relationship to the church, was published April 17, Holy Thursday; the pope signed a copy of the encyclical during the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper.

In the letter, the pope reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the church on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, on the need for validly ordained ministers for its celebration, and on the importance of following the church's liturgical norms.

Pope John Paul said he had asked the Vatican offices responsible for sacraments and for doctrine "to prepare a more specific document, including prescriptions of a juridical nature," on the obligation to follow church rules for the celebration of Mass and adoration of the Eucharist.

A publication date for the second document was not announced.

The 82-year-old pope also used the encyclical to express how important the Eucharist has been in his life and to offer a reflection on the Blessed Virgin Mary, "woman of the Eucharist."

From the day he was ordained in 1946, he said, as a priest, bishop, cardinal and pope, "I have been able to celebrate Holy Mass in chapels built along mountain paths, on lakeshores and seacoasts; I have celebrated it on altars built in stadiums and city squares."

Whether in a grand basilica or a small country church, the pope said, "the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation."

Christ's sacrifice on the cross — his offering of love to God the Father — embraces and redeems all creation and offers it back to God, the pope said.

"The church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by him she is



Karen Callaway/CNS photo illustration

The Eucharist is a lasting reminder of God's love, said Pope John Paul II before releasing his 14th encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, on the Eucharist in its relationship to the church.

fed and by him she is enlightened," the pope wrote.

"This is no metaphorical food," he said. As the Gospel of John says, "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."

Pope John Paul said the Second Vatican Council led to a "more conscious, active and fruitful participation" in the Mass, but at the same time, "some abuses have occurred, leading to confusion with regard to sound faith and Catholic doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament."

In some places, he said, eucharistic adoration has almost disappeared, and some people focus so much on its character as a "fraternal banquet" that they forget its sacrificial meaning.

The Mass, the pope said, "makes Christ's one, definitive redemptive sacrifice present in time" and allows people of all times to participate in it as if they had been in Jerusalem with Jesus.

"The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation," he said. Faithful observance of liturgical norms is "a guarantee of our love for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament."

While the pope said he has seen firsthand how beautifully local language, customs and culture can be incorporated into the Mass, creativity has sometimes been overemphasized.

"Liturgy is never anyone's private property, be it of the celebrant or of

the community in which the mysteries are celebrated," he said.

The Eucharist and the church are so intimately connected, the pope said, that those who share the Eucharist must share the church's faith in the real presence of Christ and acknowledge the unity of faith as passed on and protected by the pope and the bishops in unity with him.

Pope John Paul reaffirmed church teaching that those who have committed a serious sin must go to confession before receiving Communion, but he also said people who are indifferent to the suffering of the poor are not worthy to partake of the sacrament.

In a chapter on the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Eucharist, Pope John Paul described Jesus' mother as "the first tabernacle in history," the vessel "in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth" as the pregnant Mary visited her cousin.

The Gospels do not mention Mary as being with the disciples at the Last Supper, he said, but "Mary must have been present at the eucharistic celebrations of the first generation of Christians."

"For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers and reliving what she had experienced at the foot of the cross," the pope wrote.