

Bush to meet pope in June

John Thavis/CNS

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II will meet with President George W. Bush in early June, and the top item on the agenda will be Iraq, sources in Rome said.

The meeting June 4 was arranged after days of quiet talks involving Vatican officials and U.S. diplomats.

U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican Jim Nicholson told Catholic News Service May 9 that Bush had altered his schedule to make sure he didn't miss the pope, who is scheduled to travel to Switzerland June 5-6.

The president will "fly all night" and arrive in the morning, Nicholson said. The president and his aides are expected in the Vatican in late morning, where they will also meet with

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican secretary of state.

The president was scheduled for an evening arrival in Rome but Vatican officials said that appeared to rule out a papal audience, since the pontiff is scheduled to fly to Switzerland the next morning.

Informed sources in Rome said Iraq and the Middle East would top of the discussion agenda. It will be the third meeting between the two leaders, and the first since the start of the Iraq war, which was strongly opposed by the pope and his aides.

Vatican officials have said for months it would be unusual for a pope to meet with a sitting president during a re-election campaign, because of the risk that it could be seen as partisan. But after careful consid-

eration, the reasons for such a meeting prevailed over the Vatican's usual caution, a Vatican official said.

"The risks of political exploitation exist in any encounter like this. Obviously, an evaluation must be made, and in this case the pros outweighed the cons," the official said, adding that an opportunity to speak face-to-face on important issues was too valuable to pass up.

"President Bush is ... coming to Europe for the 60th anniversary of the D-Day invasion," Nicholson said, adding that traditionally when a president comes to Italy he meets with the pope.

"It doesn't have anything to do with it being a political year," he added.

June 4 marks the liberation of Rome by Allied armies in 1944.



Reuters/CNS

President George W. Bush waves from his campaign bus during a stop in Lancaster, Wis., May 7. He will leave the U.S. campaign trail in early June to meet with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican.

Remembering Always

Memorial Mass is open to all Catholics on Saturday, November 13, at 8:00 AM

November through April

Memorial Mass in the Parish of Holy Sepulchre from 9:30 to 10:00 AM

Holy Sepulchre Cemetery

2461 Lake Avenue • 585-458-4110 • www.holysepulchre.org