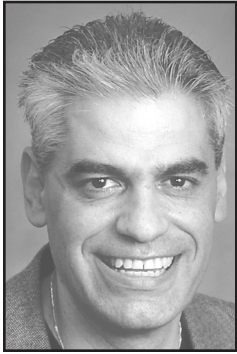




BRIEFS

Catholic theologian Miguel Diaz nominated for Vatican ambassador

WASHINGTON (CNS) — President Barack Obama has nominated prominent Catholic theologian Miguel Diaz to become ambassador to the Vatican. In a statement issued late May 27, the White House announced Diaz's nomination, along with nominees for ambassadors to the United Kingdom, France, Japan, India and several other countries. Diaz, 45, is a professor of theology at the College of St. Benedict and St. John University, both in Collegeville, Minn. He is a board member of the Catholic Theological Society of America and former president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States. His wife, Marian, is an adjunct instructor at St. Benedict and St. John's. Diaz served as a member of Obama's Catholic advisory team during the campaign and was a regular campaign spokesman on Obama's behalf, particularly in the Spanish-language press. "I am very honored, grateful and humbled that President Obama has nominated me to serve as ambassador to the Holy See," said Diaz in a statement forwarded to Catholic News Service by the university. "If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, I will continue the work of my predecessors and build upon 25 years of formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See. I wish to be a bridge between our nation and the Holy See." A native of Havana, Diaz was praised as "a leading Hispanic theologian in the United States," by Benedictine Abbot John Klassen, chancellor of St. John's.



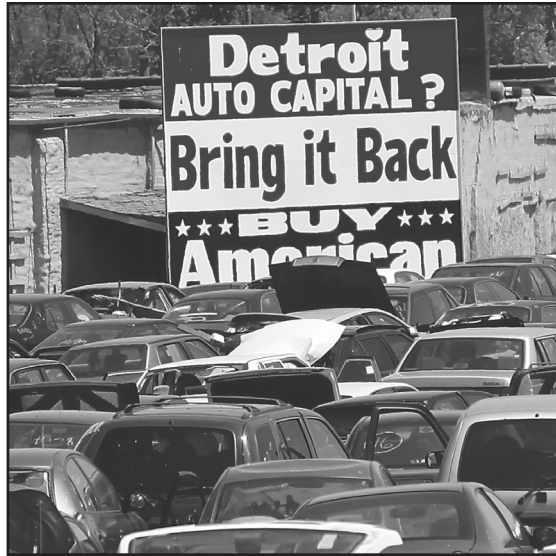
Catholic schools' reputation draws students in school-choice programs

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A program that lets low-income parents in the District of Columbia choose a private, often Catholic school for their children faces an uncertain future. Similar programs in other cities are stable. Faith-based schools comprised 56 percent of schools participating in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, which provided \$12.7 million in federal money for about 1,700 students in the 2008-09 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Parents chose one of the 22 participating Catholic schools 59 percent of the time. This can be attributed to the reputation and low cost of Catholic schools, said Marie Powell, executive director of Catholic education at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Particularly in inner cities, Catholic schools have a wonderful reputation for providing students at risk with a chance to graduate from high school," Powell told Catholic News Service. A U.S. Department of Education evaluation of the program found that the vouchers had a positive impact on reading test scores — but not on math scores — and a positive impact on parents' reports of school satisfaction and safety.

Diocese warns excommunication looms for Lefebvrist priests

OXFORD, England (CNS) — Officials in the Diocese of Regensburg, Germany, have said plans by the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X to ordain new priests without Vatican consent at a local seminary will lead to their

excommunication. "This will be uncanonical, because they have no entitlement to conduct their own ordinations," said diocese spokesman Jakob Schotz. "Our bishop is waiting for Rome to advise on how to respond, but it will almost certainly result in the excommunication of the priests and the bishop who ordains them," Schotz said. The spokesman was reacting to an announcement by the society that it would ordain three priests and three deacons in its seminary at Zaitzkofen in Bavaria June 27, along with another 18 at its headquarters in Ecône, Switzerland, and at Winona, Minn. In a statement, the Zaitzkofen seminary rector, Father Stefan Frey, said the society now had "provisional legal status" in the Catholic Church pending a "definitive canonical ruling" on its future, and had not been told to "put a stop to ordinations."



LARGE SIGN SEEN IN DETROIT AUTO SCRAP YARD — A large "Buy American" sign, in support of Detroit's auto industry, is seen in the back of an auto scrap yard in Detroit May 18. Parish priests across the Archdiocese of Detroit will be sharing a variety of messages of faith and hope with their parishioners June 13-14 in light of the recent auto crisis. (CNS photo by Rebecca Cook, Reuters)

Detroit pastors share message of faith, hope in light of auto crisis

DETROIT (CNS) — General Motors Corp.'s bankruptcy filing June 1 is one more dramatic and harsh reality to Detroit-area residents still reeling from plant closings, downsizing, job losses and house foreclosures. With the headquarters for the "Big 3" — General Motors, Chrysler LLC and Ford Motor Co. — all within the Archdiocese of Detroit, the impact of the auto crisis has been personal on a number of levels. "Just what GM represents, not just to us, but to the country," said Father Thomas Slowinski, pastor at St. Andrew Parish in the suburb of Rochester. "This giant has fallen and when it gets up it will be much smaller." Father Slowinski's parish is just miles from the Chrysler headquarters and a number of auto plants. He and other parish priests across the archdiocese planned to address the current situation during the June 6-7 weekend as they gathered for the celebration of the feast of the Holy Trinity. Father Christopher Maus, pastor of St. Daniel Parish in suburban Clarkston, said: "We've been struggling with this for a year, even though the bankruptcy just happened. We've been dealing with foreclosures, trying to balance budgets, trying to balance the church budget and people trying to balance their own budgets."

From the Vatican...

From Catholic News Service

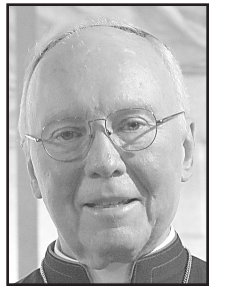
Two top leaders of the Irish church met with Pope Benedict XVI June 5 to discuss a report by an independent commission on child abuse. Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, president of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, traveled to Rome to provide Vatican officials with information about the church in Ireland, including the impact of the commission's report, said a June 5 statement by the Irish Bishops' Conference. Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin joined the cardinal for the June 5 private papal audience. The standing committee of the Irish Bishops' Conference discussed the report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse May 25, the bishops' statement said. The independent commission was established by the Irish government in 2000 to hear evidence from anyone alleged to have suffered child abuse at institutions since 1940. These institutions, funded by the state but often run by Catholic religious orders, included schools, orphanages, hospitals, children's homes and other institutions where children were in the care of non-family members.

The embarrassment and scandal raised by each new report of a case of sex abuse in the church also has a positive effect of giving other victims the courage to come forward and increasing the church's commitment to ending abuse, said experts meeting at the Vatican. The Anglophone Conference, which began in the 1990s as an informal network of English-speaking bishops meeting to share strategies for fighting abuse, held its 10th formal meeting at the Vatican June 1-5. The meeting began just two weeks after an independent Irish commission released a report saying there was pervasive, excessive and arbitrary punishment in most of Ireland's residential care institutions for children from 1940 through the 1970s. The institutions were funded by the state but often run by Catholic religious orders. St. Bridget Sister Angela Ryan, protection and prevention officer of Australia's National Committee for Professional Standards, said, "The media and the scandal enable us to again invite people to come forward so that there can be healing."

Pope Benedict XVI will spend his annual mountain vacation in Les Combes, a village in Italy's northwestern Alps July 13-29, the Vatican announced. General audiences will not be held during that period, but the pope will pray the Angelus with the public in nearby Romano Canavese July 19 and in Les Combes July 26, the Vatican said in a statement June 5. After his stay in the Alps, the pope will go directly to the papal summer villa at Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome. Popes generally stay at Castel Gandolfo until late September. All private audiences are suspended during the summer period, the Vatican statement said. While the pope is at Castel Gandolfo, he will recite the Angelus on Sundays with visitors gathered in the villa's courtyard. The pope is scheduled to resume his weekly general audiences at the Vatican starting Aug. 5, traveling between Castel Gandolfo and the Vatican by helicopter.

Fun-filled vacations or hectic workweeks must never distract people from dedicating a little time each day and, especially every Sunday, to God, Pope Benedict XVI said. "We must set aside time in life for God, to open our life to God with a thought, a meditation, a small prayer and to not forget Sunday is the day of the Lord," he said. During his weekly general audience June 3 in St. Peter's Square, the pope used the example of Blessed Rabanus Maurus, a Benedictine monk and bishop, to show how a person can live a busy life without sacrificing spiritual study, meditation and prayer. With an estimated 17,000 people gathered in the square, Pope Benedict continued his audience talks on important figures in the early church. When Rabanus Maurus, who lived in the Frankish Empire during the Middle Ages, became archbishop of Mainz in 847, he did not give up his studies and dedication to the Scriptures, the pope said. His life demonstrates how one can be completely at the service of others "without depriving oneself of spending a proper amount of time in reflection, study and meditation," said Pope Benedict.

In almost six years dealing with the most sensitive and serious matters of individual conscience, U.S. Cardinal J. Francis Stafford said he has had the "enormous grace" of coming to a deep understanding of how central forgiveness is to the message of the Gospel and the mission and life of the church. Everything the church celebrates and everything it offers the world in terms of education and social service "is dependent on our being freed from the burden of guilty," the cardinal said June 2, just a few hours after the Vatican announced his retirement as head of the Apostolic Penitentiary, the office that deals with the most sensitive matters of conscience as well as with the practice of indulgences. "I have re-learned and found a more profound understanding of the mystery of Christ's redemption and of the anxiety that is part of the human legacy," he said. The cardinal, who will turn 77 in July, has led the office since 2003. He began his service at the Vatican in 1996 when Pope John Paul II asked him to leave his post as archbishop of Denver to become president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Announcing the cardinal's retirement June 2, the Vatican said he would be succeeded by 73-year-old Italian Archbishop Fortunato Baldelli, who has been the Vatican nuncio to France for the past 10 years.



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