



Alaska Conference of Catholic Bishops

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

VATICAN CITY – The three Roman Catholic Bishops of Alaska met this week with Pope Benedict XVI, the heads of the various offices of the Vatican and the US Ambassador to the Vatican. Archbishop Roger L. Schwietz, OMI, of Anchorage; Bishop Donald J. Kettler of Fairbanks; and Bishop Edward J. Burns of Juneau are in Rome for their “ad limina” visit. The term “ad limina apostolorum” is a Latin term that means: to visit to the threshold of the apostles. Included in this visit were bishops that make up the region of the US Northwest (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana).

“It’s a pilgrimage to the gravesites of Saints Peter and Paul,” Archbishop Schwietz explained of the trip that all bishops in the world must regularly make. So in addition to meeting with the pope —the 264th successor to Saint Peter—visiting bishops also celebrate Mass at the gravesite of Saint Peter in the lower levels of St. Peter’s Basilica, and at the basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, the gravesite of Saint Paul. “This is a deeply religious and moving experience,” Archbishop Schwietz said. “It’s spiritually uplifting to pray at the tombs. It’s a spiritual renewal. In our role as shepherds we visit the graves of the earliest shepherds.”

In their meeting with Pope Benedict XVI, Bishop Kettler told the Holy Father that the thrust of the ministry of bishops today in the US is to bring about healing and reconciliation, in particular, he spoke of this need within the state of Alaska and in his diocese of Fairbanks. Bishop Burns told the Holy Father that within the ten years that the Church in the US has been addressing the clergy sexual abuse scandals that 5.2 million clergy, employees and volunteers in the US have gone through safe-environment training.

In their meetings with the heads of Vatican offices, the blessings and challenges of being bishops today made up the central theme of discussions. The bishops conclude their visit this weekend before making a personal retreat to Assisi where they will celebrate Mass at the tomb of St. Francis.

NB: For more information, please contact the communications office of the Archdiocese of Anchorage, Diocese of Fairbanks or the Diocese of Juneau.

Photo included.