

Denver archbishop says he's glad pope stressed pro-life teaching to Pelosi

DENVER – Pope Benedict XVI's Feb. 18 meeting with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., was a "gracious act," said Denver Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

The archbishop, speaking about the meeting during a segment of a show hosted by Neil Cavuto on cable's Fox News Channel Feb. 18, said he was glad the pope "took the occasion" of the official visit to stress the value of human life.

According to a statement from the Vatican, the pope spoke to Speaker Pelosi about the "requirements of the natural moral law and the church's consistent teaching on the dignity of human life from conception to natural death."

He stressed that all Catholics, especially those who are lawmakers, must work to protect human life at every stage.

As a publicly practicing Catholic and a public opponent of efforts to make abortion illegal, Speaker Pelosi, a native of Baltimore, has come under sharp criticism by some bishops and other Catholics who believe that a politician who supports legalized abortion should not be allowed to receive Communion.

When asked during the television interview if he would give Communion to Speaker Pelosi, Archbishop Chaput said he would want to speak to her if she planned to attend Mass in the Denver Archdiocese.

"I'd say to her what I'd say to anyone," he said. "If you don't accept what the church teaches, you shouldn't present yourself for Communion because Communion means you're in agreement with what the church teaches."

The archbishop added that "politicians are required to be both good Americans and good Catholics at the same time and to be convincing when they present the position of the community on basic human rights."

Speaker Pelosi's 15-minute private meeting with Pope Benedict took place in a small room in the Vatican audience hall after the pope's weekly general audience. She was on an official visit to Italy to meet members of the U.S. military stationed in the country and to discuss common security concerns with Italian government leaders.

Ten days prior to her meeting with the pope, Speaker Pelosi met privately with San Francisco Archbishop George H. Niederauer. Archdiocesan spokesman Maurice Healy told *Our Sunday Visitor*, a national Catholic newspaper based in Huntington, Ind., that he only learned of the meeting Feb. 17.

"I have no details and I have not spoken to the archbishop about the meeting, which had been envisioned as a private and pastoral meeting since it was first proposed in an invitation to the speaker," Healy told the newspaper in an e-mail.

He said the archbishop would not be able to comment on the meeting because he was on retreat the week of Feb. 16.

Brendan Daly, press spokesman for Speaker Pelosi, said the meeting between the House speaker and the archbishop "went well" and the two had agreed to meet again.

Speaker Pelosi angered many bishops and other Catholics last August when she told the television program "Meet the Press" that church leaders for centuries had not been able to agree on when life begins.