

Pope presents special chalice to show solidarity with Katrina victims

WASHINGTON - At the end of his remarks to the U.S. bishops April 16, Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged "the immense suffering endured by the people of God" in the New Orleans Archdiocese because of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The pope also praised "their courage in the challenging work of rebuilding" in the aftermath of the storm.

As a sign of his "prayerful solidarity" with the faithful of the archdiocese, he presented a special chalice to Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes of New Orleans.

The presentation came in the crypt church at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. It followed a vespers service and the pope's address.

Archbishop Hughes walked up to the altar area where the pope was seated to accept the chalice.

Pope Benedict said the chalice also was a sign of his "personal gratitude for the tireless devotion" that Archbishop Hughes and retired Archbishops Francis B. Schulte and Philip M. Hannan have shown "toward the flock entrusted to their care."

The gift of the chalice was "a complete surprise" to the New Orleans church leaders, archdiocesan spokeswoman Sarah Comiskey told Catholic News Service April 17.

She said the archbishops thought that, when the pope mentioned Hurricane Katrina early in his address, "that was the recognition or remembrance of what people went through because of the storm. They had no idea anything like this was coming."

They were "extremely touched, extremely moved. ... This was an incredible message of solidarity, a message of love and care and genuine concern from a loving father to his people," she said.

The chalice is silver, and the bottom of the cup is engraved with designs that look like grapes and grape leaves, she said.

Archbishop Hughes said he will celebrate Mass with the chalice at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans and after that it will be available for future celebrations of the Eucharist, Comiskey added.

It will remain at the cathedral, she said, adding that Archbishop Hughes will work with the cathedral's rector to create a permanent place for it to be displayed.