

# Pope sends congratulatory message to Obama

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI sent a personal message to President-elect Barack Obama Nov. 5, congratulating him and offering his prayers for Obama and for all the people of the United States.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said that because the message was addressed personally to Obama the Vatican did not plan to publish it.

However, he said, the papal message opened by referring to the "historic occasion" of the election, marking the first time a black man has been elected president of the United States.

The pope congratulated Obama, his wife and family, Father Lombardi said.

"He assured him of his prayers that God would help him with his high responsibilities for his country and for the international community," Father Lombardi said.

The pope also prayed that "the blessing of God would sustain him and the American people so that with all people of good will they could build a world of peace, solidarity and justice," the spokesman said.

Asked if the pope mentioned any specific issues he was concerned about, Father Lombardi responded, "peace, solidarity and justice."

The message to Obama was sent through the office of Mary Ann Glendon, the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, he said. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, also sent a message.

Father Lombardi said it is likely a formal message also will be sent on the occasion of Obama's Jan. 20 inauguration; in past years, the Vatican custom has been that the pope congratulates a new U.S. president only when he formally takes office.

The Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, was published Nov. 5 with an

opinion piece headlined “A choice that unites.”

“In the end, change occurred. The slogan that accompanied Barack Obama’s whole electoral campaign found its expression” in the results of the Nov. 4 election, said the article by Giuseppe Fiorentino.

“As the president-elect underlined in his victory speech in Chicago, America really is the country where anything can happen,” a country “able to overcome fractures and divisions that not long ago seemed impossible to heal,” it said.

But, the article said, the vote for Obama was “very pragmatic” because he was the “more convincing” candidate for “an electorate needing new hope, especially for a quick economic recovery.”

The newspaper said Obama and his supporters know “not everything is roses and flowers,” because of the “huge political, social, economic and moral challenges” the United States is facing.

Obama must unite the nation, a process L’Osservatore said will be helped by the concession speech of Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who referred to Obama as “my president.”

Vatican Radio called the election of Obama a “historic day” for the United States and underlined the overwhelmingly positive reaction around the world.

A commentary on the election for Asianews, a Rome-based missionary news agency, ran under the headline: “I’m happy for the victory of Barack Obama.”

Written by Father Piero Gheddo, a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, the commentary listed three reasons for satisfaction at the result:

- Obama will give a positive impression of the United States at a time when “America is seen in a bad light and even hated throughout the world.”
- The election of the first black U.S. president offers a lesson on racial equality, especially for Europe. It is an extraordinarily encouraging sign for black people around the world, who have often faced humiliation, it said.

- Obama's victory speech ended with the words, "God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America," something that would not be possible in Catholic Italy and which demonstrates that religion remains at the foundations of public life in the United States.