

Pope urges Mexico to respect life, praises abolition of death penalty

VATICAN CITY - Emphasizing the importance of protecting human life, Pope Benedict XVI congratulated the government of Mexico for its decision in 2005 to eliminate the death penalty.

"One cannot insist enough on the fact that the right to life must be recognized fully," the pope said July 10 as he welcomed Hector Ling Altamirano as Mexico's new ambassador to the Holy See.

Governments must enact laws and public policies that "take into account the high value that a human being has at every moment of existence," the pope said.

"In this regard, I welcome with joy the initiative of Mexico, which in 2005 eliminated its capital punishment legislation, as well as the recent actions some states have taken to protect human life from its beginning," Pope Benedict told the new ambassador.

The pope said he prayed that Mexico would be able to face its current problems with courage and determination so the nation would "continue on the path of freedom, solidarity and social progress."

The government has taken many steps to promote a more just social order and resolve serious problems such as violence, drug trafficking, inequality and poverty, "which can breed delinquency," the pope said.

He told the ambassador that an effective and lasting solution to such social problems also requires "moral renewal, the education of consciences and the building of a real culture of life."

The Catholic faith, shared by the vast majority of Mexicans, espouses values that Mexico needs in the process of "promoting justice, working for peace and reconciliation, encouraging honesty and transparency, combating violence, corruption and crime, caring constantly for human life and safeguarding human

dignity,” he said.

Respecting freedom of religion means not only protecting people’s rights to believe and to worship, but it also means allowing them to try to apply their religious values to public discussions and social policies, he said.

Pope Benedict also called on the Mexican government to promote policies that assist families, both because they are a central value of the Mexican people and because strong families are essential for a strong nation.

“The family – a community life and love founded on the indissoluble marriage of a man and a woman – is the basic unit of the social fabric,” he said. Families are “schools of respect and mutual understanding, seedbeds of human virtues and a motive of hope for the rest of society,” he said.