

Pope sends representative to Japan

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VATICAN CITY -- Two months after a strong earthquake created havoc in Japan, setting off a tsunami and crippling a nuclear power plant, Pope Benedict XVI sent an envoy to the disaster area to express the pope's concern for all affected, the Vatican said.

Cardinal Robert Sarah, president of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, was visiting Japan May 13-16 to convey the pope's "closeness, his prayers and his assistance," said a Vatican communique May 12.

The magnitude 9 earthquake struck March 11. According to a report May 6 from the Japanese Red Cross Society, 14,704 people have been confirmed death and almost 11,000 were still missing. The Red Cross also said that more than 125,000 of the people displaced by the quake were still in temporary housing two months after the earthquake.

Cardinal Sarah was to convey the pope's support to "all the families of the victims, the displaced and all the volunteers who tirelessly are working on reconstruction," the Vatican said.

The cardinal was scheduled to visit Saitama May 14, going to Catholic shelters for those left homeless by the quake, and then on to Tokyo to join the Japanese bishops at a Mass of thanksgiving for the beatification of Pope John Paul II.

He was to go to Sendai, close to the quake's epicenter, May 15 and preside at a Mass in the city's cathedral. The next day, he was to visit more centers for the displaced and meet with the leaders of the major charitable organizations assisting victims, the Vatican said.

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