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EDITORS: An electronic version of this release, with photos, is available at worldmercycongress.org/pressrelease

First-ever World Mercy Congress Set for Rome;
Pope Benedict to Participate in Watershed Event

STOCKBRIDGE, MA. (Sept. 8, 2007) — The first-ever World Apostolic Congress on Mercy (WACOM) will be held in Rome beginning on April 2, 2008 and concluding April 6 with a Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI.

According to Fr. Matthew Mauriello, National Director of the Congress and a member of WACOM's International Executive Committee, "The Congress aims to establish and support many initiatives to intensify the proclamation of mercy to the world. We also hope to increase the comprehension of this loving and hopeful message."

Some 10,000 people from around the world — church officials, clergy, religious, delegates, and many thousands of lay people, all of whom share a love for Divine Mercy — are expected to attend the milestone gathering, which begins on the third anniversary of Pope John Paul II's death. Father Mauriello says, "The goal is to have attendees return to their homes, parishes, and dioceses to plant the seeds of mercy at the local level."

Follow-up gatherings in 2009 will be held in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Oceania, and Asia. Each regional or national congress will further explore and disseminate the message of God's limitless mercy for everyone of every faith.

"The 2008 international gathering in Rome will begin an ongoing program of reflection and experience of Divine Mercy and its healing power that will not stop until its rays imbue all people with deeper love, compassion and, joy," says Fr. Kazimierz Chwalek, MIC, Director of Evangelization and Development of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception and also Associate National Director of the U.S. Congress on Mercy. "The Congress will involve the universal Church — Catholics, Orthodox, and Reformed Christians. It will include Jews, Muslims, and others. Everyone is invited to participate, because, deep down, we all seek forgiveness and love. God offers this gift freely to all."

In the 1930s through an extraordinary revelation to St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, a simple nun with a third grade education, Jesus reminded the world that His love and mercy for all people know no bounds. St. Faustina recorded these encounters with the Lord in her *Diary*, a book that has become a spiritual classic.

Pope John Paul II had a special love for Divine Mercy, becoming known as the “Great Mercy Pope.” He canonized St. Faustina on April 30, 2000, making her the first saint of the 21st century, and declared the Second Sunday of Easter as “Divine Mercy Sunday.”

Planners selected John Paul’s remarks in Krakow on August 18, 2002 when they fashioned WACOM’s mission statement. On that day, when the Holy Father entrusted the whole world to Divine Mercy, he also spoke of the need to “create and set up a pastoral program of mercy. This program should constitute a commitment ... to the life of the Church [and] to the social and political life of the nations of the world.”

As John Paul stated many times, mercy is especially needed today. “God’s mercy is a gift for our troubled time,” says Fr. Chwalek. “The time for mercy is especially needed now. The human family needs that mercy because there is so much hurt, fear, and confusion.”

The idea for the Congress began in July 2005, when Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, presided over a Divine Mercy international retreat in Lagiewniki, Poland. Inspired by its participants, Cardinal Schönborn approached Pope Benedict with a proposal for a World Mercy Congress. The Holy Father enthusiastically embraced it.

“The Holy Father loves the project,” said Fr. Patrice Chocholski of Lyon, France, the Congress’s Secretary General and Cardinal Schönborn’s representative to WACOM. “His name is opening many doors for this Congress, and we thank him for his involvement.”

The following Cardinals are slated to address the World Congress: Cardinal Schönborn; Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar General of Rome; Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, Archbishop of Krakow; Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; and Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, SJ, Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

Each day, the Congress will highlight a special theme: Wednesday April 2, “Prophetic Intuition of John Paul II;” April 3, “Mystery of Divine Mercy;” April 4, “Mercy for Communion;” and April 5, “Mercy and Mission.” The Congress concludes Sunday April 6 with a morning Mass celebrated at St. Peter’s Square by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Marians of the Immaculate Conception are providing key direction in the planning of the World Congress. The Marians’ Stockbridge-based province, home of the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy, is serving as the headquarters of the U.S. Mercy Congress.

To reserve a space at WACOM, e-mail dleab@marian.org or call 1-413-298-1307. Leave your name, address, day and evening phone numbers, and e-mail address.

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