



Pope John Paul II receives Jewish representatives at the Vatican last Tuesday. In what was described as the largest such papal audience, the pontiff met with more than 100 Jewish leaders, rabbis, cantors and their family members and called for renewed commitment to stronger dialogue between Jews and Catholics. (Osservatore Romano/AP)

### **Papal audience**

Pope John Paul II called for renewed commitment to stronger dialogue between Jews and Catholics as he warmly received more than 100 Jewish leaders, rabbis, cantors and their family members last Tuesday in what was described as the largest such Vatican audience with Jewish representatives.

Most of the participants were from the United States, including a large contingent from the New York metropolitan area, but there were also Jews from Israel, France, India, Canada and Croatia among the group wanting to thank the pontiff for his dedication to improving relations between Jews and Catholics.

The long-scheduled gathering happened to come amid revived debate among historians, Catholics and Jews over a contentious post-war issue: the Vatican's attempt to keep hold of some Jewish children who were baptized to save them from the Nazis. But no echoes of that flap seemed to resound in the marble-lined, frescoed Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace where John Paul, seated in his

white, upholstered wheeled chair, enthusiastically received his guests.

John Paul noted that this year will mark the 40th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, a landmark Vatican declaration which rescinded the accusation holding the Jews collectively responsible for the crucifixion of Christ.

"May this be an occasion for renewed commitment to increased understanding and cooperation in the service of building a world ever more firmly based on respect for the divine image in every human being," the pope said.