

A Call to Holiness

Vatican Retreat Draws 6,000; 10 Diocesan Priests Attend

Story and photos
by Father John F. Gagnier

Vatican City — October 5-9, 1984. These days mark a unique event in the life of the Church.

Over 6,000 clergy, including one and one-half percent of the world's priests, gathered in the Pope Paul VI Hall here for a worldwide retreat.

Ten priests from the Rochester diocese attended, including myself — Fathers Daniel Karl, Edwin Metzger, Gerald Connor, Anthony Mugavero, John Roach, Thomas Watts, John and Thomas Reddington, and James Conolly SJ.

From my room in a "pensione", operated by the Franciscan Sisters of Syracuse, I can see the Vatican Wall just across the street and the dome of St. Peter's only a thousand feet away. From this vantage point, I share with you this historic occasion in which the Word of God was preached by some of the best known figures in the Renewal of the Church today.

Since each bishop, priest and deacon attending was provided with an electronic headset, it was like Pentecost again as "each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue." (Acts 2:11)

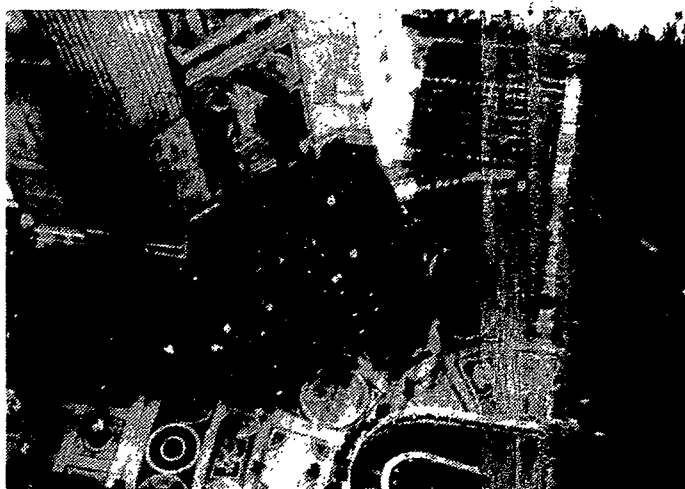
We were welcomed by Cardinal Silvio Oddi, Prefect of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Clergy.

"Can there be a retreat for 6,000 priests?" he said. "Yes! You have a unity of purpose coming to Rome — more intense dedication to the Word of God, more intimate sharing in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and a witness to the world of priests at prayer. St. Augustine tells us that in heaven it will be sufficient to know two words: Alleluia and Amen."

During these days, the Pope Paul VI Audience Hall resounded with those words.

Some dramatic events were to surround the retreat which took two years of planning. One priest from East Germany came directly to the retreat after receiving an exit visa for which he had waited 30 years.

A Dutch couple was introduced who had donated a million dollars to provide transportation for 1,000 priests from the Third World. They said to us, "Don't thank us!



Priests gather for Holy Hour at St. Peter's Basilica.

We thank you for the call to holiness which you proclaim throughout the world."

It would be impossible to describe the many events of healing and reconciliation that took place during the retreat both on a personal level and on an international level such as between the priests of Argentina and Great Britain, two nations which were at war not long ago.

From Cardinal Leo Suenens, 80, of Belgium, we heard these words: "We cannot guide the wind, but we can adjust to it. 'Charismatic' is only one element of the renewal on the part of clergy and laity. We need it to cope with these times. The paradox of the priesthood is that we are called to offer water to people who do not know they are thirsty."

From Mother Teresa of Calcutta, foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, we heard the same theme: "Mary was the first Missionary of Charity, as one who was sent to bring God's love in her visitation to Elizabeth. When Mary arrived, the unborn child (John the Baptist) in the womb of Elizabeth leaped for joy. Today the unborn child is the target of murderers.

"Like Mary, priests are called to bring God's love in their person of Jesus. People in the world today are hungry



Mother Teresa speaks to the assembly.

for God. Mary is the cause of our joy; we can be the cause of her's — all for Jesus through Mary."

Opening his talk with humorous remarks, Bishop Valerian D'Sousa of India played a guitar and sang a song. He then commented, "God takes us seriously, so we don't need to take ourselves so seriously, only Him. We have a claim on the Blessed Virgin Mary — we call her Mother. In her, Jesus gave us the best of His creation. Her faith was tested by the stable and the cross. God needed Mary to bring Jesus to us. It is not that we honor Mary too much for God has already honored her — 'He has done great things for me.'" (Luke 1:49)

Finally, on Tuesday evening was the dramatic closing Papal Mass of the retreat. A procession of 6,000 clergy entered the Basilica of St. Peter. The procession was over half of a mile long, taking 40 minutes to fill the church.

As the lights went on, the Pope entered the rear of the basilica to the thunderous applause of the priests who lined the center aisle and encircled the altar. Pope John Paul walked slowly down the aisle and around the altar so that all could see him.

The Pope began his homily with these remarks in Italian: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call (Ephesians 4:4). The words of the apostle Paul that we heard make us think, dearest brothers in Christ, of this assembly of yours which brings together many bishops and priests coming from many parts of the world. To all we resound this greeting: 'Jesus is Lord! Alleluia!'

"You have come to Rome to take part in a spiritual retreat organized by the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office. Your meeting, taking place in the Vatican, and this Eucharistic concelebration over the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles eloquently shows your profound attachment to the Chair of Peter and to the Church — one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic. The Lord wishes to confirm your faith and renew the grace of priesthood that is in you during your sojourn in this mother city of Rome, center of Catholicism."

Then, representing all of the priests of the world, the oldest priest at the retreat — ordained 58 years — and the youngest — ordained 10 days — presented the pontiff with a letter signed by all 6,000 clergy who then renewed the vows of their ordination.

Following the Mass, the Pope left even more slowly, stopping a few times so that hundreds of priests could photograph him. He was beaming with a great smile as he looked from side to side at thousands of his brother priests. It was a fitting climax to five days of prayer at the heart of the Church.

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Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, head of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops, steps from behind the altar following a Mass at the Pope Paul VI Audience Hall. In right foreground is Cardinal Leo Suenens.

Sarah Child



All in the Family

Short? No, Petite

Being short has its compensations. I never hit my head going through low doorways. I have no trouble retrieving items from the bottom cupboard. And I've yet to

sleep in a bed in which my feet hung out over the end.

When I was young, I appreciated my height (or lack of it) even more. My two best girlfriends in high school were both just shy of six feet and spent every waking moment in search of boys at least as

tall as they were. To them, wearing high heels on a date meant a one-inch elevation.

I, on the other hand, could choose to accept or not to accept an invitation out using more interesting criteria: Could he walk and chew gum at the same time? Could he discuss anything besides basketball? Would he know enough to keep his feet off the furniture? Would he remember to compliment my mother after devouring half the cake?

Still, even with the

above advantages, there is one area in my life in which being less than average height has been an unmitigated pain in the neck. To wit: the purchase of clothes.

I saw a television program the other morning in which some expert noted there were 30 million women who are 5 feet 4 or less. Obviously we all just sprung out of the woodwork yesterday because the garment manufacturers until very recently have been unaware we exist.

For almost all my life I

have been an anomaly, a woman who hates to shop. Every session was a putdown. I would gather dresses, skirts, blouses and go to the dressing room knowing full well what to expect. But each time the horror facing me in the mirror took me by surprise.

Who was this sadsack with sleeves covering her fingers, waistline at her knees, hemline flirting with her feet?

Buying cold weather protection was even worse. I substituted pants and tops for dresses but

how to get along without a coat?

A couple of years ago, somebody told the women's wear people they were missing out on a lot of bucks and they started making sizes they called "petite," obviously thinking it sounded better than short.

For the first time in my life, I can buy a dress and wear it without cutting a foot off the bottom. And while I think the "petite" designation is a misnomer (a lot of us are just short, not tiny), I am so grateful that they can name the line Munchkins and I won't let out a peep.