

Catholic Schools' Rally

Continued from Page 1

The bishop later returned to the stage for the rally's closing song, "Color the World with Song."

One of the largest delegations came from one of the diocese's largest schools — St. Charles Borromeo in Greece. More than 550 children of all ages came to the rally in 10 buses. Despite the numbers, the trip from Greece went quite smoothly according to Principal Barbara Williams.

The delegation of performers from the chorus at Elmira's Notre Dame High School was one of the smallest groups to make the trip — for good reason since they had to get up at 4:30 that morning.

Despite the logistics of loading and unloading the children from 180 buses, police and fire officials said the event ran smoothly. "No complaints," said Leo Hess, a fire department inspector.

Although most reactions to the rally were positive, inevitably a few people were disappointed.

Fifth through eighth graders who traveled to the rally from St. Mary's in Dansville described mixed feelings. "I think it's really neat to see so many people you have something in common with, who have the same feelings as you do about Catholic school," said Jennifer Spicka, a seventh grader.

But Dawn Werth, another seventh grader, was disappointed by the entertainment. "I thought it would be more lively," she said. "They need better music."

Eighth-grader Anne DiNardo of Good Shepherd had a similar reaction. "I thought we'd be more involved ... but I was impressed by the number of kids in Catholic schools," she said.

The rally brought back old memories for Thomas Bahr, principal of Our Lady of Good Counsel School. As a student years ago at St. Peter and Paul School in Rochester, he came with his class to the War Memorial to see a passion play.

"The state legislature and the governor

should be here to see this," he said Thursday. "This is the future."

Memories also flooded back into Father Thomas Wheeland's mind as he watched the Notre Dame Chorus perform. As a Notre Dame student himself some 20 years ago, he traveled with his class to the War Memorial for the Mission Cinerama. That was the last time a comparable group of Catholic school students gathered under one roof, said Father Wheeland, now pastor of Holy Cross Church.

"I think it's magnificent to get all these people together," he said. "To see students from your own school system putting on shows such as this is really inspiring ... I think we forget what a wonderment it must be for the little ones to see so many kids their own age."

Catholic high school students from around the diocese provided entertainment, from classical music to Broadway show tunes. "They were thrilled when they saw the size of the stage and the size of the crowd coming in," Sister Virginia said. Among the biggest crowd pleasers were marching bands from Aquinas and Bishop Kearney who sent their color guards into the aisles with flags snapping.

But the undeniable high point of the rally came during a performance by St. Augustine's School gospel choir.

"We would like to dedicate our last song to our school, St. Augustine's, which reaches out to all Catholic people," a choir member announced. The choir then sang "Reach Out and Touch," and in a matter of moments, the whole crowd had joined hands and were singing and swaying together.

It was an emotional moment for everyone from St. Augustine's, which is scheduled to close after this year.

"Touch one another — that's what we all need to do," said Sister St. Luke Hardy, the principal, as she peered through binoculars at the stage.

"These kids will always remember this. They may not remember exactly what happened, but they'll know they were here and it was really special," she said.



Nearly 10,000 students from 46 Catholic schools around the diocese packed the Schools Week.



Freshman Karen Welch, a member of the Aquinas marching band, stands ready amid the crowd during her high school's portion of the program.



Fifth-grader Mary Clare DeVine shares a sign with Meredith Weider.



Evan Hausle, 3, gets a hug from Bluebell.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark and Sister Carol Cimino, applaud the audience.