

Hispanic Catholics seen as 'hidden theme' of papal visit

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — Hispanic Catholics are the "hidden theme" of Pope John Paul II's September trip to the United States, according to Church officials in cities on the pontiff's itinerary.

The pope will speak on many important topics while in the United States, said Father Lawrence J. Steubben, coordinator of the Texas papal visit. "But when the trip unfolds perhaps most important will be the message coming loud and clear that Hispanics are forming part of the U.S. church, and that they have a long and rich history that goes back four centuries, that they are a very large and growing reality."

Hispanics constitute the majority of Catholics in the archdioceses of Miami, San Antonio, Texas, and Los Angeles — three of the nine dioceses the pontiff will visit during his Sept. 10-20 visit to the United States and Canada.

The pope is visiting parts of the nation that are heavily Hispanic, said Father Steubben, and the trip cannot help but emphasize the "giftedness, customs and language of Hispanic Catholics."

He thinks media coverage generated by the papal trip inadvertently may force U.S. Catholics to realize "this is no longer a little border thing," and take notice of the way Hispanics are changing the face of the U.S. Church and the nation.

In Monterey, thousands of Mexican migrant farmworkers are likely to be among those greeting the pope. In the Diocese of Phoenix, where Hispanics include third-generation Mexican-American doctors and lawyers as well as the more recently arrived farmworkers, estimates are that 18-35 percent of the Church is Hispanic.

San Francisco is refuge to growing numbers of Central American immigrants. And, as far north as Detroit, large numbers of Hispanics are making plans to see the

pontiff. Raul Feliciano, director of Detroit's Office for Hispanic Ministry, anticipates almost all of the estimated 115,000 Hispanics in the archdiocese will turn out to see the pope.

While Hispanic Catholics are not among the official themes the pope will address during the 10-day visit, the pontiff will speak in Spanish on the topic of parish ministry at the largely Hispanic Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Antonio. In a number of cities Spanish and Hispanic contributions to the U.S. Church will be incorporated into Masses celebrated by the pope.

In downtown Los Angeles, the pope is scheduled to address schoolchildren at Immaculate Conception Elementary School, where the majority of students are Hispanic and most instruction is given in Spanish.

Hispanics already are "a major theme in the American Church," Father Steubben said. "When one-half the Catholics in Yakima, Wash., are Hispanic, and 500,000 Catholics in Chicago are Hispanic, and half of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City is Hispanic, you've got to realize this is no longer a little border thing." He added that three out of every four Texas Catholics are Hispanics.

In the Archdiocese of Miami, where the Catholic population is 75 percent Hispanic, "everybody's talking about (the papal trip)," said Maria Luisa Gaston, a member of the pastoral team of the Miami-based Southeast Region Office for Hispanic Affairs.

Gaston agrees that Hispanic Catholics are the papal trip's hidden theme, but wishes it weren't such a secret in Miami. Hispanics will be the majority of those attending functions during the pope's stop in Miami, she said, "but unlike what's happening in San Antonio, that aspect is not being played up here."

She said neither the pontiff nor the press

are likely to note the influence of Hispanics on the Miami Church unless they take time to walk among the crowds and chat with the people.

Although many of Miami's Hispanic Catholics were deeply disappointed that the pope will not visit the Miami shrine of Our Lady of Charity, the patroness of Cuba, their disappointment won't keep them away from lining up to see Pope John Paul II, she said.

"The pope is a figure Hispanics respect," Gaston said. "He's a symbol of unity in the church. His stop here is thought of as an historic moment."

In the Diocese of Monterey, where some towns are 50-75 percent Hispanic, the people consider it a privilege that the pope is coming to see them, said Sister Patricia Murtagh, a Sister of Charity of the Infant Mary and director of the Hispanic ministry office.

Since the pope will speak on the theme of agriculture in Monterey, Sister Murtagh notes, "he cannot help but touch on Hispanic life. It's the Hispanics who are working in the fields."

She said about 121 migrant camps in the Diocese of Monterey employ migrants, who

Native American bishop persists in hopes for Phoenix canonization of Kateri Takakwitha

Washington (NC) — The nation's first Native American bishop, Bishop Donald E. Pelotte of Gallup, New Mexico, says Catholic Native Americans hope Pope John Paul II will canonize Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha during his stop in Phoenix, Ariz. But a Vatican official has said that won't happen.

In an interview, Bishop Pelotte said he had no word from Rome on the matter, but said Native Americans have "every hope that Holy Father will do this. We certainly have expressed that hope very loudly and clearly in all our correspondence with Rome."

An official with the Vatican Congregation for Sainthood Causes later said, however, that the 17th-century Mohawk, who was beatified in 1980, will not be canonized because "there is no second miracle which took place after the date of beatification that has been canonically

work in the fields cutting, thinning and watering artichokes, carrots and broccoli. Other migrants work in packing companies.

"A lot of these people have been working here for many years, giving a lot to this country. Many have not been paid as well as they should have been. A lot of them don't qualify for legalization" under the 1986 immigration amnesty program, Sister Murtagh said.

She said the farmworkers want to tell the pope that "they know hard times. They're trying to do the best for their families, and to stay with the Church."

During the papal Mass celebrated at Laguna Seca Raceway in the Diocese of Monterey, three farmworkers will carry baskets of fruits and vegetables to the altar during the offertory procession, she said.

U.S. Hispanics are moved that "the pope is coming to their homes in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Miami and San Antonio," said Primitivo Romero, director of the Office for Hispanic Affairs of the Diocese of Phoenix. "Hispanics around the country are praying and saying rosaries so that he will have a safe 'caminata' (journey) through the United States," he said.

approved?"

A second miracle is required for canonization, except in cases of martyrs.

"She has been the great unifier of Indian Catholics," Bishop Pelotte said, adding that he viewed the growth of devotions throughout the Southwest as a miracle in itself.

Capuchin Father Gilbert Hemauer, executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference for Catholic Native Peoples, told National Catholic News Service Aug. 17 that "all things are possible, but we would be surprised (by a September canonization). We have not received any word to that effect."

Father Hemauer is one of the organizers for the pope's Sept. 14 meeting with Indians in Phoenix. A spokeswoman for the Phoenix diocese said planners "don't anticipate that (canonization) happening."

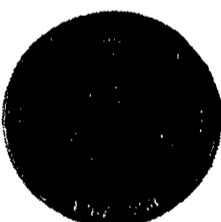
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