



Father John Gagnier

Five thousand priests wearing matching stoles form an impressive procession across the vast St. Peter's Square on their way to a concelebrated Mass with Pope John Paul II.

Seneca Falls priest attends worldwide retreat in Rome

By Father John Gagnier
Guest contributor

In 1984, 10 priests from the Diocese of Rochester — myself included — traveled to Rome for the Worldwide Retreat for Priests.

This past September 14-18, I was the only priest from the diocese to travel to the second of these gatherings.

This year's event — which focused on evangelization — was attended by three cardinals, 100 bishops and more than 5,000 priests and deacons.

In Rome, we heard talks by a variety of speakers, including Bishop Valerian D'Sousa of Pune, India, the "singing bishop;" Redemptorist Father Tom Forrest of Evangelization 2,000; Mother Teresa of Calcutta; and Molly Kelly, a mother of eight who speaks to U.S. teenagers about chastity.

And, of course, we heard Pope John Paul II address the retreat's theme during his Sept. 18 Mass. "Only the one who possesses Christ because he desires him, loves him and remains in intimate, permanent and increasing communion of life with him becomes a 'witness' and therefore a believable 'evangelizer,'" the Holy Father said.

For me, however, the trip to Rome included contact with two such "witnesses." I stopped in England at a church named for St. John Fisher, and visited the Diocese of Rochester's Father Ted Metzger, currently serving as a Maryknoll Associate in



Father Edwin "Ted" Metzger (left) introduces Father John Gagnier to the residents of the Nairobi River Settlement in Kenya.

Kenya.

As part of my Sept. 2-3 stopover in London on the way to Kenya, I visited the Church of St. John Fisher in Rochester.

St. John Fisher, the bishop of Rochester, England, was arrested and taken to London to stand trial for opposing the royal decree that made the king of England the head of the Church.

Later, after a contrived trial, St. John Fisher was beheaded in the courtyard of

the Tower of London on June 22, 1535.

In 1935, John Cardinal Fisher was canonized. Attending the ceremony in Rome was Bishop James E. Kearney, who two years later became bishop of Rochester, New York.

Bishop Kearney later appealed to the people of Rochester to contribute funds for the construction of the Church of St. John Fisher in Rochester, England. In response, the people of the U.S. Rochester diocese

raised \$30,000, a third of the cost of the new church.

After leaving London, I arrived in Kenya Sept. 4, where I visited Father Ted Metzger, former pastor of St. Stephens' Parish in Geneva. He is now the pastor of St. Joseph Centre in Buru Buru, a suburb of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

Father Metzger has both foreign and native lay people to help him staff his parish. He has become well versed in the native Swahili language in which he both preaches and celebrates Mass.

Father Ted's leadership in the parish has brought about an increased participation of men in the life of a community that — like communities in many other places — considers religion a matter for women and children.

I left Kenya Sept. 10 for the trip to Rome and the retreat.

Those of us who gathered for the worldwide priests' retreat were welcomed on behalf of the Holy Father by Cardinal Antonio Innocenti, prefect of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. "We are sent forth into the task of evangelization," Cardinal Innocenti remarked. "Like the victim robbed on the road, the world waits for Christ."

Bishop D'Sousa opened his remarks with singing and guitar playing. "A glad heart is a happy face," he observed. "We cannot bring Easter news with Good Friday faces."

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