

Visionary brings messages to youths, adults

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

GREECE — He's not a New Kid on the Block, and you'll never hear him say, "Cowabunga, dude." But Ivan Dragicevic, a visionary from Medjugorje, has a unique way of communicating to American youths the messages he says he receives from the Blessed Mother.

Ivan visited Rochester last week and spoke to teens — as well as adults — at St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Nov. 7. Now on his third tour of the United States, he is attracting wider and wider audiences of teens as he continues to preach to them the messages of peace, conversion, prayer, penance, fasting, faith and love.

Ivan is one of the six original visionaries of Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, who are still receiving daily apparitions from the Blessed Mother. For the past nine years — except for the 11 months that he was in Yugoslavia's military service — Mary has appeared to him promptly at 5:40 p.m. every day, and her visits usually last from five to 10 minutes. Ivan said their talks are very personal.

"I feel more comfortable talking to our Blessed Lady than I feel talking to you tonight," Ivan told the audience at St. Charles.

Yet the young Yugoslavian said he has no idea why Mary chose him for her visits. "I am different than what people are making of me," he said. "I am not a celebrity, but I have a peace in my heart that gives me the strength to do all this."

Ivan said he is a typical young adult — finding time for family, friends and sports. In fact, Ivan is very interested in sports, and plays basketball, European soccer (football) and tennis. Before his stop in Rochester, the visionary visited Syracuse University, where he had a chance to play basketball with the SU Orangemen during a practice at Manley Field House. He spent time talking with All-American Billy Owens and SU head coach Jim Boeheim.

Now 25 years old, Ivan said he first saw the Blessed Mother when he was a 16-year-old high school student. The first apparition occurred while he was playing a game similar to American football. Mary appeared to him again later that day while he and a friend were taking a walk during the halftime break of a basketball game they had been watching on television.

Ivan said his initial response to Our Lady's presence was that of shock. "And it was a shock that I never recovered from," the visionary said.

Ivan continues to live with his parents in Medjugorje, and spends much of his time talking with pilgrims who visit his home



Above, children pray the rosary with Ivan Dragicevic during the Medjugorje visionary's Nov. 7 visit to St. Charles Borromeo Church, Greece. At right, Dragicevic tells news reporters about the visit he said he had received from the Blessed Mother in a side chapel of the church.

town or traveling to other cities to proclaim Mary's messages. On this trip, Ivan plans to visit Wichita, Chicago and Washington, D.C. — where he will meet with President George Bush and former President Ronald Reagan — before heading back home in December.

Although Ivan said it was impossible to describe Mary's beauty in human words, he said she wears a gray garment and a white veil; has blue eyes, rosy cheeks and dark hair; and always stands on a cloud.

During his speech, the young ambassador of Mary talked about the world young people must live in today — a world that is marred by use of drugs and alcohol.

"Moral decay is present all around us, and the immoral revolution leads in all the wrong directions," he said.

Noting that parents need to be aware of this situation, he emphasized the responsibility parents have in bringing up their children. Some parents have their priorities mixed up, letting material things come before their children, he said.

"Parents have to talk straight, sincerely and often with their children," the seer observed.

Schools also have a big influence on children, but educators often put religion on a low level of importance or teach it superficially, he continued. A big danger exists when young people live away from their parents at college and are exposed to many negative influences, he said.

The Yugoslavian also stressed the importance of family prayer in order to solve problems and create harmony in the home.

"Every family unit should be a prayer group," he said, "and the strength of the

family will strengthen the church."

Acknowledging that some children do not have a family with which to pray, the young man from Medjugorje urged all Christians to pray for those children who need stronger families. "We must give our love to them through prayer," he said. "With this we would make the Blessed Mother very happy."

Another problem for young adults is early marriages, the visionary noted, adding that too many people are unprepared for lifelong commitment. These young people have many problems that are not resolved before they get married, which causes great suffering later in their marriages, he added.

"We have to listen to Our Mother about these things. That is why she came here to us," said the young speaker.

Ivan implored the youths to accept the life that has been given to them. "You live only once so appreciate your life," he said.

Part of appreciating life is helping to build a new world, he informed his young audience.

"The generation before us left such a mess," he stated. "We must make a new world so that we may make Our Lady happy, then all may be happy."

The messenger noted that Mary is happy with most young people, but she wants to help make their lives even better. Only a minority of youths are bad, he said, and

Mary wants to help those who have gone astray to find the straight path.

Ivan suggests that young people pray thoughtfully and reflect on Scripture readings. "But," he added, "you cannot force religion on anyone. If someone starts out only saying three decades of the rosary, don't force them to pray the whole thing. It will come."

Ivan said Mary also understands the pressures to conform that faces young people today, and said she will help them if they pray.

Ivan invited about 50 people to pray with him in a private room at St. Charles for his apparition on Wednesday evening. He later told the people who joined him in prayer that Mary had extended her hands and prayed over everyone in the room. She told him to ask the people to pray for peace.

"There are so many disturbed people," Ivan told the crowd. "Our Lady wants us to pray for peace in the world, in the church and in every heart."

Ivan's words reached many young people that night, including Colleen Coughlin, 16, and Rachel Thielmann, 14, of the youth group at Holy Trinity Parish. Colleen's eyes lit up as she spoke of her belief in the apparitions.

"There are people who don't believe in the visionaries, but after being here tonight, I definitely know it's true," added her friend, Rachel.

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