

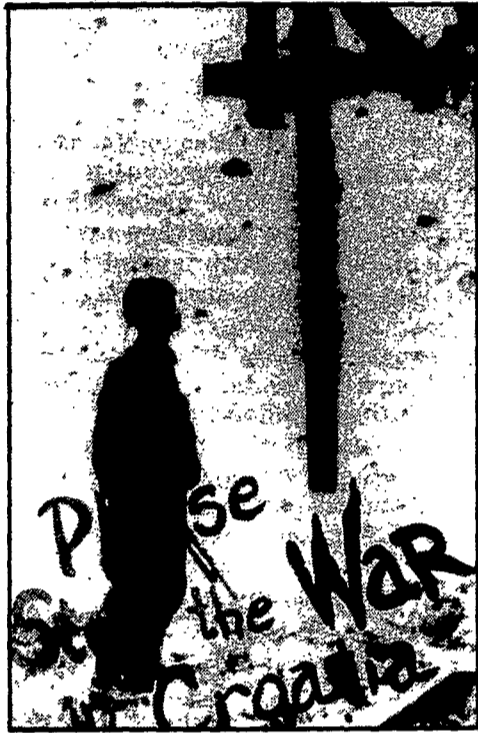
# Visionary says prayer can bring about peace

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — He doesn't walk on water. He doesn't perform miracles. In fact, the sharply dressed, 26-year-old Ivan Dragicevic could easily pass for a business executive.

Yet what Dragicevic represents gives his followers cause to consider him an extraordinary human being.

Dragicevic is one of the six visionaries who claim to have seen and spoken with the Virgin Mary in Medjugorje, a



People across the United States gathered in state capitals for five hours Nov. 30, carrying these signs while praying for peace.

small town in the Yugoslavian republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

He visited Rochester Friday, Nov. 29, for two appearances at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center — an afternoon gathering for area youths, and an evening presentation to adults. Together, the two events attracted nearly 3,000 people.

The appearances marked Dragicevic's second trip to Rochester. Last year he spoke at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece, but attracted such a large crowd that Father Joseph Catanise, parochial vicar at the parish and an organizer of both visits, opted for the convention center this time around.

Dragicevic's visit to Rochester was arranged by Don Dwello of Waterloo, a veteran pilgrim to Medjugorje who frequently conducts tours to the site.

The appearance kicked off a local nine-day Prayer for World Peace campaign. The theme seemed fitting for Dragicevic, whose homeland is embroiled in a bitter civil war.

"My thoughts are mostly directed to young people," Dragicevic said during the gathering with area youths. "Our Lady is very concerned about young people, and I have consented to help as much as I can."

It was just over 10 years ago that Mary is said to have first appeared to Dragicevic and five other residents of Medjugorje. Since then, the town has attracted millions of pilgrims from all over the world who pray and visit with visionaries at the site.

Dragicevic said he still speaks with Mary every day at around 5:40 p.m. Each conversation lasts a few minutes and usually occurs in a private setting.

"If you look at the history of apparitions, none of them have lasted nearly this long. And no visionary has ever gone as public as Ivan," noted Father Catanise, who has led four pilgrimages to Medjugorje.



Ivan Dragicevic, a visionary from Medjugorje, was in Rochester Nov. 29 to kick off a nine-day Prayer for World Peace.

Dragicevic's message to his Rochester audiences was consistent and simple: Prayer is the best way to bring about world peace.

"Our Lady says that there are so many influences and problems that lead our thoughts astray, that it is important for us to decide to start praying," Dragicevic said through an interpreter. "If you would only know how much Our Lady is praying for all of us, we would all be on our knees praying."

Many of those who attended the Convention Center events already had visited Medjugorje. When Dragicevic asked how many had made pilgrimages, about half of those at the evening gathering raised their hands.

Among them was Al Affonso of Rochester, a parishioner at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, who went to Medjugorje with his wife, Patricia, in 1989. Last Friday he took his five children, ages 18 months to 14 years, to see Dragicevic.

"I think they were surprised that he was an ordinary person," Affonso said. "These (the visionaries) are simple folks, and they're asking us to make simple changes."

Although millions like the Affonsos believe in the apparitions at Medjugorje, Dragicevic acknowledged that others question their validity. Thus far, the Catholic Church has not taken a stand on the alleged apparitions.

"There are always those who don't believe, as there were when Jesus was on earth," Dragicevic remarked during a private interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "I don't want to have to force anyone to change their opinion. Everybody has the freedom of choice. They can listen to me and then make their own decision."

Dragicevic is providing opportunities for many people to make such decisions during his current four-month tour of the United States and Canada. And Father Catanise said the visionary may return to Rochester in May, 1992.

His visits also have provided an outlet for prospective pilgrims whose visits to Medjugorje have been deterred by escalating strife in Yugoslavia. Although Medjugorje has not been attacked by Serbian-led forces, Dragicevic's interpreter, Helen Saicevic, said the atmosphere there is "very tense."

"It seems like my purpose (on this tour) is to make this (the audiences') Medjugorje, even though it wasn't planned that way," Dragicevic told the *Courier*.

## Group to offer own plan

ROCHESTER — School parents opposing a plan to close three schools in the Northeast Quadrant planned to present an alternate plan to the quadrant's governance board earlier this week.

The group was slated to present its alternate plan to the board during its regular monthly meeting Wednesday, Dec. 4 at St. Margaret Mary's Parish, 401 Rogers Parkway.

Opponents of the current reorganization plan will emphasize fundraising and student recruitment drives — rather than school closings — in their alternative proposal, according to Barry Sullivan, leader of school parents against the plan and president of St. Thomas the Apostle's School Board.

In addition to St. Cecilia's and St. Stanislaus schools, St. Thomas the Apostle School was targeted for closing by the governance board's reorganization plan. In part, the board has cited quadrant budget deficits and a decline in overall quadrant enrollment as the basis for its decision to recommend closing the schools.

But a number of members of the board itself currently support tabling the current reorganization proposal and stated their beliefs in a Nov. 25 letter they submitted to Thomas O'Neil, the board's chairman.

Signed by seven members of the governance board, the letter stated that the signatories decided to compose the petition when Sullivan presented them with an alternate proposal.

"This proposal was not in existence at the time the Board met to address

the deficit," the petition read. "We are impressed by the strong support and organization which makes this proposal, and we see it as a creditable effort to address the problem."

The letter also pointed out that Sullivan's group wants a five-year moratorium on any further reorganization in the Northeast Quadrant so that "clear patterns emerge in reference to registration, usage, support and development of Catholic Education."

The fact that the school parents' alternate proposal would even receive consideration at the Dec. 4 meeting represents a small victory for the opponents of the school closings.

Originally, the quadrant board was to have submitted its reorganization plan to the Diocesan Christian Formation and Education Council by Dec. 1. However, the diocese agreed to extend the deadline for submission of the reorganization proposal to Dec. 5 after O'Neil requested an extension on Tuesday, Nov. 26, noted Father George Norton, diocesan spokesman.

Nonetheless, the diocese wants to see a "tangible" reorganization proposal from the northeast board, Father Norton stressed. He pointed out that, in a Nov. 5 letter to O'Neil, Bishop Matthew H. Clark had informed the governance board that "I could not accept a status quo situation in the quadrant for 1992-93."

The bishop wrote the letter after the governance board had initially rejected a reorganization proposal from its strategic planning committee.

— Rob Cullivan

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