

Patriarch takes time out for diocesan youths

Visits students at two schools

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — To the rest of the world, he is known as the patriarch who will celebrate Christmas midnight Mass in Bethlehem next week.

But for a group of third-graders, he'll be remembered simply as the friendly priest who held the class's pet rabbit in his lap.

Visiting with young students — and lending insights about youths in his homeland — was the main mission for Patriarch Michel Sabbah, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, this past Friday morning, Dec. 11. Battling through a fierce snowstorm, Patriarch Sabbah managed to keep his scheduled appearances at Aquinas Institute, 1127 Dewey Ave.; and St. John the Evangelist Church, 150 Floverton St.

These visits were part of an 11-day tour of the United States and Canada for the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem.

At Aquinas, Patriarch Sabbah celebrated a Mass for the student body and faculty in the school's auditorium. He then participated in a question-and-answer session in the school library with representatives of AQ's student council, chaplaincy team and peer ministry.

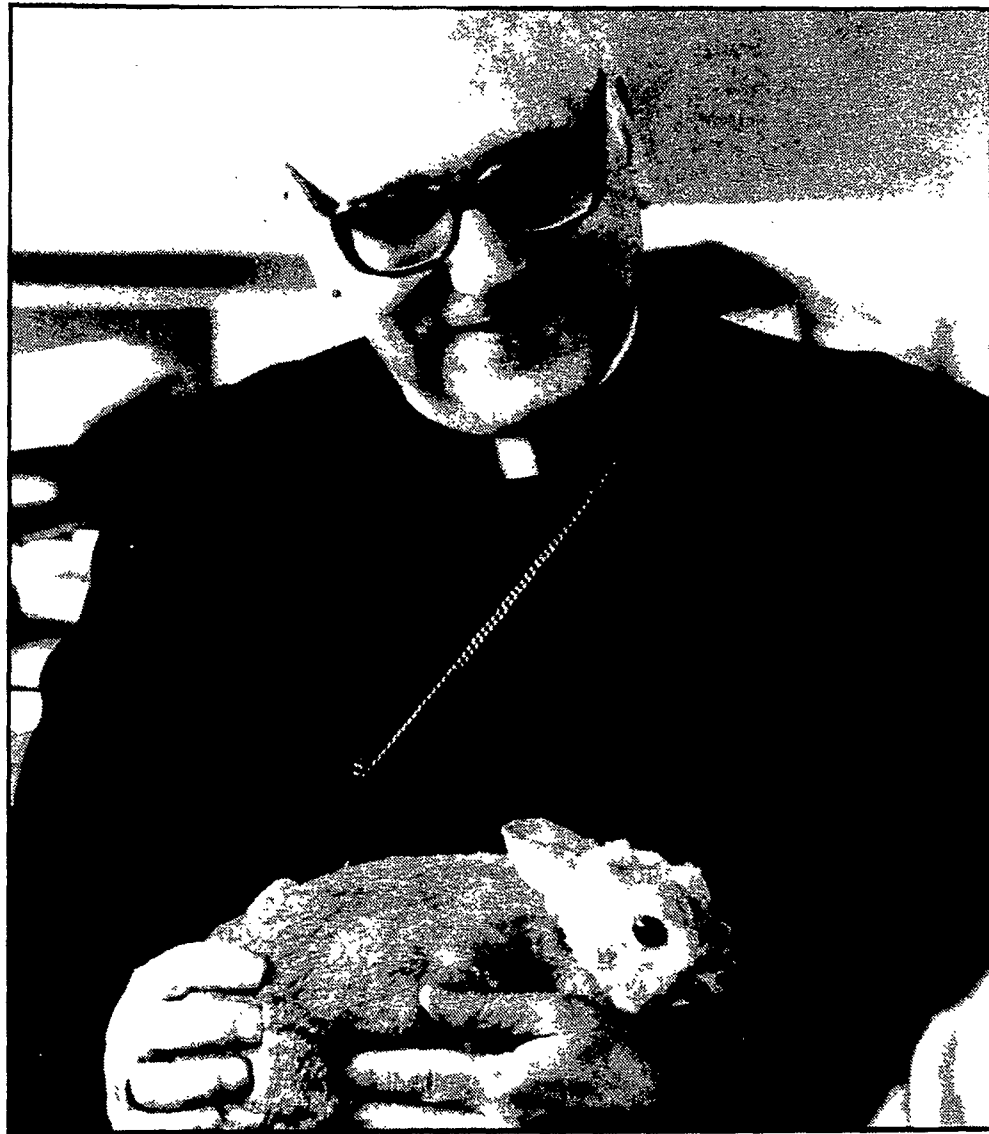
Most of the discussion centered around ongoing tensions in Jerusalem between Jews and Palestinians. The 59-year-old patriarch, whose see covers Israel, Jordan and occupied territories in the Gaza Strip, emphasized to students his goal of promoting peaceful understanding between people of all religious beliefs.

Wendy Brundage, a peer ministry leader, asked Patriarch Sabbah what life is like for Jerusalem teen-agers.

"It's a very hard life," he responded. "They're facing a military situation. They're always exposed to arrests and prison."

Brundage, a 17-year-old senior, has a particular interest in the Middle East: her brother, Michael, a 1986 Aquinas graduate, spent seven months in Jerusalem earlier this year as a volunteer worker.

Following the Aquinas appearance, Patriarch Sabbah headed across town



Patriarch Michel Sabbah, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, holds up the class pet, Bugsy the Rabbit, during a visit with third-grade students at St. John the Evangelist in Rochester Dec. 11.

to meet with students from St. John the Evangelist School. Inside St. John's Church, the patriarch blessed and distributed wooden Christmas-tree ornaments which he had brought as gifts for the children. He also fielded more questions.

Timothy Isganitis, a 9-year-old St. John's fourth-grader, wanted to know about the challenges of preaching in an environment surrounded by violence.

"It's very difficult to preach the Gospel," the patriarch said. "We tell everybody that you have to love each other, even the enemy."

The patriarch, who was born and raised in Bethlehem, implored St. John's students to "pray for all the children of Bethlehem, especially on Christmas Day."

Patriarch Sabbah then walked over to St. John the Evangelist School, 545 Humboldt St., where he visited a class of third-graders. Again the patriarch patiently answered questions — this time with "Bugsy," the class's pet rabbit, sitting in his lap. Not surprisingly, some of the students' queries dealt with pets and animals in Jerusalem.

Accompanying the patriarch during his morning tour, as well as the rest of his 11-day excursion, was Father Thomas Rosica, CSB, a 1977 Aquinas graduate. Father Rosica is currently a doctoral student at the Ecole Biblique de Jerusalem, and maintains frequent contact with the patriarch. His sister, Maria, teaches the St. John the Evangelist third-grade class which the patriarch visited.

Brundage noted that Patriarch Sabbah's appearances at Aquinas and St. John the Evangelist, as well as other parts of North America, will help portray the human side of Middle Eastern natives.

"(The patriarch) knows what goes on there, but our images of all the people are very negative. And that has to change," Brundage commented. "(The fighting) is not all their fault."

She added that the patriarch's efforts to improve Middle Eastern relations is similar to the message spread by another who resided in the same land 2,000 years ago — Jesus Christ.

"All I really hope is that peace will come (to the Middle East), because that's where Jesus lived. And he was not violent," said Brundage.



Needy families to benefit from Mercy High School project

BRIGHTON — Students at Our Lady of Mercy High School, 1437 Blossom Road, are devoting the month of December to collecting items for Rochester-area families in need.

Each homeroom was assigned a specific agency or family in late November. Students then collected non-perishable food, toys and clothing to

fill Christmas baskets.

This project will culminate with an 8:30 a.m. Mass on Wednesday, Dec. 23, in the Mercy auditorium. Bishop Matthew H. Clark will celebrate the Mass and also bless the food and gifts. Following Mass, students will deliver the baskets to designated families.

KATS begins new program for deceased children's kin

ROCHESTER — Kids Adjusting Through Support (KATS) has started a new program to help families of deceased children.

Known as the Child Bereavement Program, this service will include a series of 10 weekly support groups. Parent group meetings are beginning this month, with a full program planned for the spring that will include child groups as well.

The program is offered free of charge. For details, write to KATS, Inc., 600 East Ave., Rochester, 14607, or call 716/232-5287.

'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Acts 20: 35

We thank you ...

In the name of our missionaries and the people of God they serve in every area of Latin America, Africa, the South Pacific and Asia... For helping us touch the world with God's unselfish love during the past year.

We pray that Christ will be the real light, joy and peace of your life now and throughout the New Year!

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