

Papal visit draws high level of interest

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Last night when I returned home from a Thanks Giving Appeal meeting in Auburn, I found a note telling me that Michael Wentzel, a reporter for the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, wants to speak with me today or tomorrow about Pope John Paul II's visit to our country next week.

It was not surprising to receive such a message because the visit is a newsworthy event that has already attracted much attention across the nation and in our local community.

The pope's visit is unquestionably of interest to great numbers of people. Roman Catholics regard the pope with respect and affection because he is successor to Peter and, in that ministry, attends to the deep bonds of faith and charity that should identify us as Catholic Christians.

Members of other Christian churches and people of other faiths respect the pope as a moral leader of considerable stature. And, I think it is true to say, great numbers of people in the world community recognize John Paul II as a man of great intelligence, uncommon energy and deep convictions about the human dignity and worth of every single person on the planet.

Last week I was in New York for two days of meetings with the bishops of the eight New York state dioceses. Our agenda was wide-ranging, but the papal visit was an item of particular interest. We received a



A LONG THE WAY

full briefing from Bishop Patrick Sheridan, vicar general of the Archdiocese of New York, who represented Cardinal O'Connor in working with Vatican authorities to arrange events in the archdiocese.

As you might expect, security surrounding the visit is extremely tight. The visit of a world leader to United Nations headquarters to deliver a major address would always raise security issues. That is even more true in an age when violence is so quickly adopted as a sign of protest or identified as a solution to problems. And, without question, the horror of the 1981 attempt on John Paul II's life is still fresh in the minds of the world's people.

One of the unfortunate — and unforeseen — consequences of that

extraordinary level of security is that less space than originally anticipated will be available for participants at some of the New York events. Less space for participants means fewer tickets. The smaller pool of tickets means fewer tickets for distribution to the dioceses of our state. Yesterday I had to write to a number of people in our diocese with the disappointing news that we had run out of tickets and cannot obtain more.

I will attend most of the New York City events. I was not invited to the United Nations, but will be at Aqueduct Raceway for the Eucharistic Liturgy with the people of the Brooklyn diocese. In New York I will be at: St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, for the pope's session with seminarians from the region and the people of Yonkers; at St. Patrick's Cathedral for prayer of the rosary; at Central Park for Mass with the youths of the region; and at the cardinal's residence for dinner with the pope and his party with the bishops of our region.

After the visit I'll tell you of my experience of it in this column. In the meantime, I invite you to pray for Pope John Paul II that God will bless him with all of the faith, strength and courage he needs for his arduous ministry to the Church throughout the world. I ask you to pray as well that all of us in our country will be genuinely open to honor his words with an honest hearing and careful consideration.

Peace to all.

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