

Lunch at soup kitchen added to pope's plans

By Tina Vardaro
Catholic News Service.

BALTIMORE — "I'm going to have lunch with the pope ... the pope!"

Donna Campbell still can't believe she's been invited to a luncheon with Pope John Paul II to be served at Our Daily Bread soup kitchen in Baltimore Oct. 8.

She and her three children will join individuals and families representing six Catholic Charities programs for a meal of chicken casserole, peas, carrots, a dinner roll and cookies — the same meal served to more than 800 guests on a typical day at the city's largest soup kitchen.

Pope John Paul will visit Our Daily Bread about 2 p.m., after the papal parade through Baltimore that will end near the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, next door to the soup kitchen. He and his guests will sit at a 24-foot-long table, using everyday place settings.

In announcing the last-minute addition to the pope's schedule, Baltimore Cardinal William H. Keeler said he and Harold Smith, executive director of archdiocesan Catholic Charities, first extended the invitation to the papal advance team last June, but the team decided the schedule was too tight to add another event.

"Then we thought, 'Suppose he could come for lunch? Now that would be special,'" Cardinal Keeler said. The visit will give Pope John Paul an opportunity "to bring his personal ministry and affirmation to those facing challenges" in Baltimore, he added.

The lunch is scheduled to last about an hour and will be prepared and served by volunteers who have worked at the Catholic Charities soup kitchen for years.



Cardinal Keeler

Some have been volunteers since the program began 14 years ago.

George Thompson, 81, is one of those longtime volunteers, cooking meals two or three days a week. He said he won't do anything differently for the pope's meal.

"We'll say, 'This is what we serve,' and it'll be the truth and we won't have to go to confession," he said.

Asked why he has worked at Our Daily Bread for so many years, Thompson said, "If you came here and saw those people lined up in 102-degree weather, or in the snow and cold, you'd know they need it. That's why I do it."

Campbell, whose three children all took part in St. Veronica's Head Start program in the Cherry Hill neighborhood of Baltimore, said she was speechless when Sister Loretta Rosendale, the program's director, told her of the invitation.

"My mouth was wide open," she said. "I asked Sister Loretta how this happened."

Campbell said it's an honor for her family to participate in this special occasion, and she thinks the pope will be comfortable with his guests. "He'll be able to sit down with ordinary people for an hour or two, and he won't have to worry about spilling anything," she said.

Pope John Paul's other fellow diners will represent Our Daily Bread; the Hispanic Apostolate; F.X. Gallagher Services, which provides residential and day programs for the developmentally disabled; Villa Louise, a comprehensive program for pregnant and parenting adolescents; and International Children's Services, which provides for adoption of children from overseas.

Since the area around the basilica will be cordoned off for security reasons, the soup kitchen's regularly scheduled meal will be served at St. Alphonsus school hall nearby. Margie Counselman, director of volunteer programs for Catholic Charities, said every effort will be made to tell regular guests about the change when they come for their meals Oct. 6 and 7.

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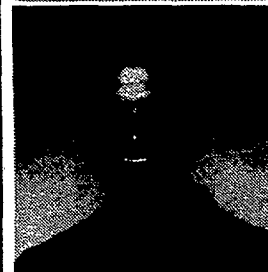
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