



Pilgrims to Sosnowiec, Poland, wave yellow streamers to welcome Pope John Paul II to a Mass June 14.

Pope battles bout of flu

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

KRAKOW, Poland — A mild case of the flu forced Pope John Paul II to cancel a day's activities in Poland, including a planned papal Mass for more than 1 million people in his former Archdiocese of Krakow.

The pope was running a fever of about 100 degrees and had been advised to rest for a day June 15, papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls told reporters. The spokesman said the pope was taking anti-flu medicine and hoped to resume his scheduled activities the next day.

The 79-year-old pontiff was saddened to have to cancel his participation in the

Mass, and it took aides a long time to convince him to stay at his residence and rest, Navarro-Valls said. It was the first time bad health had caused the pope to cancel a full day's events during a foreign trip.

"It was a rather difficult thing for him, but there was no other choice," the spokesman said. He said the pope would stay in bed most of the day and remain under the care of his physician, Dr. Renato Buzzonetti.

"Even the pope has to obey someone. In this case, it's the doctor," Navarro-Valls said.

The Krakow Mass was celebrated without the pope, and at its conclusion — with the pope watching on TV — the crowd

Continued on page 4



Catholic Courier

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Inside This Week

Bishop stops by Cleveland prelate spreads word on his city-suburb efforts
— Page 3



BK students hail summer months
Teens' traditional night out sets PACE
— Page 6



Too much stress affects even kids
Help is around the corner at Brockport summer workshops
— Page 7

Parishes seek convent uses

In the late 1800s, the convent at Rochester's Holy Family Church was filled with women religious who taught at the parish school.

Today, it houses four nuns and three single men.

Beginning in June 1998, the parish's convent has been rented by nuns and other lay people, most of whom work full-time jobs away from Holy Family.

The group prays together as a formalized community, and also helps with the Sisters of St. Joseph Volunteer Corps, which operates out of the convent. This outreach involves people who stay temporarily at Holy Family while volunteering with a number of programs on Rochester's west side.

"Having people in the convent again, the (parishioners) love it. They're very affirming and supportive," said Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ, one of Holy Family's women religious residents. Sister Del Santo, director of the volunteer program, said that the convent had been vacant since 1995.

Holy Family's is among the more creative approaches for parishes with excess convent space. These buildings, which in many cases were built to house 20 or more nuns, are no longer needed for such purposes: Not only is the number of women religious decreasing, but sisters are also showing an increased preference to reside in apartments and rented houses near the communities in which they work.

Leadership-team members in the Sisters of St. Joseph and Sisters of Mercy — the two largest orders in the



Sister Lucy Jean, CSC, stands in her old bedroom at St. Francis de Sales Convent in Geneva, her home from 1986 until February this year. The convent is slated for demolition.

Rochester Diocese — pointed out that sisters who continue living in convents now pay rent to parishes. In past generations they generally lived in convents rent-free in exchange for teaching at parish schools or performing other parish duties. Many of those parish schools are either no longer in operation, or employ relatively few sisters.

Rectories, as well, increasingly have unoccupied space as the number of priests continues to dip and some priests opt to live off parish grounds.

Yet convents were built for greater occupancy than were rectories and are therefore of greater concern regarding unused space, according to Eric Patchke, diocesan manager of buildings and properties. Most of the parish-based convents in this diocese are currently well below capacity with resident women religious," he said.

"This is a trend, and an issue we're going to be dealing with for awhile,"

Patchke said.

Parishes may choose to deal with this issue by closing parts of convents; leasing or selling the buildings; or allowing other residents or ministries to share space with women religious.

The "absolute last resort," Patchke added, is for a convent to be torn down. However, that appears to be the fate of the convent at St. Francis de Sales Church in Geneva. In April the parish council opted to raze the structure, which is more than 100 years old. The convent's last resident sister moved out in February and no buyer or rental tenant could be found for the building.

Karen Robideau, St. Francis de Sales' business manager, said that for 10 years the parish had considered closing the convent because only a handful of sisters was living there.

"It was a long, drawn-out process, and the decision didn't come easily," Robideau said.

Continued on page 10

STORY BY MIKE LATONA • PHOTOS BY GREG FRANCIS