

WE MON ON the

Story by
Mike Latona

A very holy week

They may have been absent from their own parishes during Holy Week, but youth-group members from St. Paul's Church, Webster, and St. Mary's, Rochester, most certainly acknowledged the Easter season. In fact, they may never experience another Holy Week like this again.

A group of 27 youths and seven adults traveled extensively through Europe April 14-22, attending a Holy Thursday Mass in Rome, a Good Friday procession in Assisi, and an Easter Vigil Mass in Rome. To top it all off, they were part of a papal audience with Pope John Paul II earlier during Holy Week.

The group, known as F.A.I.T.H. (Friends Adventuring In True Holiness) International, was mostly made up of youth-group members at St. Paul's and St. Mary's. The contingent visited parts of Holland and France, in addition to Italy.

Sean Miller, from St. Mary's, said his group saw so many historic sites that "it didn't really hit me until I got back to Rochester."

"I was saying 'I can't believe I did all that, wow. The places I had dreamed about going to, and now I've gone,'" said Sean, 14. "I'm very grateful that I got to go."

The group arrived April 14 in Amsterdam. Later that day they toured the building where famed author Anne Frank hid from the Nazis for two years during World War II. Her experiences are recorded in *Anne Frank, the Diary of a Young Girl*.

Following Amsterdam, F.A.I.T.H. International headed for Paris, where they visited the Louvre museum and Eiffel Tower and attended Palm Sunday Mass. Then it was on to Florence, where they stayed one night before spending their final five nights in Rome. There, they visited such historical sites as the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the Spanish Steps.

While in Rome, F.A.I.T.H. International went to Vatican City, headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. They observed St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, and also gathered in St. Peter's Square April 19, where Pope John Paul II blessed them and numerous other groups.

Lillian Riley, from Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish, said that she was glad to have seen the pope in person but was struck by the physical condition of the pontiff, who will turn 80 on May 18.

"I saw how frail he was," said Lillian, 16. "When he was holding the microphone, his hand was shaking."

While attending Holy Thursday Mass



Provided photos

Residents of Assisi re-enact the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday.

at Rome's Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels and Martyrs, several F.A.I.T.H. International youths took part in a foot-washing. On Good Friday the group visited Assisi, the home of St. Francis, patron saint of the environment. They saw an elaborate Stations of the Cross procession on the streets of Assisi, which featured several people portraying Christ carrying a cross as "guards" looked on.

Lillian said she was struck by how the entire city of Assisi seemingly turned out for the procession. "Here (in Rochester) we have each parish, but we never do anything so unified," she remarked.

Following the Easter Vigil Mass in Rome on April 22, the group departed for home the following day, Easter Sunday.

Michelle Contant, youth minister at St. Mary's, said the teens blended fun and faith into their trip.

"There were the times, at one point or another, they were really brought into the depths of their soul," Contant remarked.

"They could be doing fun things but also be off in a corner praying."

Lillian said that she and her bunkmates talked about their experiences well into the night.

"We were laying in the dark, talking about what we had been doing that day. At home we don't do that," Lillian said.

St. Paul's Megan Mongioli, noting the cultural differences, said she was treated kindly by Europeans — but she did encounter a language barrier while staying in France.



Priests wash the feet of Adam Larabee, from Rochester's St. Mary's Church, on Holy Thursday in Rome.

"I said to one woman, 'Bathroom?' She started talking in French and I was like, 'I don't know (what you're saying)!' " Megan, 17, recalled with a laugh.

F.A.I.T.H. International's trip was in the making for about a year. According to Kristine Mich, the project evolved into a joint effort because she serves as youth minister at St. Paul's and her own children are youth-group members at St. Mary's.

Mich said the group held extensive fundraisers to finance the trip, such as a bottle-and-can drive, holiday gift fair, rummage sale, Valentine's Day pasta dinner and silent auction, and pledge drive. In addition, F.A.I.T.H. International members participated in service projects at Rochester charities.

"We believe we have a responsibility to make a return to the community for all we are receiving," Mich explained.

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