

Fr. Vosko: Church design evolved

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Jesus left no specifics about church design to his followers, and the Catholic Church has been changing its concepts of church design almost as long as it has existed, according to Father Richard Vosko, the liturgical design consultant to the Sacred Heart Cathedral Renovation Committee.

Father Vosko made his point before about 200 people during a public presentation on the history of church architecture at Nazareth Academy on the night of May 7.

A priest of the Diocese of Albany, Father Vosko, 57, has overseen redesign projects for an estimated 200 Catholic churches, in-

cluding 12 cathedrals, in the United States and Canada. The Diocese of Rochester has slated cathedral renovation to take place here from 2003 to 2004. Father Vosko and renovation committee members at the presentation emphasized that no specific decisions have been made about changes to the cathedral.

Prior to his talk, about 20 protesters outside the Academy on Lake Avenue carried signs opposing the renovation. Others prayed the rosary outside the doors of the school. Leaflets from the anti-renovation group Sacred Heart Preservation Committee were stuck in the doors of parked cars.

Inside, Father Vosko's talk proceeded relatively smoothly, although some audience members occasionally heckled him,

and one woman interrupted loudly for a few minutes. After his formal talk, the priest answered some questions audience members had written on cards, and the session threatened to break down twice when two men got into verbal arguments with the priest and one of the evening's facilitators. However, the evening ended on a note of applause for the priest from about three-fourths of the audience when he complained that Catholics are overlooking weightier issues of social justice when they get into arguments about church design.

"To quibble over things in buildings is not what Jesus called us to do," he said.

His talk was the first in a series of three. The May 8 talk was set to cover the topic "The Environment for Worship" or what a

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Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer
Fr. Richard Vosko speaks at Nazareth Academy, Rochester, on May 7.

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A trip across centuries of division

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

DAMASCUS, Syria — On a pilgrimage highlighted by bold ecumenical and inter-religious gestures, Pope John Paul II reached across centuries of division to Orthodox Christians in Greece and Muslims in Syria.

In Greece May 4-5, the pope issued a dramatic apology for past treatment of the Orthodox and said it was time to "heal the wounds" that have divided Eastern and Western churches for nearly 1,000 years. Vatican and Orthodox officials called the visit an ecumenical breakthrough.

In Syria May 6, he became the first pope in history to enter a mosque, where he was warmly greeted by his Muslim hosts. He said Christianity and Islam should forever put aside conflict and ask forgiveness for past offenses.

The pope was tracing the footsteps of St. Paul, and he encouraged the minority Catholic communities in Greece and Syria to follow the Apostle's example in combining evangelization and dialogue. He said St. Paul had approached the ancient peoples of the region on their own cultural terms 2,000 years ago, launching the church's universal mission.

The pope, who turns 81 later in May, appeared tired as he labored through receptions and liturgies during the first three days of his May 4-9 pilgrimage, which also was to take him to Malta, the site of St. Paul's shipwreck on his way to martyrdom in Rome.

But the pontiff was clearly buoyed by the apparent success of his first two stops and the welcome he received — cordial in Greece and enthusiastic in Syria.

"It has gone beyond our expectations. The pope is very pleased," Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said at mid-trip.

The pope arrived in Greece with little fanfare and a pilgrim's humble demeanor. He made his biggest ecumenical impact with a unilateral apology on behalf of Catholics, delivered in front of the head of the Orthodox Church in Greece, Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens.

"For the occasions past and present, when sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by action or omission against their Orthodox brothers and sisters, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we



Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II waters an olive tree — a symbol of peace — outside the destroyed Greek Orthodox church at El Quneitra in the Golan Heights May 7. In Syria the pope appealed to people to forgive past wrongs and commit themselves to peace.



Pope John Paul II waves to a crowd on his first day in Damascus, Syria, May 5.

beg of him," the pope said.

Among the especially painful memories for the Orthodox, he said, was the "disastrous" sacking of Constantinople by Western Crusaders in 1204. Constantinople, today the city of Istanbul in Turkey, was the center of the Eastern church in Greece at the time.

"It is tragic that the assailants, who had set out to secure free access for Christians to the Holy Land, turned against their own brothers in the faith. The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret," he said.

The pope followed his strong "mea culpa" statement with a call to turn the page, saying the time had come for Christians to put aside rancor over past injustices and "walk together."

At the end of the day, Archbishop Christodoulos prayed the Our Father with the pope and called his visit the start of "a new era" between the churches. The arch-

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