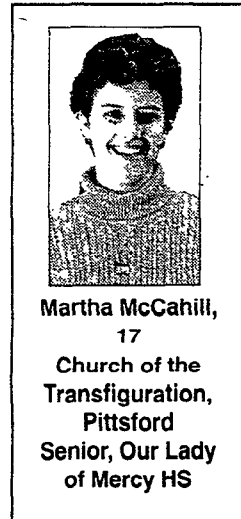


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A weekend of flamingos, Bishop Clark and faith



Martha McCahill, 17
Church of the Transfiguration, Pittsford Senior, Our Lady of Mercy HS

On Dec. 5 around midnight I began my pilgrimage to Indianapolis, Ind., for the 26th biennial National Catholic Youth Conference. By about 9:30 a.m., you could feel the excitement growing, and when my bus reached Indianapolis at 11:30, the excitement erupted.

The main theme for NCYC was "Hope at the Crossroads," with an underlying theme of the Indy 500. From the interactive "Raceway Park" — a place where you could buy music, books, clothing, talk to religious orders or colleges, participate in games, or hear music — to the "track" that surrounded the main stage in the RCA Dome, to the checkered flags that were

part of the decorations, the racing sub-theme was apparent.

Two major components of NCYC this year were the National Catholic Congress on Vocations and the Literacy Project. Youth and about 50 bishops, including Bishop Matthew Clark, attended the Congress on Vocations. The reason for this congress was for bishops to encourage youth who may not feel they have what it takes — "the call" — to enter a vocation. At the congress, the youth talked to the bishops in a roundtable discussion that began on Friday and was continued on Saturday with a Youth Rally where the discussions were shared with others.

The Literacy Project was begun with the hope that each of the 24,000 participants would bring a book for children in Indiana. The project included educating teens in the importance of literacy, as well as literacy in the Catholic faith.

Throughout the NCYC, we from the Rochester Diocese were the "Flamingo People," mainly because of our flamingo hats that everyone wanted. At our diocesan gathering, Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry, gave out prizes for the most creative hats — such as the "Quidditch Hat" created with inspiration from Harry Potter.

On Dec. 6 we "flocked" over to the RCA Dome where the emcee, Jesse Manibusan, entered singing "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord." The conference had begun and when the different bishops were called up, the loudest cheer was for our own Bishop Matthew Clark.

Our keynote speakers were all very different, but all were devout Catholics. One keynote speaker was Angela Perez Baraquo, Miss America 2001. She has served as a K-3 teacher, an athletic director, and a coach in Hawaii. Miss Baraquo's platform was character education, and she credits her success to her faith. As she finished, Miss Baraquo compared the youth to the stones in her



Photo courtesy of Greg Farrell, St. Louis Parish, Pittsford
Bishop Matthew H. Clark stops to chat with teens from the Rochester Diocese Dec. 7 prior to a liturgy for Region II (New York state). The Mass celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

crown; they are all beautiful and different.

I also talked to Indianapolis Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, the host bishop, and Bishop Clark. Regarding the roles of youth in their dioceses, Bishop Clark said he believes in full participation and that adults should help them prepare for the future. We also discussed our present world situation. Bishop Clark was asked how the youth could respond to the violence, and he believed they should live their lives and not be frozen in fear.

I attended workshops led by Brian Johnson, Doug Brummel and Steve Angrisano. Mr. Johnson told stories about his life and his faith (and recognized Rochester because he was at the diocesan convention in Geneseo over the summer), and Mr. Brummel played different characters of different ages, and told how true character is on the inside. Mr. Angrisano sang and talked about the miracles of how he and his wife found a son to adopt.

On Friday evening, Region II, which is made up of all of New York state, gathered in Pan Am Plaza for Mass, to celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The youth participated in all parts of the Mass, and Bishop Joseph Sul-

livan of Brooklyn gave the homily. The bishop said we must have faith — because in faith, it was Mary's ultimate joy to follow her Son and to say "yes" to God.

On Sunday, we celebrated Mass again — all 24,000 of us. It was an honor to be able to hear Bishop Matthew Clark say the homily. What could have been better than when he said he had to say hello to his young friends from Rochester, which got a large and loud response?

Bishop Clark thanked the youth because he and his brother bishops, he said, were "strengthened by your faith." Bishop Clark reminisced about some instances in his life. Referring to Mr. Manibusan's singing of "Prepare Ye," Bishop Clark told how much he enjoyed "Godspell" when it premiered, and even though some found it "unholy," Bishop Clark felt that it was a different way of seeing Christ.

Bishop Clark also told the youth, "You influence us very deeply when you share your faith," saying we were important in our parishes and our dioceses.

The weekend of Dec. 5-9 was the most eventful and inspirational I have experienced in a long time. If you are able, please attend NCYC in Houston in 2003!

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