

# Diocesan pilgrims stake claim in field of faith

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

April Pettingill, youth-ministry coordinator for St. Mary's Parish in Waterloo, summed up the feelings of most of the hundreds of teenagers, young adults and older adults from the Diocese of Rochester who sat and sweated in humid Downsview Park, north of Toronto.

"It's really hot, but hey, it's for the pope."

Pettingill accompanied teenagers from the Finger Lakes region to World Youth Day, and sat with several from her parish in the Diocese of Rochester's section at Downsview, a former Canadian Air Force base, on the afternoon of July 27. Around them mingled hundreds of thousands of young people from 169 countries, including the United States.

Pettingill noted that her late mother was devoted to the pope, and that this journey "was a pilgrimage for her." One of Pettingill's charges also had her mother on her mind as she sat in the field awaiting the beginning of an evening vigil with Pope John Paul II.

"My mom's jealous because she knows she's never going to see him," said Lori Duprey, 16. "It's cool because he's such an important figure."

Like Lori and Pettingill, Kristin Osterhout, 16, also had a relative on her mind as she awaited the vigil — her grandmother.

"She thought it would be a good opportunity to share your faith with other teenagers," Kristin said.

Her friend, Liz Babiarz, 15, said she was inspired by the sight of so many people walking to Downsview. Many of the pilgrims were bused to sites one or two miles away from Downsview and walked in a huge throng to the field. Although some young people dressed formally, and a number of youthful-looking religious and clergy were on hand, a far greater number of pilgrims looked like contemporary teenagers and young adults you'd find anywhere. Several sported tattoos and body piercings, and even played hip hop and rock music on their boomboxes. All in all, the pilgrims streaming into Downsview and setting up their makeshift camps painted a rather informal picture of a church whose stereotypical images are usually more formal. Again and again, the pilgrims stressed that they were as devoted to their faith as any previous generation of Catholics.

"Youth are looked at as troublemakers, like we don't want to do anything good, but we really do," Liz said. "One of these days, we're going to be the older people in the church, and the more we practice the faith now, the easier it will be to make life decisions in the future."

The young people seemed to agree that one older Catholic has great faith in them: the pope. From the moment his helicopter was seen landing at Downsview to the moment it took off after Mass on July 28, the pope's gestures, words and movements were cheered and applauded by the young. His entrance to Downsview in his "popemobile," with its clear, bulletproof shielding was akin to the landing of the Beatles in New York City a generation ago as people screamed and slapped each other on the back, shouting "I saw the pope!"

"Hey, young people!" the pope said as he spoke his first words to them at the vigil. Although his words from that moment on were a bit more academic, the young people cheered whatever he said as if he were a pop music star egging them on at a rowdy concert. Indeed, Teresa Trout, 15, also of Waterloo, likened the youngsters gathered at Downsview to fans at a concert, except they were all there as fans of the pope and Jesus.

In his now famous Slavic baritone voice, the pope spoke strongly, despite his obvious health difficulties, and exhorted the young people to embrace Jesus and his teachings.



Karin von Voigtlander/Staff photographer

Brian Gallagher (from left), Anne Kidera, coordinator of youth ministry and young adult ministry at Henrietta's Good Shepherd Parish, and Jeanne Kidera hold candles during the July 27 prayer vigil.

"Do not wait until you are older in order to set out on the path of holiness," the pope said. "Holiness is always youthful, just as eternal is the youthfulness of God."

Another cleric who made an effort to shore up the faith of the young people present was Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who spent most of the vigil sitting in the Diocese of Rochester section. Wearing a tie-dyed T-shirt that read "St. Bridget's Loves Jesus!" which was given to him by members of the Rochester parish, the bishop recalled that he had spent a similar all-night outdoor vigil with diocesan youngsters during World Youth Day in Denver in 1993. However, he said, he decided this year to go back to his hotel to sleep after the vigil was over around midnight.

"I think when you start collecting Social Security, you should stop sleeping on the ground," the bishop said with a chuckle.

The bishop added that he thought World Youth Day was an important event because the one he attended in Denver seemed to have left a major impact on everyone he'd met since who told him they were there. On that note, some teenagers from Guardian Angels Parish in Henrietta said they were hoping to bring back great memories of their time in Toronto.

"I want to share the experience with my family and friends and let them know how important (World Youth Day) was," said 14-year-old Jennifer Rosario. Her fellow Guardian Angels parishioner, Brian Olek, 16, had similar sentiments, and noted that he was particularly moved by the pope's presence as he made his way through the crowd in his popemobile.

"Just as he passes, you feel this sort of calm inside of you," Brian said. "There's something about him that draws you toward him."

Also present at the vigil were several young adults from the diocese, who had participated in WYD activities all week. One such young adult was Leo Dondiz, 33, of St. Bridget's in Rochester. Dondiz said he had come to WYD to rejuvenate his faith, noting the abuse scandals in the church that made headlines this year had sometimes given him a negative feeling about Catholicism. After several days of events, not only had he banished his negative feelings, he said he had concluded that Catholicism was a "great religion."

"It's not a dying religion, it's a strong one," he said, as WYD pilgrims held lighted candles in the twilight. "Though we're



On his arrival at Downsview Park for Mass July 28, Pope John Paul II waves to the estimated 800,000 worshippers in the crowd.

all different here, we share that same connection to Jesus."

Three young adults from St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Irondequoit said that they had come to WYD for various reasons, including a desire to meet other young, faithful Catholics.

"It's just refreshing to know there's still good people in the world," said Jessica Scuteri, 18. Her friend, Michelle Weber, 19, also of St. Thomas, said she was impressed by the down-to-earth nature of many of the pilgrims, as well as their diversity. Lisa Canarvis, 18, agreed with Weber that many of the pilgrims seemed like everyday young people who would be just as comfortable in any secular setting as they would be in a church setting.

"It's like they're incorporating (their faith) into their lives, and it's not just a social outlet," she said.

After the pope left for the evening, the pilgrims slept through the night, if they could ignore the music, conversation and singing around them, and were awakened by a brief storm before sunrise that turned the field muddy.

More rain came just as the pope arrived via helicopter on the morning of July 28, and a windy downpour marked the second tour of his popemobile through the crowd, which had swelled to 800,000 by the time Mass began. As if it was scripted by a Hollywood writer, the Mass took an upbeat turn when the sun came out moments be-

fore the pope began his homily.

Despite the presence of hundreds of thousands of people, it was amazingly quiet during the Mass, especially during the Eucharistic prayer when the only sound near the altar stage was the flapping of various nations' flags in the breeze. On the altar with the pope was Bishop Clark, who spoke afterwards about what it was like to concelebrate Mass with the church's best-known priest.

"It was a great thrill, as it always is," the bishop said as he stood with hundreds of priests, bishops and cardinals who had also shared the altar with the pope. "I continue to marvel at (the pope's) ability to marshal the enthusiasm that he always does considering his health. It's quite a thrill to have the witness of his faith and his perseverance and his love of commitment to the young people."

After the Mass, as people streamed out of Downsview, a group of teenagers from St. Andrew's Parish in Rochester shared their thoughts about what WYD and the papal Mass meant to them.

"I think the best part was seeing the pope," said Maria Oberst, 17. "I just started shaking for no reason why. It's just amazing that he could come out and do this for us."

Elizabeth Steadman, 16, said camping out in Downsview was marked by various headaches, yet the pope's presence still touched her deeply.

"Despite the disorganization, it was one man commanding the attention of 1.2 million people," she said. She added that she has a picture now of the pope looking directly at her from his popemobile.

Brynda Manigault, who attended WYD with her twin sister, Glynn, said she especially liked the mix of cultures and languages present. The 18-year-old said she met people from Poland, Italy, Canada and Spain. Her sister gave them piggy banks she'd made herself as souvenirs.

"Seeing the pope was an uplifting and inspiring experience that I hope I can share with my friends and family in the future," Glynn said.

Maria Oberst's brother, Kevin, 15, apparently got the message the pope tried to convey all week to the young people in Toronto, because this was how he expressed his feelings after the Mass.

"We're not the church of the future," he said of young Catholics. "We're the church right now, in the present, today."