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WYD

Continued from page one

is a day-by-day account of why I'm inclined to agree with them.

July 24: Wide, wide world

Excitement is crackling throughout Exhibition Place as the first leg of a three-day Youth Festival hits high gear with concerts and lots of mingling among the pilgrims. Rochester's young adults are already stirring things up at Exhibition Place, getting people involved in a rousing dance and chant: "Front to front to front my ba-by, back to back to back my ba-by, side to side to side my ba-by, this is how you do IT..."

The dancers are dragging young people into their circle from other countries, including a guy draped in an Italian flag. Already, group members say, they've met people from the Spice Islands, Costa Rica and Ireland. The lone priest traveling with Rochester's group, Father Quintus Fernando, says he ran into a priest friend from his native Sri Lanka today. Father Fernando is from Holy Family Catholic Community of Steuben and Livingston counties.

On the evening of July 23, the diocesan group took part in an opening Mass for World Youth Day. They had bused up Monday and spent the rest of that day adapting to their surroundings and to each other, notes Tim Santo of St. Leo's, Hilton/St. Thomas More, Brighton.

"Father Quintus said Mass for us Monday night and it was wonderful," Santo says. He cuts our conversation short as he discovers none other than Father Brian Cool, Catholic chaplain at the University of Rochester, in the sea of people walking by. Turns out Father Cool has hauled together a bunch of students — in fact, about the same size as the diocesan group.

"It's a big world, but a small world," Santo remarks.

The diocese has staked out an unofficial meeting spot under a tree, conveniently situated across from a food building. While relaxing in the shade, Anne Kidera recalls her memorable experience from the previous day: She was in a group of 75 people who greeted the pope upon his arrival at Pearson International Airport before he took off for a nearby island to rest.

Anne admits that the day contained an embarrassing memory: no one had told her this was a formal event. "Everybody was in suits and dresses, and I was in my shorts and T-shirts," she laughs. Kidera reports that Basilian Father Thomas Rosica, a Rochester native and WYD's chief organizer, was aghast: "He said 'We have to get this girl a skirt.'"

So she was whisked off by an assistant to have a dress bought; she returned to WYD's head offices in downtown Toronto in time to catch the bus to the airport.

"It was a fashion emergency. It went on the pope's credit card," quips Kidera's sister, Jeanne. I ask Anne if she had to return the dress. Jeanne cuts in: "She's already sold it for cash." Actually, Anne did get to keep the dress — and also got to sit within a few feet of the pope at the reception.

July 25: 'He made it'

Who needs coffee when you can wake up with a church full of young people?

Shortly after 8 a.m. the catechetical program begins at Ss. Salvador do Mundo Parish in Mississauga, a suburb of Toronto. Catechesis is taking place mornings Wednesday through Friday for WYD pilgrims throughout the Toronto area; each session features musical guests and a bishop or archbishop who gives a talk and then celebrates Mass. The Diocese of Rochester has a special distinction — an ensemble of pilgrims is providing the music for all three sessions at Salvador do Mundo. The group is led by Nora Bradbury-Haehl, diocesan director of young-adult ministry.

Later in the morning I view the diocesan group's living quarters: two classrooms at a high school in Mississauga. Two members of the diocesan group, Lynette DeJesus and Leo Dondiz, note that one shower room has hot water only, and the other has



Jayme Kish (left), 16, and Larissa Sonich, 17, both of Cleveland, Ohio, protect themselves from the rain as they watch the Way of the Cross in downtown Toronto July 26.



Jennifer Olin of Arlington, Virginia, tears up at the sight of the pope speaking on stage during the Saturday evening prayer vigil in Downsview Park.

cold water only.

On a bus back into Toronto, two elderly women notice the diocesan young adults and their WYD badges. "It's exciting meeting young people," one says. "Makes us young," the other adds. "Shakes us up," the first one remarks with a chuckle.

I take an unexpected one-hour walk with DeJesus, the diocesan coordinator of urban youth ministry, and Dondiz, from Rochester's St. Bridget's Parish. The public transit we had planned to use was cancelled because congestion is already starting at Exhibition Place, where in a few hours the pope will make his first public appearance of the week.

Near Exhibition Place, I see rows upon rows of portable bathrooms. Makes me think back to covering World Youth Day in Denver in 1993, where the facilities were dubbed "Vati-cans" by our diocesan youth.

Then it's back to the diocesan tree by the food building, where Jason Galens, of St. Dominic's Parish in Shortsville, adds to the subject of U.S.-Canada relations. He says Canadians prefer that folks from the U.S. don't refer to themselves as Americans — because Canadians are Americans too.

Just a few blades of grass away is Father Cool and His Gang; apparently, the University of Rochester has adopted the tree area as well. Right now they're eating a lunch of ... well, nobody is quite sure. Goulash, maybe? The identification aspect doesn't keep the collegians from polishing their plates, though.

We're paid a visit by Tristan Young, from Holy Trinity Parish in Webster, who's been in Toronto since June 1 as a WYD volunteer and will return home next week. He says he took last semester off from college so he could work full-time and afford to be

up here as a long-term assistant.

Young is serving as operations manager at the accreditation center. He says he has to make sure the right people get the right badges, lest a terrorist or other criminal slip through.

Indeed, security has been air-tight at the entrance gates thus far. Officials acknowledge that September 11 has played a major role in the extra precautions.

It's late afternoon and the main stage area is filled as the pope's welcoming address draws near. Flags from

numerous nations fly among the jubilant crush. The diocesan group has designated Kate Reilly of Ithaca College, who's somewhat of a flag expert, to connect the flags with their countries.

A native of the Philadelphia area, Kate says she also saw many different flags at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. "But it wasn't anything like this," she said of the wild scene around her.

The pope begins his speech "Dear young friends ..." and those three words alone cause the crowd to erupt in joy. As is his custom, the pope issues his following remarks in several languages.

The pontiff implores the pilgrims to view themselves as the "salt of the earth, the light of the world" — the words from Matthew 5:13-16 that is WYD 2002's theme.



Robert Légère's image is projected on a jumbotron screen as he carries the cross toward the next stage in the Way of the Cross, based on a play written by Pope John Paul II.

Pope John Paul's frailty is apparent; he is permanently hunched over. But he speaks clearly and obviously continues to have an electrifying effect on young people.

"He made it. Everybody said he wasn't going to make it here. He made it, man," says a very satisfied Tina McAuliffe, a diocesan pilgrim from St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Churchville.

July 26: Fun, frustration

I opt for a tour of the Youth Festival that's wrapping up today at Exhibition Place. In Queen Elizabeth Hall, a youth forum is going on all afternoon with a rotation of guest panelists discussing religious and social topics. In the main exhibition building there's a catechetical session in Spanish attended by thousands of Hispanics.

One exhibition area of note is the voca-