

ON THE MOVE

STORY BY
MIKE LATONA



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Parishes unite with world — and with each other



Karin von Volgtander/Staff photographer

Pilgrims wait for Pope John Paul II to arrive for the evening vigil at Downsview Park July 27 during World Youth Day.



Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Liz DeTorio of St. Michael in Lyons (left) shares a smile with Emily Kiley of St. John/St. Patrick, Clyde/Savannah after World Youth Day's closing Mass July 28.

At times, youths in southeastern Wayne County might have preferred hanging out with folks from 5,000 miles away rather than those who are five miles away.

Sister of St. Joseph Catherine Gibbons says it's been a delicate procedure to blend youth groups from St. Michael's Parish, Lyons, and St. John the Evangelist and St. Patrick in Clyde and Savannah. She explained that Lyons High School and Clyde-Savannah High are long-time adversaries, especially in sports.

"Last year I began to move toward trying to have the groups coming together as one," said Sister Gibbons, the faith formation director at both St. Michael's and St. John's/St. Patrick's. "Well, they're our enemies," they would say. And I said, "Well, that's on the football field or basketball court. And they're not the enemies, they're rivals."

One youth-group member, Liz DeTorio of St. Michael's, said she's made friends with Emily Kiley of St. John's/St. Patrick's. And she observed that the group's male members have slowly put their geographic differences aside as well. "They all get along now because they like the same stuff. There's some separation, but that's going to happen," said Liz, 15.

It was a united group that attended World Youth Day July 27-28. Teens from Lyons, Clyde and Savannah — along with their family members — slept, sang, prayed and posed for pictures together in Toronto's Downsview Park.

It was an appropriate setting to celebrate unity: World Youth Day's chief president, Pope John Paul II, began the event 17 years ago in hopes of connecting young Catholics from all over the world.

The Lyons-Clyde-Savannah gang included Sister Gibbons along with: from St. John's/Patrick's — twin brothers Jason and Jordan Bastedo, Jesse Alexander, Richard Petrus and his stepmother Andrea, and Emily and her parents, Elena and Deacon Greg Kiley; from St. Michael's — Liz and her mother Amy, and Emily VanHanehan and her mother Julianne.

Sister Gibbons said that several organizations from the parishes helped finance the trip. The southeastern Wayne County group was among approximately 1,000 people from the Diocese of Rochester who journeyed to Toronto July 27 to begin the overnight pilgrimage. The next day, they were part of a throng of 800,000 people who attended Mass with the pope, the final event of World Youth Day 2002.

"I don't think they were prepared for that mass of humanity," Sister Gibbons commented.

Nor were they prepared for the 90-degree weather. "I think it's crazy," exclaimed Emily, 14, as she awaited the Saturday-night vigil at Downsview Park. "So many people and it's so hot — all the extremes."

Despite the discomfort, Emily was looking forward to seeing the pope and had gotten the idea to make a sign in



Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II waves to youths gathered for the overnight vigil at Downsview Park.

Latin to bring to Toronto: "Te Amamus, Papa" ("We love you, pope.") Emily added that her parents came with her to World Youth Day so they could all be together when she got her first look at the pope. "They say it's a one-time thing," she remarked.

Meanwhile, Emily's dad said he hopes World Youth Day will not only spark deeper interest in the Holy Father, but also be used as a springboard for young people to learn more about the pope's teachings and responsibilities.

"If we can accept Jesus Christ Superstar, we can accept the pope that way," Deacon Kiley said. "It's a natural attraction. But they don't understand what is the teaching office of the pope. Ask how he's a symbol of unity and they say, 'Huh?' But they do know instinctively."

Liz seems to have that instinct. After watching television coverage from Toronto early during the week of World Youth Day, it sank in to her that this was a rare opportunity to see the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. "I began to realize how privileged I was," she said.

Meanwhile, Sister Gibbons said the purpose of World Youth Day extends beyond its founder and leader. "One of the things I want (youths) to look at is the church from the more global aspect, not necessarily focusing on the pope," she said. "This was all cultures, all ethnic backgrounds, all racial origins."

Emily was already grasping that concept during the vigil: She said wants to learn all the languages she heard being spoken around her, and she was already gearing up for the next World Youth Day — in Cologne, Germany. "I want to go in 2005," she said.