

Ladies' week in Toronto

About the only similarity between Toronto and Cato, where Christine MacDavitt lives, is the fact they both end in the letter "o." As she notes, there aren't too many subways in Cato.

Christine's home town is a tiny village centered at the intersection of Routes 370 and 34 in northern Cayuga County. The 16-year-old left her rural lifestyle behind for a few days in late July, joining hundreds of thousands of people for World Youth Day in Canada's largest city.

Christine was one of 24 female teens, young adults and sisters — representing 12 different states — in a group organized by the Sisters of Mercy. The group included nine people from the Diocese of Rochester who attended WYD through the Rochester community's vocation minister, Sister Kathleen Wayne, who also went on the trip.

The Rochester contingent met at the Mercy motherhouse in Rochester July 21 and traveled to Buffalo, where they linked up with the rest of the multistate group. They slept overnight on a gymnasium floor before departing for Toronto, where they would remain until Pope John Paul II's closing Mass on July 28.

"When we first met in Buffalo everyone was real quiet and kind of off to themselves," said Megan Brown, 18, from St. Dominic's Parish in Shortsville. But soon after successful ice-breaking activities, she said, "You would have thought we'd known each other forever."

"By the time we came home we were like a family," Christine remarked. She added that even on the bus ride to Toronto, the group engaged in a lively discussion about the sacrament of reconciliation.

Once in Toronto, the young women resided at the provincial house of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood. They also took full part in the World Youth Day activities: listening to talks, going to concerts, attending prayer services and, of course, being in the massive crowds when Pope John Paul II made his public appearances on July 25, 27 and 28.

"I think seeing the pope kind of took my breath away," Megan said.

Christine said she was struck not only by the pope's presence but also by "just being around that many Catholic people in one place." Meanwhile, Megan enjoyed getting to know a group from France. "We sat for an hour talking about anything you possibly think of," she said.

Abby Curatolo, 20, is writing articles about her WYD experiences for newsletter publications of the Mercy sisters. Some of her reflections have noted such inconveniences as bad weather, poor access to food and bathrooms, and missing ride connections. These problems reached their pinnacle on World Youth Day's final two days, when the Holy Father's vigil and closing Mass drew audiences of 500,000 and 800,000, respectively.

Yet for Abby, the positives outweighed



Photos courtesy of Rochester Sisters of Mercy

The Sisters of Mercy-sponsored group that attended World Youth Day consisted of 24 teens, young adults and sisters from 12 different states. Nine of those travelers were from the Diocese of Rochester.

the negatives: "Being so close for so long to strangers from around the world presented the rare opportunity to make new friends, sing songs and experience new cultures," wrote Abby, who belongs to St. John the Evangelist Parish in Spencerport. "Many even commented on how wonderful it was to see so many people gathered for the same reason and enduring the torture in God's name, all the while gasping for air."

World Youth Day was apparently so meaningful that it's stuck with the Mercy pilgrims after their return home. For instance, Megan said that when she watches videotapes of WYD television coverage, "It blows my mind, the fact I was actually there. I was thinking, 'Wow I was in that crowd with all those people, professing my faith.'"

Christine said that she was practically crying when she spoke Aug. 4 about her experiences during Masses at her church, St. Patrick's in Cato, and at St. Joseph's in Weedsport. The two churches are part of the Northern Cayuga Cluster along with St. John's in Port Byron.

WYD 2002, for Christine, was "just a source of inspiration. There are times even the most spiritual person goes through when they're not feeling

that way. But we really put a lot of feeling into this, and it lights that fire," she explained. "You could feel it there. Even if you were in the lowest spot in your spiritual journey, you could feel the Holy Spirit."

Christine said she attended World Youth Day, in part, because her best friend, 18-year-old Jessica Mattiace of St. Hyacinth's in Auburn, was also going. They, as well as Abby, had been invited to World Youth Day by Sister Wayne, who maintains contact with all of them. Abby, who attends the State University of New York at Oswego, said she appreciates Sister Wayne's friendship, noting, "I'm going to a public school so I don't have that kind of a tie at college."

The Mercy group was convened as an effort by the order to promote greater vocational programming. WYD was an ideal venue; many of the week's events and exhibits were devoted to vocations.

Abby estimated that half the people in the Mercy group are discerning a religious vocation whereas the rest, including herself, "were just there to strengthen our faith and have a good time."

"There was no pressure. Of course, we were talking about it (but) I'm too young to know right now. But I'm always praying about it and keeping an open mind about it," Christine said.

Though she's not considering a religious vocation, Megan said she admired the sisters she met and the young women who are discerning. She said that experience helped break the stereotype of nuns who wear habits and are excessively rigid: "It kind of made me look at it a different way. I definitely had a new-found respect for them."

On the

Story by
Mike Latona



The Rochester contingent, from left: Sister Kathleen Wayne, Christine MacDavitt, Megan Brown, Mary Jackson, Jennifer Hatch, Abby Curatolo, Leila Seghatoleslami, Jessica Mattiace and Mary Ellen Uschold.