

Geneva offers living rosary

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Based on his call for Catholics worldwide to increase their rosary devotion, Pope John Paul II would likely have been quite pleased by the scene in Geneva April 8.

There, at St. Stephen Church, children and adults came together for an impressive recitation of the Living Rosary.

Nearly 90 Catholic-school students—mostly from St. Francis deSales/St. Stephen School and DeSales High School—took part in the ceremony, each holding a candle while helping to form a human rosary around the church.

"It really was lovely. I was so proud of the kids, even the littlest ones. They knew their Hail Marys," said Elaine Morrow, principal of St. Francis deSales/St. Stephen.

Among the Living Rosary participants were 14-year-olds Gavin Karski and Emily DiDuro, both eighth-graders at St. Francis deSales/St. Stephen. "It was well done," Gavin said. "The candles added a nice effect to it."

Emily added that the event was important because "it brought everybody together to say the rosary."

The young Catholics were joined at St. Stephen's for rosary recitation by many members of Knights of Columbus Council 272 in Geneva; repre-



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier
Courtney Chain (left) and Eleanor Eshenour, parishioners of St. Mary's Church in Waterloo, participate in a living rosary recitation April 8 at St. Stephen's Church in Geneva.

sentatives of other Finger Lakes-area K of C councils; and a congregation of more than 150 people. All students who took part were given rosaries that had been donated.

According to John Oughterson, co-chairman of the April 8 event, the Living Rosary was a first-time venture for Geneva.

"I'm sure it's going to be a tradition," said Oughterson, a member of Council 272.

Oughterson added that the Living Rosary came off extremely well considering that the Geneva area was still grappling with the aftereffects of ice and snow storms. "With the roads being as bad as they were, we were surprised we had that good of a turnout," he said.

As part of the Living Rosary, organizers prayed for those serving in the U.S. military and other people who are affected by the war in Iraq. Morrow added that St. Francis deSales/St. Stephen School, along with other Catholic schools from the Finger Lakes, will continue to pray the rosary every school day—for world peace and in response to the pope's call for extra rosary recitation.

Morrow noted that this daily rosary effort was begun by St. Mary's School in Waterloo and has spread to Catholic schools throughout the Finger Lakes.

"We'll just keep doing it. We intend to pick it up again in the fall," Morrow said.

"We're just saying extra rosaries for people over in the war, and anyone else that needs it," Gavin said. "The prayers go out to anybody who needs a prayer," Emily added.

ROSARY

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In the early church, Christians used prayer beads or knotted cords as a counting mechanism for long, repetitive prayers. Monks in the Middle Ages may have used them to count the 150 Psalms when they prayed.

The name "rosary" comes from the word *rosarium*, which means "rose garden." By the time of St. Dominic in the 12th century, the rosary consisted of 150 beads, and the Our Father or Hail Mary was often recited on each bead as a substitute for the Psalms.

It is not known when the separated beads (known as the Our Father beads today) were added, but the rosary was eventually broken up into three sets of 50. At the time, the Hail Mary consisted of the first half of the prayer we know today: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

St. Dominic is often credited with popularizing the use of the rosary. According to church tradition, Mary inspired St. Dominic to use it as a

teaching aid to fight the Albigensian heresy, which, among its errors, denied that Christ could be both human and divine, and asserted that the body was evil.

"St. Dominic took that which existed and added for every decade a certain meditation. He would pray a decade of 10 Hail Marys and then preach. He would pray and preach, pray and preach," explained Dominican Father Paul A. Duffner, director of the Rosary Center in Portland, Ore., and of a large Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary.

"He didn't have the exact mysteries developed in his time, but he was the first to combine vocal and mental prayer," Father Duffner added. "It was especially helpful to so many people who didn't know how to read or didn't know Latin."

After St. Dominic's death, rosary sayers began to focus each group of beads on events in the lives of Jesus and Mary. To each set of 50 Hail Marys was attributed a set of mysteries—joyful, sorrowful or glorious—and an example of that mystery was attributed to each decade as a theme for meditation.

Since the 15th century, the Dominican rosary has formed the basis

of the modern devotion. The complete format of the prayer's vocal component, which included adding the Glory Be to the end of each decade and adding the second half of the Hail Mary, is believed to have been in place by the end of the 15th century.

Pope St. Pius V, a Dominican friar, standardized the 15 mysteries of the Dominican rosary in 1569 and, in 1571, established a feast of the Holy Rosary.

By the 16th century, the rosary prayer sequence included the Apostles Creed and became uniform around the world. In the 17th century, the rosary gained more popularity thanks to the efforts of St. Louis de Montfort, who wrote *The Secret of the Rosary*, an early history of and meditations on the tradition.

ROSARY SEQUENCE

The rosary sequence stayed the same until the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima in 1917. A prayer taught to the child visionaries then—"O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, especially those in greatest need"—began to be recited after the "Glory Be" and continues to be popular with some

PRAYER BEADS OF DIFFERENT FAITHS

Chotki (Orthodox)—A woolen prayer rope, with 25, 33, 50, 100 or 103 knots, and a tassel. Traditional prayer used is the "Jesus Prayer," which reads "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Mala (Buddhist)—A string of 108 beads with a tassel. The number of beads corresponds to the 108 earthly desires a disciple must overcome. Its purpose is enhance goodness and diminish toxins in the body.

Mala (Hindu)—Similar to the Buddhist mala, which evolved from it, these are considered the oldest prayer beads in the world, dating to before the time of Christ.

Subha or Tasbeeh (Muslim)—Consisting of 99 beads plus a leader bead and a tassel, this prayer aid means "to exalt" or "to praise God." The beads represent the 99 names of God mentioned in the Quran. The 100th name is not known to man.

Baha'i—a string of 95 beads. Starting at the beginning of the string, the user slides the beads between his fingers, saying *Al-lah'u' Abha'* ("God is most glorious") at each bead.

—Bill Howard

rosary sayers today.

Over the centuries, popes have embraced the rosary as a powerful tool for praying and teaching. Pope Urban IV praised the merits of the rosary in the 1260s. Pope Leo XIII wrote extensively on the rosary in the late 1800s and stressed that families should pray it as a way to stay together. In 1938, Pope Pius XI granted a plenary indulgence for praying the rosary in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Pope John Paul II went one step further with *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* and, on the 24th anniversary of his election to the papacy, introduced the Mysteries of Light.

Father Duffner, who has spent more than 50 years promoting the rosary, admitted that even he was surprised at the addition of new mysteries.

"But I was happily surprised. There was nothing in the rosary about Jesus' public life, and this fills in the gap," he said.

Father Duffner said that the change may also be felt around the waist of each Dominican priest and nun. They hang full rosaries of 15 decades from their habits.

"Do we have to add another five? I don't know," he mused.

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