

Pilgrimages benefit believers

Judith Sudilovsky/CNS

JERUSALEM — Pilgrimages to the Holy Land elevate the understanding of the Gospel to another level, said Cardinal Pio Laghi, who led a group of 50 Italian pilgrims on a visit Nov. 24-27.

"In a way, when you just study the Gospel, it remains flat. Coming here elevates your understanding of what the Gospel says," said Cardinal Laghi, a former nuncio to the U.S. and retired head of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education.

Coming to the Holy Land not only benefits the pilgrim but also all the people living in the area, said Cardinal Laghi, who said he recommends that Catholic pilgrims return to the holy sites.

"Our pilgrimages also benefit those here who are witnesses to the faith and who have been challenged because of the situation. We have to support them not only with our spirit of solidarity but also (we must) do something for them," he said.

While pilgrims continue to flock to other holy sites in Europe and around the world, the Holy Land is the "holiest" of all, Cardinal Laghi

said, emphasizing how important he considered pilgrimages to the land of Jesus' birth.

He said he wanted to dispel people's fears about visiting the Holy Land.

"We are protected here. We are less safe in Istanbul (Turkey) or even in Rome," the cardinal said.

The group, organized by the Vatican's Rome pilgrimages office, included some 30 priests and 20 lay pilgrims. In their brief stay they visited Christian, Jewish and Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, West Bank. They distributed pre-Christmas gifts to children at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem who were injured in terrorist attacks and to mute and deaf children at the Effeta School in Bethlehem and gave donations to both institutions.

Cardinal Laghi said he hoped the Italian priests would return with organized pilgrim groups from their parishes.

Father Giancarlo Breda of Canadian Martyrs Parish in Rome and a tour guide for the pilgrimages office said his parishioners were afraid to join him on the pilgrimage and he hoped to prove by example that

there was nothing to fear by visiting the Holy Land.

"I hope my brothers in the parish will have the courage to join me next time," said Father Breda. "Coming to the Holy Land is like returning to the source of our Christianity. It is also important to find our Jewish and Muslim brothers. Once we know, then we can love and accept our differences."

"I know these are difficult times here," said Father Martin Rodriguez, a theology student from Mexico. "But those difficulties do not represent a superior force to that force which has brought me here."

The priests in the group also were to take a day trip to Jordan to visit Amman and Mount Nebo.



Debbie Hill/CNS

Cardinal Pio Laghi greets a Jewish man at the entrance to King David's Tomb in Jerusalem Nov. 25 during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Priest will lead healing services

Father Richard McAlear, OMI, a Massachusetts-based priest known for his healing ministry, will be making the following appearances in the Diocese of Rochester:

• **Saturday, Dec. 6, from 9:15 a.m. to 1 p.m.**, Father McAlear will be the guest speaker at the "Magnificat Ministry," for women only, at the Holiday Inn/Holidome Hotel, 1111

Jefferson Road, Henrietta.

The Magnificat is an international Catholic lay women's evangelization movement. Reservations are required and may be made by calling Mary Anne Erickson at 585/223-9545, or by e-mailing mared@rochester.rr.com. A \$12 fee, payable to "Magnificat — Rochester," may be sent to P.O. Box 1122 Pittsford, NY, 14534.

• **Monday, Dec. 8**, Father McAlear will celebrate a healing Mass at 7 p.m. in St. Mark's Church, 54 Kuhn Road, Greece. People in need of physical, spiritual and emotional healing are encouraged to attend.

During a healing Mass, Father McAlear encourages participants to take "their needs and infirmities to the Lord at the very moment they receive the Eucharist," according to information at www.frnac.org.

• **Tuesday, Dec. 9**, Father McAlear will celebrate a healing Mass at 7 p.m. in St. Januarius Church, 180 N. Main St., Naples.

• **Wednesday, Dec. 10**, he will celebrate a healing Mass at 7 p.m. in St. Patrick's Church, 46 Stanley St., Mount Morris.

• **Friday, Dec. 12**, Father McAlear will celebrate a healing Mass at 7:30 p.m. in St. Louis Church, 64 S. Main St., Pittsford.

• **Saturday, Dec. 13**, the priest will host a "Day of Spiritual Renewal and Teaching on the Ministry of Healing" in the St. Louis Parish Hall, beginning at 10 a.m. and concluding with a Mass at 4:30 p.m. A registration fee of \$15, payable to "Oblate Healing Ministries," is required for the Saturday event. For information, call Marian Battle at 585/586-7385.

Participants are asked to bring a brown-bag lunch. Beverages and dessert will be provided.

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