



The travers from St. Joseph's and St. Mary's pose in front of the Vatican during their trip to Italy.

Parishioners Travel To Italy Together

By Evelyn Beck

"It was a trip of a lifetime," said Denise Rivera. She was among the 50 individuals—parishioners and clergy from St. Joseph and St. Mary of the Angels Catholic Churches, along with friends and family members—who traveled to Italy in November on an 11-day tour organized by Brother Henry Fulmer.

During the first four days in Rome, the highlight was an audience with Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. Tickets in hand, the group arrived 90 minutes early and took their seats to await the passage of the Popemobile. A slight snafu ensued when two parishioners left to find a restroom and were not allowed to return because the barricades had been put into place. "They wouldn't let us go back even though we were only 20 feet away from our seats," said Armanda Selice. "I pleaded in Italian, but the guard said it was impossible." How-

ever, the two ended up with an even better view once the Pope appeared, and they rejoined the group afterwards. Among those who watched from their seats, Gayle Perkins was surprised at her proximity to Pope Benedict. "I didn't expect to be as close as I was," she said. "I expected to be sitting in a gallery looking at a monitor or something."

Another highlight in Rome was the celebration of a private Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. "We arrived for Mass at 7:30 a.m. before the basilica opened to the public," said Rivera. "Later that morning, thousands would be passing through, but for that brief moment, it seemed like we had St. Peter's to ourselves to marvel at the splendor of this magnificent church." This particular Mass was held in one of the crypts, which are individual chapels located underneath St. Peter's. Tom Holahan couldn't help but think of all who had come before. "It was eye

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A Trip Full Of Surprises

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opening,” he said. “It helped me understand what went into the planning for pilgrims to come to Rome to have Mass there. It really was a destination.”

Private Masses celebrated by Brother Henry, Father Aubrey McNeil, and Father Donald Sterling were another memorable part of the trip. “It was good to be with a Catholic group of people who could appreciate the history of the Church,” said Holahan. “And the Masses were very special.”

The next stop after Rome was Assisi, which included a walking tour of the Basilica of St. Francis; the Church of St. Clair; and Santa Maria degli Angeli, the birthplace of the Franciscan movement, which features thornless dog roses, said to be the result of St. Francis rolling in the thorns of the rose bushes here in an attempt to overcome doubt and temptation. “I think I really like Assisi the most,” said Perkins. “It seemed peaceful and quiet. We climbed to the top of the mountain where we stayed. It was a gorgeous view from all around.”

From Assisi, the group traveled to Florence, where they saw Santa Maria del Fiore and the Baptistry of St. John with its famous “Gates of Paradise” doors. At the Academia, they beheld Michaelangelo’s original statue of David. Then they traveled to Padua, where Brother Henry felt especially drawn to the Basilica of St. Anthony. “St. Anthony of Padua was the most spiritual place for me,” he said. “At the other places, I felt like a tourist. But when we got to St. Anthony, people

Travelers on the Italy pilgrimage included Janet Boom, Michael Boom, Jane Davis, Annaliza Dennis, Mary Derksen, Carol Dubrouillet, John Fanning, Solange Frascarelli, Brother Henry Fulmer, Kim Holahan, Tom Holahan, Louise Jones, Father Aubrey McNeil, Catherine McPherson, Edgar McPherson, Ellen Mentasti, Joseph Mentasti, Mary Theresa Millici, Gloria Morris, Tom Morris, Carol Overman, Janis Parsons, Mark Parsons, Gayle Perkins, Horace Perkins, Carol Louise Recker, Denise Rivera, Laura Schofield, Samantha Schofield, Armanda Selice, Carl Sless, Sandra Sless, Norene Smith, Domenic Soignoli, Linda Soignoli, Anthony Soignoli, Linda Soignoli, Sandra Souther, Doris Spells, Father Donald Sterling, Elizabeth Stibora, Donna Stone, Robin Stone, Annie Thompson, Walter Thompson, Celeste Tienken, Fred Tienken, Patricia Wentz, Craig Wilson, and Lynn Wilson.

were praying and at Mass. There was a little more solemnness there.”

Their last stop was Venice, which featured a gondola ride complete with a serenade and wine. Later, Selice enjoyed feeding the pigeons in St. Mark’s Square. “I had never had pigeons in my hair and on my arms,” she said. “They’re so used to people that they’re really very brazen.”

The trip was full of lovely surprises. Donna Stone was able to connect with a cousin in Florence. Holahan found himself leading his fellow travelers in song in a 900-year-old cathedral. “I just said I wanted to cantor and Brother Henry said sure,” said Holahan. And parishioners from two churches got to know one another. “Everybody worked together well,” said Brother Henry. “They were interested in one another and helped one another. Sometimes individuals were not able to walk as fast, and others would stay back and help.” There was plenty of laughter, as well as a deep reverence inspired by the centuries-old religious sites. “I especially appreciated being immersed in the Franciscan spirituality,” said Stone.

If this sounds like an appealing adventure, then mark your calendar. Brother Henry hopes to take another group to Greece or Turkey in about 15 months.

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