

Bishop Madden moved by interfaith gathering in Assisi

After participating in an Assisi pilgrimage of “truth and peace” with Pope Benedict XVI and 300 religious leaders, Bishop Denis J. Madden came away energized to promote the message of peace and understanding.

Bishop Madden, incoming chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, was one of three U.S. bishops to participate in the pilgrimage. He partook in Oct. 27 sessions with the pope and attended other interfaith and ecumenical events throughout the week.

Bishop Madden celebrated Mass Oct. 28 at the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi, a day after the pope joined Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams and others in praying for peace at the holy site.

Bishop Madden said he was moved by Pope Benedict’s reminder that people who are suspicious of religion cannot be blamed for questioning God’s existence when they see believers use religion to justify violence. He called it a blessing for religious leaders to come together from all corners of the globe.

“It’s an inspiration that we really can unite on issues of substance,” Bishop Madden said. “It was a great going forth from there. Everyone left there with the idea of, ‘How can I live this out? How can I keep this alive? How can I use this?’ ”

The pope led an interfaith gathering in the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, marking the 25th anniversary of the first Assisi interfaith gathering for peace, hosted by Blessed John Paul II in 1986. The pope also welcomed agnostic philosophers.

The recent gathering received some criticism, from some who said it put all religions on the same level.

“It’s just not true,” Bishop Madden said. “We can unite on issues of justice, peace and harmony. We don’t necessarily offer up the same beliefs, but we certainly don’t

have to fight.”

Bishop Bennett called Pope Benedict the “unifying factor” for making the peace gathering possible.

Visit tinyurl.com/cr-peacemadden for more on Bishop Madden’s pilgrimage, photos and the bishop’s goals for his new role with the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.