

Catholic University students thrilled to welcome pope 'on our turf'

WASHINGTON - The pope doesn't visit a U.S. college campus very often. So when four seniors at The Catholic University of America heard that Pope Benedict XVI was coming to their campus, the roommates knew they wanted to witness it.

So they arrived on the lawn behind the Columbus School of Law shortly before 10 a.m. April 17 to wait for the papal arrival on campus some seven hours later.

Spreading their blanket out on the lawn, they settled in to view the 10 a.m. Mass at Nationals Park on the big-screen television and soaked up the pope's homily.

Though all four women are from different states and two classify themselves as "moderate" Catholics, one says she's a liberal and one calls herself a conservative, they wanted to be together for the historic event on their campus.

Friends since their freshman year, they were thrilled to have an opportunity to welcome the pontiff to the school they will graduate from in May.

"We are living through a historic event on our campus," said Emily Goudreau, 22, of Raynham, Mass. "A pope hasn't been to CUA in 29 years."

As the women watched the movie "Sister Act" on the big screen, fellow students played Frisbee, kicked soccer balls and enjoyed the sunny weather as they waited for the pope to arrive.

Sarah Ferry, 21, of Harrisburg, Pa., is the only one of the women who has seen the pope before. Last March she was able to secure a ticket from Cardinal William H. Keeler, retired archbishop of Baltimore, to attend a papal audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican.

"But it's different when the pope comes to your school," Ferry said. "We get to play

host to him here, on our turf.”

While the women differ on their views of Catholicism and the policies of the pope, they are very proud to have the pope visit their campus.

“He is the leader of our church, and that means something,” said Sarah Raminhos, 21, of Germantown, Md., who said she differs with the pope on issues such as same-sex marriage, which the church opposes, and women’s roles in the church.

“I can still love our church and our pope even if I don’t agree with every policy,” she said.

The lone conservative in the crowd, Natalie Pyle, 21, of San Antonio, said she wasn’t surprised by the number of people who packed the field to honor the pope as he arrived to meet with Catholic educators.

“Regardless if you are a conservative, moderate or liberal Catholic, he’s the pope,” she said. “We’re all ready to wave our papal flags.”

One thing all four women agreed on is that the pope would not be getting a tour of their dormitory, a trailer in the back of campus.

“I don’t think CU wants to show that off,” Ms. Goudreau said. “We think it’s nice but the administration may not.”