

Inaugural Faith Fest attracts 2,000 to Harford County

As Hurricane Florence approached the Eastern seaboard Sept. 12, approximately 80 people gathered at St. Mark in Fallston to pray an emergency rosary.

Their concern was the inaugural “Faith Fest Maryland” Sept. 16, which had an estimated 2,000 registrants.

The event, of course, commenced under beautiful blue skies.

Live music filled the afternoon, which was sponsored by the 11 parishes in the “Harford” region. Families spread blankets and lawn chairs to hear Catholic musical artists such as Ike Ndolo, Josh Blakesley and Maggie Padgett. The kid zone featured moon bounces, an obstacle course, a rock wall, a zip line, a petting zoo and the “Dunk a Seminarian” booth.

The offerings included worship, a model depicting Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, a place to record personal faith stories and more.

Family blessings

One tent was solely dedicated to family blessings from area deacons.

“This is an opportunity for them,” said Deacon Jim Sullivan of St. Francis de Sales in Abingdon, adding that families who often go to Mass rarely receive a personal blessing. “This is what (Faith Fest) is all about.

“I’ve blessed I don’t know how many families today. ... It’s a nice feeling for all of us deacons, and I hope it’s a nice feeling for the people.”

The Harford-area deacons also staffed the adoration tent and the rosary tent, where a rosary was prayed every half hour.

Saintly and biblical encounters

Volunteers dressed as saints and biblical figures mingled with festival-goers. Among them were Joseph and a pregnant Mary, played by David Sanborn, the youth minister at St. Ignatius in Hickory, and his wife, Victoria.

“She was conveniently pregnant,” David said of his wife. “It’s really important for everyone, especially children, to understand that Mary and Joseph were flesh and bones, they’re not just icons.”

As Victoria/Mary walked and worked up an appetite (which her husband satisfied with a basket of fries), she said her appreciation for Mary has grown.

Children participated in the “Saint Hunt,” searching for clues to match with a saint’s name, each a patron of the local parishes.

Spreading the word

In addition to the sponsoring parishes and outreaches such as Birthright Pregnancy Center of Bel Air, tented informational booths featured religious women such as the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart and the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Sister Maria Lourdes Prieto shared the latter’s mission of caring for the elderly, specifically at the St. Martin’s Home for the Aged in Baltimore. She was able to introduce two couples who have elderly parents, and witnessed them connecting over similar situations.

“Making connections is a beautiful fruit of sharing the faith,” she said. “I’m on fire spreading the word.”

Remembering

St. John the Evangelist in Long Green Valley’s booth focused on the history of the parish, which will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2022.

The parish’s booth displayed a map of Baltimore and Harford counties, encouraging visitors to place a sticky dot where they worship, and a poster board highlighting notable parishioners, including the late Johnny Unitas, who quarterbacked the Baltimore Colts to three NFL titles.

“It tells our story,” said Richard Walter, a member of the parish’s history team and parishioner of St. John for more than 40 years. “It’s more than (just) St. John’s.”

Walter noted Maryland’s storied past for Catholics, which began with suppression until religious freedom was granted to all Christians in the state’s first constitution.

Among the photos displayed was one of religious women waiting at a stop along the Maryland and Pennsylvania, or “Ma and Pa,” Railroad. They were traveling from St. Ignatius in Hickory to St. John the Evangelist to teach at the parish’s school.

Walter built a model depicting religious women waiting at a depot that was displayed at the booth.

A new experience

After seeing advertisements for Faith Fest, Jennifer Lesko Quinton brought her six-year-old daughter, Josie, at the last minute.

“I’m always looking for fun, family, free activities to do on the weekend,” said Lesko Quinton, a parishioner of St. Joseph in Fullerton.

With the clergy sexual abuse crisis bringing a dark cloud over the church, she said it is important to continue to participate and find ways to share the faith with her daughter.

“This is why we’re Catholic,” Lesko Quinton said. “It’s not a building – it’s the people.

“We’re not changing who we are. We’re living our faith.”

She especially wanted Josie to experience a Mass different from the norm – one that was outdoors and on a large scale.

Out with a bang

Fireworks followed the concluding Mass, where Archbishop William E. Lori presided and concelebrants included Auxiliary Bishops Mark E. Brennan, Denis J. Madden and Adam J. Parker.

The archbishop asked the faithful if they had enjoyed their afternoon, and the congregation erupted in applause.

“Having a good time is only part of what you did,” the archbishop said in his **homily**, emphasizing the evangelization they provided. “That’s the way to keep holy the Lord’s day.”

Archbishop Lori apologized, acknowledging that the clergy sexual abuse crisis makes it difficult for parishioners to share their faith right now.

“Far from being the wrong time to celebrate our faith, this is precisely the right time to celebrate it – to make every day of our lives a faith fest until that day dawns when, as Blessed John Henry Newman said, we are ‘led out of shadows and symbols into the full light of truth,’” Archbishop Lori said.

To see more photos or purchase prints, visit our Smugmug gallery [here](#).