

# **Pope expected to encourage vocations in visit to New York seminary**

WASHINGTON - St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., one of the stops for Pope Benedict XVI during his three-day visit to New York this April, is no stranger to the pope or his predecessor, Pope John Paul II.

In 1988, years before he was pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gave a talk at the seminary about the study of Scripture. Seven years later, Pope John Paul II spoke to seminarians on the 40-acre campus commonly known as Dunwoodie for its location in the Dunwoodie section of Yonkers, just a few miles north of New York City.

Baltimore Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, a former student at St. Joseph's Seminary and also its rector for seven years, called the pontiff's planned April 19 visit a "great privilege" for the seminary.

The archbishop, who was rector during the 1995 papal visit, remembers the excitement and the intense preparations for that event, including the restoration of the seminary's chapel.

The archbishop, who also coordinated Pope John Paul II's 1979 visit to New York, knows that all the behind-the-scenes preparations are well worth it. He noted that the pope's visit gave seminarians and other youths tremendous encouragement and inspiration in their vocational calling.

The archbishop told Catholic News Service Feb. 7 that he assumed Pope Benedict would similarly encourage vocations during the scheduled meeting with youths and seminarians on the seminary grounds.

Archbishop O'Brien described the pope's audience at Dunwoodie as "the new generation" and added that they are "very much in tune with living their faith and proud of it."

The archbishop coordinated Vatican-run apostolic visitations of U.S. Catholic seminaries and houses of priestly formation in 2005 to assess the quality of formation programs. He said the pope would probably not allude to the results of those visits but would likely “stress the good he sees” in U.S. seminaries and provide encouragement.

When the reports on the visitations are completed, the Vatican is expected to make an overall evaluation of seminary formation in the United States.

During his 1995 visit to St. Joseph’s, the major seminary of the Archdiocese of New York, Pope John Paul told the seminarians that they must be strong in their faith and not afraid of denouncing evil.

He also challenged them to be true to their calling. “If there is one challenge facing the church and her priests today, it is the challenge of transmitting the Christian message whole and entire, without letting it be emptied of its substance,” he said.

Pope Benedict will not only address seminarians but also Catholic youths at the seminary gathering, described in the pope’s itinerary as a rally/prayer service. In addressing young people he will be continuing a long tradition of Pope John Paul, who always had a strong connection with youths.

Thousands are expected to attend the ticketed event. Tickets will be distributed to young people, seminarians and individuals in formation for religious life in the Archdiocese of New York through Catholic schools, parish catechetical programs, parish youth groups and seminaries.

Prior to the rally, the pope is also scheduled to meet at the seminary with about 50 children with a range of disabilities.