

Youth and young adult pilgrimage could be biggest ever

The Archdiocese of Baltimore is expecting a record crowd for the April 4 Youth and Young Adult Pilgrimage, which should top last year's 1,300 participants.

More than 1,100 people registered by the last week of March for the 16th annual pilgrimage, during which young people carry crosses and palms on a nearly three-mile trek through the city in an effort to usher in Holy Week. Expectations are so big that the large group will be divided in two.

Kristin Witte, coordinator of pastoral care for the archdiocese's youth and young adult ministry, said the popularity of the event rests in the spiritual bond it creates.

"One of the reasons is that it's a tradition," Mrs. Witte said. "It's based on the World Youth Day pilgrimage and connects young people to the diocese and also to the world."

The theme of this year's pilgrimage is "Unstoppable: Faith, Hope and Love." Participants will worship, celebrate and pray along the pilgrimage route as they mark Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.

The Catholic Church is currently celebrating the year of St. Paul and "Faith, hope, love remain" was an integral part of the Paul's Letter to the Corinthians.

Participants will meet at 11:30 a.m for registration at the St. Mary's Spiritual Center and Historical Site on Paca Street. A performance by ValLimar Jansen will also take place at the Shrine of St. Jude on that street.

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien will play a central role, presiding over a eucharistic adoration at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

He will also conclude the pilgrimage by celebrating a Mass attended by all participants at St. Casimir in Canton.

“It will say that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our day,” Mrs. Witte said. “We will have begun and ended our day with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.”

Curious tourists and city residents often engage pilgrims with questions about what they are doing.

“For one day a year, the young church says we’re here, we have identity and we’re proud of who we are,” Mrs. Witte said. “We don’t water down being strong, prayerful Catholics. We want these young people to live lives of discipleship.”

BEFORE YOU GO

The event is targeted to high school youths and young adults and includes a \$15 registration fee. Participants are encouraged to wear comfortable shoes because of the long walk, and to bring sunscreen, a poncho, gloves in case of cold and a hat.

Participants are encouraged to bring banners signifying their parish.

Organizers will also be collecting gift cards from Wal-Mart, Target, Safeway and Giant for Catholic Charities. The amount must be clearly marked.