

Pope's visit boosts sales of Catholic religious goods

By Mike Sweeney

DES MOINES—When about 340,000 people, five bishops, three archbishops, and one pope gather for the largest mass in the history of Des Moines, it means big business to the city's Catholic supply store.

"This has been a kind of a gift we didn't expect," James Vitiritto, proprietor of Catholic Religious Goods, told an inquisitive customer.

Vitiritto said business usually is in a slump in August, September and early October. Customers buying religious Christmas presents such as medals, photographs and crosses don't begin to trickle in until late in October.

But Wednesday, Oct. 3, 1979 did not follow form. "I've been constantly having to wait on customers from the time I opened the door until now (5:30 p.m.)," Vitiritto said. "I've had no time to have lunch except for a few sips of coffee."

HE SAID POPE John Paul II's scheduled visit to Des Moines on Thursday accounted for 99 percent of the business boom.

Customers crowded around a small counter in the back

of the tiny downtown Des Moines store, buying medals and other religious articles for the pope to bless.

Many of them were Protestants, Vitiritto said.

"They say 'I'm not Catholic but I'm going to see the pope and I want to send these to friends in California or Arizona,'" he said.

Both Catholics and Protestants seemed drawn toward the pope's spiritualism, Vitiritto, a Catholic, said.

"I really feel most people consider him to reflect the epitome of spiritualism," he said. "If you get anywhere near him, you feel this. Watching him on TV is not the same."

THE RUSH of customers had depleted the store's stock of many religious items.

Vitiritto said he sold almost all his rosaries by Wednesday. Men's rosaries, of heavy, dark beads, sold out, and only a few of the smaller, lighter colored women's rosaries remained.

But they also would disappear in the few hours he planned to operate the store Thursday morning. Vitiritto said he planned to attend the pope's mass, but he intended to open the shop for two or three hours to accommodate the elderly people who were to catch a bus to the

papal mass.

The items left on his store's shelves testified to the pope's popularity. Shoppers could buy a record album, "Habemus Papam" (We have a pope) for \$9.95; a composite picture of the last four popes, a high relief photograph of Pope John Paul, or a "Bless our Home" plaque picturing Jesus and the pope.

THEY ALSO could buy the bowler's prayer plaque for \$4.50: "May the Good Lord help me reach my goal of a perfect score each time I bowl."

However, Vitiritto said the most popular items were papal medals and a replica of the pastoral cross favored by the patriarch.

Rosaries ran a close second, he said.

Although enterprising businessmen sold everything from T-shirts to key chains to commemorate the pope's visit, Vitiritto limited the number of papal items in his store.

He said he prayed for divine guidance to help him select items in good taste. He knew hawkers would be selling T-shirts in the streets Thursday morning, he said.

"I stayed away from souvenir items. I don't feel my store should be a place for that."

Living History Farms transformed for visit

By Alice Hrnicek

DES MOINES—Living History Farms, a monument to agriculture, may seem the most natural place for Midwestern farmers to host their Catholic leader.

But the transformation from an active but simple monument to an outdoor cathedral which could hold hundreds of thousands of worshippers did not occur overnight.

Preparations for Pope John Paul II's visit to the historical site took months of planning and voluntary labor, according to Vincent King, farm manager.

Crops were harvested prematurely, fences removed, roads graded, cables laid and a \$37,000 sound system placed.

The three farms, portraying past, present, and future agriculture, cover 600 acres. Corn, beans, alfalfa, cattle, hogs, eight work horses and a team of oxen were included.

REMINDEES OF pioneer days dot the 1840 replica farm while horses and steampower equipment are seen on the 1900 farm. Modern farming methods are practiced on the farm of Today and Tomorrow.

The more than 40 employees and volunteers at the site were seated in a special section next to the farm buildings and spot of the pontiff's helicopter landing.

"This is the most happy day of all our lives," said Mabel King, wife of the farm manager. She was responsible for getting security clearances for people in the Living History section and for coordinating the annual corn-husking contest which was to begin Saturday, just two days after the Pope's visit.

Carol Rees, who compiles statistics for the farms' annual festivals, said the visit would help to publicize Living History Farms around the world.

The concept of the outdoor museum began in 1967 with Dr. William Murray, an Iowa State University agricultural professor. Although he had no funds to purchase land, contributions allowed the non-profit educational-historical foundation to buy 171 acres of land at \$1,200 an acre.

LAND HAS BEEN purchased five times since then, and more than 150,000 people toured the farms last year.

Two main festivals, a grain cutting contest and a corn picking contest, highlight each year, said volunteer Jim Dooley, a sociology major at ISU.

"People can get right in and pitch bundles," he said referring to Saturday's contest. "Anyone can be a contestant."

Annual events also include plowing matches, craft shows, July 4th celebrations, horse and buggy days, and livestock viewing.

The altar base, centered on top of a hill surrounded by manicured fields and other hills rising in the background, is 78 feet long and 68 feet at its widest point. More than 365 tons of earth were piled on to raise the platform five feet.

A lectern for the Mass and a pulpit for the choirs were built with thousands of feet of board planking. One tree and chrysanthemums, marigolds, zinnias and other flowers were planted to add color to the display.

Assembled for security measures were 350 oil drums, three miles of, snow fencing, seven miles of rope and thousands of steel fence posts. Medical lanes for emergencies were spaced throughout the acreage.

To accommodate more than 1,000 press people, the Des Moines Diocese set up a press tent, TV towers and three photographers' platforms.

The visit was to be paid by the Des Moines Diocese and contributions from spectators. Free will donation boxes buried six feet in the ground were available to spectators wishing to contribute.

An organization of central Iowa contractors donated materials, equipment and labor to build the Papal stage.



Photo by Mike Sweeney

Threatening morning skies didn't dampen this couple's anticipation for the pope's arrival. The clouds cleared before the pope arrived.

Protestants help finance pope's visit

By Mike Sweeney

DES MOINES—Protestant and Jewish organizations supported and helped finance Pope John Paul II's visit to Des Moines, but a fundamentalist group warned of the pope's imminent "takeover" of America.

The United Methodist Church and the Des Moines Jewish Welfare Association each gave the Des Moines diocese \$1,000 to help defray the costs of the pope's visit.

"We worship the same entity, the same God," Debbie Hansen of the United Methodist information office said. She said she saw no reason why Methodists shouldn't help the Roman Catholic church.

However, one Episcopal rector said his church could do little to aid the Catholics during the pope's visit.

"The Romans are running their own show," he said.

The Rev. Sam Hochstatter, pastor of First Baptist Church, said he was enthusiastic about the pope's visit, but said he received letters from a right wing fundamentalist group denouncing the pope.

Hochstatter said three pamphlets printed by a Canadian publishing company arrived in two separate mailings. The pamphlets, which he threw away, warned that the pope's American visit was the beginning of his takeover.

"Those days of hostilities, resentment, and jealousies—they need to be moved aside," Hochstatter said.

Theologians may argue about the purity of religious doctrine, but "for it to spill out into the community is very unfortunate," he said.

Hochstatter said although Baptists and Roman Catholics are on opposite ends of the religious spectrum, there is no reason why they couldn't cooperate.

Jerry L. Schmalenberger, pastor of Saint John's Lutheran Church, agreed.

In a sermon in the form of a letter to Pope John Paul II, Schmalenberger said, "We Lutherans... still have differences in the theology and social ethics with you. But, so do I have differences with my wife and kids and good friends—but they still remain one family and close friends."

Hochstatter said the pope's visit was the first time he could remember open communication between Baptists and Catholics in Des Moines.

He attributed the cooperation to ecumenical spirit and the immense popularity of the pope.

Pope John Paul has captured the public's imagination by confronting issues as a religious authority," Hochstatter said.

The issues the pope has addressed, from abortion to birth control, cut across church lines, he said.

Schmalenberger said he hoped the pope's visit would stimulate people to think about spiritual matters.

He said the pope's arrival could help the Holy Spirit reach the 52 percent of the people in the country who do not profess church membership.