The pilgrim pope of evangelization

MARTHA FERNÁNDEZ-SARDINA

Go, said the Master. So the servant went. "Go and make disciples of all nations." (Mt. 28: 18) "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation." (Mk. 16: 15) "Go into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." (Lk. 5: 4) John Paul II took the Lord's command literally. This fisher of men dedicated his whole life to bringing the Good News to the ends of the earth. He flew over 700,000 miles, equivalent to 28 trips around the world, visiting over 120 countries and territories, and many cities therein — including San Antonio, Texas. He was indeed a man on a mission.

He taught us how to connect with people who struggle with individualism, hedonism, secularism, consumerism, relativism, and all sorts of confusion, lukewarm in their faith. He modeled what it means to engage people today and present them the "path to happiness" which we all seek and need to reach our highest calling. He did so by preaching and teaching, writing and recording, celebrating the sacraments and World Youth Days, speaking people's native tongues and wearing their local garb. He was both for God and for people, exhibiting that "fidelity both to a message whose servants we are and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact." (Evangelization in the Modern World, No 4)

A CATCH OF MIRACULOUS PROPORTIONS

Pope John Paul II knew the kind of "catch" that awaits the obedient and diligent. From his long hours in daily prayer and his constant contact with people, he knew that we can relive what Peter and his companions experienced 2,000 years ago, if we too cast out our nets with complete trust in Christ's words: "Upon doing this, they caught such a great number of fish that their nets were at the breaking point… the two boats… nearly sank." (cf. Lk 5: 6-7) Our parishes, schools and formation programs also will burst at the seams!

This is why the pilgrim pope of evangelization spared no expense till the very end to bring Christ to the world. He mingled with people everywhere -whether Christian or not, inside or outside the Church- in an effort to captivate the attention, imagination, and interest of modern man and show that Jesus saves, that life with God is indeed "the good life," that the Church's teachings and life are relevant today. In a word, to evangelize — whether in the Vatican or in San Antonio.

THE POPE LEFT US SOME HOMEWORK: COME TO YOUR PARISH HOME

During his September 1987 visit, Pope John Paul II recalled the rich history and missionary activity of the region, stating that "the Hispanic heritage of San Antonio and the entire southwest is very important to the Church," reminding us that "Spanish was the language of the first evangelizers of this continent, and in this region precisely." But the appeal that followed applies to all: "It is your vocation to be evangelizers to others, especially among those whose faith is unsteady or those who resist giving themselves entirely to the Lord. May it never be said of you that your zeal for evangelization and for giving witness to Christian love is less than that of your ancestors!" (Papal address, Plaza de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe) He called us to live our faith fully and invite others to our parish life, "the place and the center of the communion where you nourish and give expression to your Christian life", this "family of families" where, from the beginning, disciples gather for worship, instruction, Christian initiation, pastoral care and service. (cf. Acts 2: 42ff)

May the example and words of this dynamic, untiring, prayerful, Christ-centered, Church-building, world-traveled, evangelizing pope resound in your ears and hearts. May they move us to fulfill the mission he left us: "Go out to seek and find those brothers and sisters in the faith who live confused due to their own indifference or who have in some way have been hurt in their own lives." May we repeat his loving words to them: "I invite all who have doubts about the Church or think you will not be welcomed, to come to… enter your parish home. There you have a place which belongs to you! It is meant to be your family within the Church, and the Church is the dwelling of God in which no one should feel

Principals in papal pilgrimage planning discuss impact on their lives

BY JORDAN MCMORROUGH
TODAY'S CATHOLIC

SAN ANTONIO • No one would doubt that the visit of Pope John Paul II was the biggest event ever to happen in the archdiocese, a time that still impacts lives and ministry in this part of the church in south Texas.

However, most would probably never guess that this undertaking, and all of the massive planning involved, was headed by a core team of only four people.

This small coterie included then Father Larry Stuebben, statewide coordinator; Sister Charlene Wedelich, CDP, administrative assistant; Robert Aguirre, project manager; and Cathy Heck, secretary. The following are their stories.

BEGINNINGS OF THE VISIT

The seeds were planted for the papal pilgrimage when Archbishop Patrick F. Flores and the bishops of Texas were in Rome in 1982 for their "ad limina" meetings at the Vatican.

Pope John Paul II had visited to the United States in 1978, and let it be know that he wanted to come back and visit different parts of the country

More than 60 dioceses submitted invitations to the Holy See, hoping that the Holy Father would grace their own local churches with his presence.

In the fall of 1985, an advance team came through and looked at facilities in San Antonio in anticipation of a visit by the pontiff, and a few months later, in February of 1986, a group from the Vatican appeared in town for the same purpose.

Two weeks after their departure, then-Father Stuebben was called into the office of Archbishop Flores. The archbishop told him that the pope was probably going to come here, and the archbishop asked the then-rector of Assumption Seminary to coordinate the visit. On top of these new duties, the rector was still expected to maintain his current job.

"I practically collapsed," Msgr. Stuebben exclaimed. He thought the matter over for three weeks, but was concerned about fundraising for the effort. However, when monsignor brought that problematic situation to Archbishop Flores, the prelate replied, "I'll raise the money."

In what Msgr. Stuebben called a "master stroke" by Archbishop Flores, San Antonio was the only location in the United States in which the whole province hosted the visit and not just one diocese. It was a joint invitation that featured joint payment, based on a formula devised by the Texas Catholic Conference. Under that plan, larger sees, such as Dallas and Galveston-Houston, contributed more toward funding the papal pilgrimage.

Of a $2.4 million budget established before the trip more than 20 years ago, $200,000 remained in the coffers after the event.

"Some dioceses are still paying for the visit two decades after the fact," Msgr. Stuebben said incredulously.

The monsignor noted that a decision was made early in the process to not pay for the visit by selling souvenirs, as was done in some of the other cities on the U.S. tour.

He emphasized that at every level of planning, the then 13 different dioceses of Texas were involved, and each diocese had its own event coordinator. As an example, at the papal Mass, the ushers, Eucharistic ministers, and choir members came from all over the Lone Star State.

After agreeing to lead the effort, Msgr. Stuebben told the archbishop that he needed someone to work with on the massive endeavor. Archbishop Flores suggested Sister Wedelich, vicar for the archdiocesan office of religious, and she agreed to join the team. Then Aguirre was hired as project manager. "He was the person who had the overall view," the monsignor said.

"Nobody had ever done anything like this before," said the visit coordinator, "so 12 basic committees were composed of the best, most competent people we could find. There was 18 months of preparation, and everyone had to ramp up at the same time. In the summer, things were put in place, and in the fall, we really got organized."

Each committee was asked for a financial plan, and more than $6.5 million in requests were fit into a $2.4 million budget.

After careful deliberations, a Mass site was chosen in Westover Hills that fit all of the criteria needed for a huge outdoor gathering. The property was owned by developer Marty Wender and attorney Wayne Wright, with a small part of the acreage purchased by Tim Von Dohlen; who were of the Jewish faith, a Baptist, and a Catholic, respectively.

Msgr. Stuebben told of a meeting with Wender at his office tower located near I-10 and Loop 410. The negotiations were becoming protracted as attorneys brought up issues of liability and site improvements. The monsignor said the developer eventually told his team of lawyers, "I want this to happen. Have the papers ready by next week."

Auxiliary Bishop Charles Herzig was originally head of the Site Committee, however, during the planning process he was named as the first ordinary of the newly established Diocese of Tyler. Father David Garcia then succeeded the bishop as head of that effort.

THE DAY THE TOWERS FELL

The Mass site was to feature two seven story towers designed to withstand 40 mile an hour winds. However, just as the pontiff was arriving in Miami on the first leg of his American visit, a freak storm with 60 mile an hour wind shear hit the location and the towers toppled.

The disaster avoided becoming a tragedy thanks to Ben Hoffner, the alert volunteer fire chief in Westover Hills. He was watching the storm forecast, drove out to the site in his truck and

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