

In the pope's historic visit to an American synagogue Friday night, he sounded like a neighbor who simply dropped in for a cordial chat. Blogger Paul Moses describes it all at newsday.com/pope

of conciliation



■ Visits Jews at a Manhattan synagogue ■ Pleads for human rights as path to peace

On his whirlwind first day in New York City, Pope Benedict XVI reminded the world's nations of their duty to protect human rights and religious liberty, called for renewed dialogue among Christianity's varied strains, and in a historic visit on the eve of Passover, became the first pope to set foot in an American synagogue.

Mild weather and tempered philosophical remarks characterized Benedict's carefully choreographed travels across the city, as enthusiastic onlookers craned their necks in hopes of seeing the pontiff.

After three days in Washington, D.C., where he repeatedly addressed the explosive issue of sex abuse by Catholic clergy, Benedict hewed to less charged topics here. The pope addressed the United Nations, where he prompted a standing ovation with a speech that emphasized the international community's collective role in promoting peace but refrained from singling out individual countries for censure. And he extended a conciliatory hand to strengthen bonds between Catholics and Jews that may have become frayed after the pope's recent revival of a Good Friday prayer calling for Jews to convert to Christianity.

"Shalom!" Benedict greeted congregants at the Park East Synagogue, where he exchanged gifts and warm words, saying, "I find it moving to recall that Jesus, as a young boy, heard the words of Scripture and prayed in a place such as this."

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, a Holocaust survivor, called the German-born pope's visit to his congregation "a historic moment in Jewish history. . . . The leader of the Catholic Church standing in the synagogue with a rabbi; you don't have to say a word. The statement is loud and clear."

A local welcome

Benedict's plane, draped with a U.S. flag and papal colors, touched down at Kennedy Airport just after 9:30 a.m. amid heavy security. About 200 well-wishers erupted in cheers as the pope walked down a red carpet leading to a hangar, where he was met by Gov. David A. Paterson, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Cardinal Edward M. Egan, archbishop of New York.

"I feel excited because our school and I got picked to see one of the world's great leaders," said Ciara Warner, 8, a third-grader at St. Thomas the Apostle School in

West Hempstead, one of the handful of Long Island Catholic school pupils and administrators on hand to welcome the pope before he was whisked away by helicopter to Manhattan.

Benedict made the fourth papal visit to the United Nations, where he met privately with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon before addressing the General Assembly Friday morning. Ban escorted the pontiff to his office overlooking the East River and pointed to two photographs that showed the pair during their first meeting in the Vatican a year ago, April 18, 2007.

In his address to the General Assembly, the pope stressed the importance of religious freedom, saying that the task of the United Nations "is to propose a vision of faith not in terms of intolerance, discrimination and conflict, but in terms of complete respect for truth, coexistence, rights and reconciliation."

Benedict did not publicly address the thorny topic of church sex abuse Friday, but it arose not long after his remarks at the UN, at a luncheon attended by Cardinal William Levada, an American cleric who runs the Vatican agency that enforces church doctrine. Levada told reporters at a luncheon given by Time magazine that a change in canonical law to better address the problem of abuse was "possible."

Between major events, vendors as well as demonstrators took advantage of the pope's presence. Selling papal souvenirs near Herald Square Friday, Virgil Craig said business in New York had been unexpectedly slow.

As of Friday afternoon, Craig, of Fort Wayne, Ind., had sold just nine pennants from his post at 34th Street and Seventh Avenue — compared to the 3,000 he sold during Benedict's three-day stop in Washington, D.C.

On a more serious note, about a dozen people who said they had been victims of clergy sex abuse as children demonstrated across from St. Patrick's Cathedral, where the pontiff is scheduled to celebrate Mass Saturday morning.

Reconciliation urged

Later in the afternoon, the pope met with Jewish congregants at the Park East Synagogue before attending an ecumenical prayer service at St. Joseph's Church, a 19th-century Yorkville church founded by German immigrants on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

At St. Joseph's, the Bavarian-born bishop of Rome preached a message of reconciliation to leaders representing the major Christian traditions. "Through you, I express my sincere appreciation for the invaluable work of all engaged in ecumenism," the pope said to 250 leaders from Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant congregations across the nation.

During his 40-minute visit, the pope led the assembled in the Lord's Prayer, warned against secular relativism, and urged listeners not to abandon doctrinal principles in the pursuit of ecumenical unity. "Only by holding fast to sound teaching will we be able to respond to the challenges that confront us in an evolving world," the pope said.

The Rev. Sarah Hinkley Wilson, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who is studying at Princeton Theological Seminary, said the pope's appearance at the ecumenical gathering challenged church leaders to reject an insularity that she said has contributed to a growing secularity in society.

"He is sending a message that our mission is out in the world, and not in just circling the wagons around our traditions," Wilson said. "That is why our churches have been empty."

This story was reported by **MICHAEL AMON, ZACHARY R. DOWDY, MARTIN EVANS, MICHAEL FRAZIER, BART JONES, MELANIE LEFKOWITZ, OLIVIA WINSLOW, KARLA SCHUSTER** and written by **JENNIFER SMITH.**

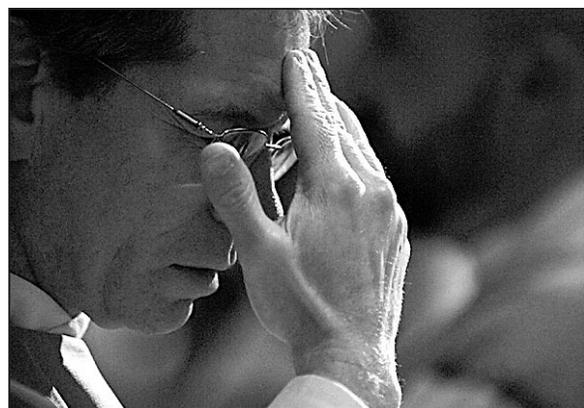
arrives at St. Joseph Church on Friday.

AP PHOTO

for the children



Pope Benedict XVI blesses disabled young people in a chapel at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers.



A priest waits for the pope in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

■ In Yonkers, urges the young to share in 'ministry of hope'

His eyes fixed on the future of his church, Pope Benedict XVI spent his second day in New York exhorting his fellow Catholics — especially the young — to maintain their devotion amid the complications of modern life.

"So far he's doing everything people said he could not do. He's reaching out to other religions, he's sending a message of hope," said Matthew Rouse, 17, of Garden City, who attended a youth rally in Yonkers that served as the festive centerpiece of the day.

An occasionally boisterous mix of sacred organ music, prayer and rock and roll, the event drew tens of thousands of excited teenagers and seminarians to a sunny field at St. Joseph Seminary. There, the pope urged the crowd to share "a ministry of hope for humanity," and he spoke in personal terms of his own life as a boy of faith living under the irreligious pall of Nazism. His remarks followed a more intimate meeting inside the seminary chapel, where he blessed 50 young people with disabilities.

In constant motion over the course of more than nine hours, the 81-year-old pontiff delivered a message of comfort and solidarity to Catholic clergy and lay people. He celebrated the first papal Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral and afterward waved to jubilant believers along Fifth Avenue as he paraded 20 blocks to the residence of the papal nuncio.

Benedict began the day with the cathedral Mass in Manhattan. Sunlight poured through the church's soaring stained-glass windows as he delivered the homily before 3,000 clergy and men and women from religious orders across the country. After urging them to rekindle their faith and unite the different groups within Catholicism, the pope reminded listeners of his "spiritual closeness" to them as the church works to repair the suffering caused by the clergy sex abuse scandal.

The pontiff then turned to what would become one of the day's key themes: the need to sow the seeds for the next generation of those in religious life. He called the labors of today's priests, deacons, nuns and brothers "a legacy" to pass on to those who follow, and told them to "work generously and joyfully, for he whom you serve is the Lord."

■ Thousands line Fifth Avenue to get glimpse of pontiff

After the service, Benedict traveled uptown in the popemobile past crowds of onlookers packed behind barricades along Fifth Avenue. Some had traveled far for their spots along the route. Guadeloupe Martinez, a devout Catholic visiting from Mexico with her son, Aldo, 12, said the excitement — while intoxicating — was nothing compared to how the pope would have been received back home. "People would have been sleeping in the streets for days, waiting," she said.

The pope's entrance into the chapel at St. Joseph Seminary later that afternoon struck a more low-key tone. But it was nonetheless an emotional interlude. Touching the foreheads and stroking the cheeks of the children, Benedict greeted those in wheelchairs, others with learning disabilities and some with birth defects.

Acknowledging the challenges his young listeners there faced, the pope said, "God has blessed you with life, and with differing talents and gifts... our faith helps us to break open the horizon beyond our own selves in order to see life as God does."

Disabled children gave the pope a painting by a 17-year-old autistic boy. Among the presenters were

■ At cathedral, asks priests, brothers, nuns to rekindle faith

Yonkers residents Lauren Kurtz, 11, and Caitlin Manno, 7. Lauren has Down syndrome, and Caitlin suffers from cerebral palsy. When Benedict got to Lauren at the end of the receiving line, she reached up her thin arms and wrapped them around the pope. Lauren then turned and hugged her mother, Beatrice Kurtz.

Caitlin's mother, Angela Manno, said disabled children remind us of our vulnerability as human beings. "It was nice that he made that speech to say how difficult it can be," Manno said. "At times, it can be overwhelming. But every day just a simple smile is a miracle to us."

Afterward, outside the seminary, roars erupted when the popemobile slowly carried Benedict into view.

Thousands of young people, including dozens of young seminarians wearing priestly collars, waved gold and white banners and classical music blared.

"He's a very serious and intelligent man," said Joel Urena, 14, a ninth-grader from All Hallows High School in the Bronx. "I may follow in his footsteps. I look up to him."

Teenagers raised camera cell phones to snap pictures. Students presented the pope with gifts of bread and grain, symbols of the nations from Eastern Europe to Africa where Catholicism is embraced, and sang "Happy Birthday" in German to the pope.

Benedict began his speech with references to exemplary New World Catholics such as Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, who helped

establish the first free Catholic school in America and became the first native-born North American to be canonized. "All offered an outstretched hand of hope to those they encountered along the way, often awakening in them a life of faith," the pope said. "... these six people laid open the way of faith, hope and charity to countless individuals, including perhaps your own ancestors."

Benedict called on young Americans to follow their lead, and asked the crowd "to invite others, especially the vulnerable and the innocent, to join you along the way of goodness and hope."

■ Speaks of how he grew up under 'sinister regime'

He reminded the crowd to cherish the liberties they enjoy as Americans. He also expressed sympathy for their troubles and told them of his own dark times growing up under the "sinister regime" of Nazi Germany, which he said "banished God and thus became impervious to anything true and good."

Switching to Spanish toward the close of the event, the pope thanked the international audience for their warm reception, saying, "I encourage you to open your hearts to God so that he fills you completely and with the fire of your love, take his word to all the neighborhoods of New York."

Throughout the rally, intense security served as a reminder that Benedict's predecessor, John Paul II, had survived an assassination attempt. Police and secret service agents ringed the crowd, while black-clad men in bulletproof vests stood atop two trucks and scanned the scene with binoculars.

The exuberant event included more than three hours of concerts before Benedict arrived. Sometimes the mix was incongruous: after "American Idol" star Kelly Clarkson sang a rollicking rendition of "Since You've Been Gone," organizers showed a video about the sacrament of marriage between a man and a woman.

"The energy here is amazing," said Meghan Miles, 17, of Massapequa, a student at Kellenberg Memorial High School in Uniondale. "I've met people from Brazil, Canada and everywhere. We are all united under one religion."

This story was reported by **BART JONES, DEBORAH S. MORRIS, KEITH HERBERT, KARLA SCHUSTER, PERVAIZ SHALLWANI and DAVE MARCUS**, and was written by **JENNIFER SMITH**.

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