

Pope's invited to Madonna

By MARGARET MILLER

A letter inviting Pope John Paul II to visit Madonna College in Livonia is on its way to the Vatican with the warm greetings of two Madonna administrators who just crossed paths with the Holy Father twice in Europe.

Sister Mary Danatha and Sister Mary Lauriana, for 11 years Madonna's president and academic dean team, were close to the pope at Czestochowa and later had the opportunity to greet him in Rome in the course of their recent three-week trip.

By the time they were starting home they were thinking about an invitation to bring the pope to the college, operated by the Felician Sisters, an order that had its beginnings in Poland. The letter was sent off by Sister Mary Francilene, current Madonna president, even before last week's official announcement that John Paul II would travel to the United States in September.

"I think he will come to this part of the country," said Sr. Danatha, "and we're not that far away."

"This could be his stop for a pause to refresh himself," added Sr. Lauriana.

THE TWO EDUCATORS — Sr. Danatha now is director of cooperative education and Sr. Lauriana vice president for development — returned late in June from a journey designed to "touch base with our heritage."

Both are second-generation Polish nationals. Sr. Danatha's parents came from Wadowice, the home town of the pope, and Sr. Lauriana's father was from a small village near Poznan. And, as Felicians, they have ties to Krakow, where their religious congregation was founded, and to Rome, where their motherhouse is located.

So the long-planned trip held excitement for both, even before it turned out that Pope John Paul II would be in Poland at the same time.

They worried just a little that their tour, which was planned by Palmer Travel Agency and took them all over Poland and to Rome and Lourdes, might be disrupted because of the crowds bound to see the pope.

But it was only at Czestochowa that there was any chance.

"They told us the Holy Father would be there at the same time we would," Sr. Lauriana said, "and we had the choice of accepting lesser hotel accommodations or going to a different place."

"Everyone chose to be where the pope would be."

It worked out that their bus took them into the town where a monastery houses the Black Madonna painting, said to have stopped the Tartar invasion in the 16th century.

"The roads were blocked, but we had an escort into town," Sr. Danatha recalled. "We could look out and see all the thousands of people walking. There were so many there — there was an excitement you cannot forget."

THE TWO SISTERS said they had front row positions for the pope's motorcade appearance because "the Poles have a great respect for the religious and they lifted the ropes for us to go through."

Pope John Paul II, they said, spoke at the shrine and talked of great love for those who are ill and those who care for the ill.

"He was bestowing a special blessing on those who help the sick," Sr. Danatha added.

They were particularly moved, they said, by the feeling in Czestochowa of excitement "but with love and adoration," and by the pope's actions like joining in singing with the people.

"He is so human in his approach to people," said Sr. Danatha. "He is very tender, gentle, calm," Sr. Lauriana added.

In Rome, the nuns said, they again managed to be close to John Paul II when he appeared in St. Peter's Square at the end of a rainstorm.

"When he was close, I said to him, 'Warm greetings from Livonia, Madonna College,'" Sr. Danatha said. "He asked what we were doing in Rome, and when I told him we were Felician sisters, his face really brightened."

THE TWO ENCOUNTERS with the pope were high points of the tour, but for the two teaching sisters, there were many other memorable times.

Especially there were the meetings with relatives. Sr. Lauriana, in previous correspondence with cousins, learned that she had an 81-year-old uncle "still very much alive."

"My relatives were so happy to see us," she said, "but compared to my father who came to this country, they are so poor. What we could not understand was the lines at the markets to buy meat — people would wait two, three hours and still don't get any meat."

"And there is a great shortage of children's clothing — none are made there now, so there is inspection of the luggage of everyone who leaves the country so no children's clothing will be taken out."

All the relatives, the nuns said, were experiencing their first visit from someone from the United States.

"But after seeing them," mused Sr. Danatha, "you almost forgot there was an ocean separating us. I still feel that way."

A VISIT to Wieliczka salt mine, near Krakow, was another memorable experience.

"Everything is made of glass, and it looks like crystal," Sr. Danatha said. It is possible to go down several levels into the mine, and its lower reaches house a hospital for those with respiratory diseases. They said the mine as a site for visitors soon would be closed so the hospital could get top billing.

Another "back to the roots" part of the trip was a stop at Assisi, home of St. Francis.

"We are Franciscans," Sr. Lauriana pointed out, "and in 1981 the Franciscan orders will mark the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis."



Sister Mary Lauriana and Sister Mary Danatha (second and third from left) were close to Pope John Paul II twice during their recent visit to Poland and Rome. This picture was taken in St. Peter's Square, Rome.

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