

St. Michael's youth survive car

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trouble to see Pope in Canada

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Sixteen teen-agers and four adult chaperons departed St. Michael's Church in high spirits July 28; they were on their way to Toronto to see Pope John Paul II at World Youth Day. The teens and two chaperons were in an old battered bus painted with "John Paul II We Love You" and other Catholic thoughts. Two other chaperons rode in a van that had its rear seats removed to accommodate the luggage for 20 people.

Soon after their departure, they realized that the air conditioner was not up to cooling a packed bus, so they opened the windows for some ventilation. With only two stretches of heavy rain and lots of teen-age exuberance, after 400 miles the pilgrims arrived, hot and tired, at about 6:30 p.m. at Lincoln Trail State Park near Marshall, Ind. There they discovered that swimming was prohibited, and worse, that the showers and toilets were under renovation. They managed to maintain privacy and dignity, but it took a lot of extra effort.

The second day, after only 200 miles, they had just passed Fort Wayne, Ind., and filled up the gas tank when the bus engine began backfiring and losing power. Two rear tires failed as well. They found a motel with reasonable rates nearby, which had air conditioning, a pool and showers.

The third day, the pilgrims attended an early Mass hoping

to get an early start, but the bus starter failed right in the church parking lot. Then they discovered that overnight someone had siphoned the gasoline out of the gas tank. They replaced the gasoline and resumed travel only to find the engine problem was still there, prohibiting speeds over 35 mph. Fuel filters and distributor parts were replaced in an attempt to correct the problem but to no avail. In addition, the engine radiator failed in a freakish incident and needed replacement. With all this, the pilgrims only made 45 miles to Pokagon State Park in Angola, Ind., near the Michigan border, by dark. That had been their objective for the second day.

The fourth day, the pilgrims made zero miles and stayed a second night at Pokagon State Park while waiting for a new radiator and trying to find out why the engine was running so erratically.

The fifth day, as desperation set in, an anonymous donor at St. Michael's agreed to pay for the rental of a 15-passenger van so the pilgrims could leave the bus in Indiana and get to World Youth Day in time for the arrival of Pope John Paul II. The bus was towed into town and arrangements were made for a mechanic to repair it in time for the return trip.

But now the pilgrims had to find a rental company that would let them take the vehicle into Canada. None would. Then God led them by a wrong turn to the only rental company that

would allow them to drive into Canada! They drove straight through all the way, with minimal delay at Canada Customs, to the host parish, St. Margaret of Scotland, in Toronto.

When they arrived at Toronto's Union Station to check in, World Youth Day records showed them as being already registered. They had to wait yet again while records were corrected and passes, meal tickets, etc., were issued. They wanted to take a streetcar to Exhibition Place where they could use their lunch tickets, only to find that the next streetcar would not come for another hour. They walked briskly to Exhibition Place to arrive just before they stopped serving lunch.

Friday morning brought a special treat. Many of the Catholic bishops in the United States and Canada attended World Youth Day. The schedule called for the pilgrims from each diocese to get some catechesis (Catholic instruction) from their local bishop. However, although Bishop Sartain, an excellent catechist, was there, the Diocese of Little Rock pilgrims were taught by Cardinal Arinze, a Vatican cardinal from Nigeria and one of the world's top catechists.

While the spiritual rewards were overwhelming, the logistics were challenging. Toronto city fathers did all they could but evidently did not have enough resources to accommodate the crowds a World Youth Day draws. The St. Michael's pilgrims ended up walking more