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Long Islanders participate in papal events

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As Pope Benedict XVI arrives in Washington, D. C., Tuesday afternoon, many Long Islanders are headed to the nation's capital to participate in activities there. Continuing his six-day visit to the United States, Benedict arrives in New York on Friday.

A papal knight

Long Beach resident Gary Krupp will be meeting with the pope in Washington, but he'll have to leave his ceremonial sword at home.

Krupp, who is Jewish and has been invited to an inter-religious meeting with the pope on Thursday, is the recipient of one of the Catholic Church's highest ranks for lay people. He was knighted by Pope John Paul II to the Papal Knighthood of St. Gregory the Great as a commander, he said.

Pope Benedict XVI raised his rank to commander with a Silver Star.

Krupp, who has met with both popes several times, said he received a request from the Vatican to wear his Papal Order uniform to Thursday's event. The Secret Service, however, does not want him to bring the ceremonial sword.

That's fine with Krupp. He said the larger aims of his organization, Pave the Way Foundation, revolve around stopping extremists from using religion to carry out acts of violence or advance other personal agendas.

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"We were absolutely astonished" to be invited to the event, said Krupp, who will attend with his wife, Meredith, a cofounder of the group. "Of course, it's an honor."

He made the pope laugh

Gunther Lawrence of Port Washington also will be at the event, but he probably won't keep a promise he made the last time he saw the pope.

After a formal presentation at an interfaith conference in October, Lawrence, who was born in Berlin, called out to the pope in German, "The next time I see you, I'll bring you your favorite weiswurst [white sausage]."

"The pope broke out in laughter," Lawrence recalled, "so I know he has a sense of humor." Considering the tight security surrounding the pope's visit next week, Lawrence is not likely to greet the German-born pontiff with a package of sausages from Long Island.

Guests are required to arrive no later than 3:30 p.m. for the 6:30 p.m. reception.

Lawrence, 80, a refugee from Nazi Germany in 1936 and executive director of the Interreligious Information Center, has been promoting Catholic-Jewish relations for the past 20 years. He brought a gift to the pope at the October conference: a miniature of a Holocaust menorah he designed with Israeli sculptor Aharon Bezalel. Lawrence presented a similar gift to Pope John Paul II in 1999.

The Catholic sheriff

By day, Vincent DeMarco is sheriff of Suffolk County. On weekends the Huntington resident heads to his childhood Catholic parish in Ronkonkoma, St. Joseph's.

DeMarco, 39, is one of four sheriffs in New York State who also happen to be Catholic and have been invited to a welcoming ceremony for the pope to take place Wednesday morning on the White House South Lawn.

DeMarco said he was honored by the invitation, and that it brought back memories of when his grandmother saw Pope John Paul II in 1979 at Shea Stadium. "I remember that was a real big deal" for her, he said.

She brought him back a pin from the event that he still has. Now DeMarco is thrilled about his own chance to see the pope up close. "It will be something that will be with me for the rest of my life," he said.

An inspired educator

Bishop William Murphy of Rockville Centre, along with the diocese's three auxiliary bishops, will be attending papal events in Washington. So will Sister Joanne Callahan, the superintendent of the Catholic

school system on Long Island.

Callahan will attend a meeting of Catholic school superintendents and presidents of Catholic universities with the pope on Thursday. She said his focus on education was energizing, and that schools across Long Island are using his visit as a "teachable moment" to discuss with students the importance of faith.

She said one message the diocese is trying to emphasize with students is that people need to make "this world a kinder, God-filled place."

Excitement -- in eight languages

The Rev. Aaron Vellaramparampil is an immigrant from India and a priest with the Diocese of Rockville Centre. He'll be heading to Washington, to attend the pope's Mass at Nationals Stadium today.

Vellaramparampil, who is pastor of the heavily Italian Church of St. Rocco in Glen Cove, is -- like the pope -- multilingual. He speaks four native languages of India along with Italian, English, German and Spanish.

He said seeing the pope will be one of the highlights of his 37 years as a priest. "Being in the presence of the pope means so much to me," he said. "He's a living saint."

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