



Usually when thousands gather on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) campus, it's to cheer on the greatest college football team of all time, the Nebraska Cornhuskers (because this a blog and I'm allowed to say that about my alma mater (people are also there for the marching band which is the Pride of All Nebraska)).

But on Sunday, thousands lined the sidewalks surrounding UNL's campus for something completely different – to pray.

Inspired by a massive rosary event along the borders of Poland last year, the Diocese of Lincoln's Eucharistic Family Rosary Crusade coordinated a similar event on Sunday, during which approximately 3,500 – 4,000 Catholic Nebraskans lined the largest university campus in the state to pray the rosary for peace.

"I was edified by the more than 3,000 people who came out to pray the rosary for peace," said Bishop James Conley of the Diocese of Lincoln.

"It was a beautiful witness of the devotion to Mary that is present in the lives of Catholics throughout the Diocese of Lincoln. The Blessed Virgin Mary always leads us to Jesus, and Jesus is the Prince of Peace."

Bishop Conley (kneeling, center) prays the rosary with approximately 4,000 other Catholics on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Photos courtesy of the Southern Nebraska Register.

Wayne Ringer, one of the organizers of the HuskerCatholic Candle-lit Rosary Crusade, said that the placement of the rosary around the campus of UNL was a symbolic gesture, as college campuses are spiritual “high ground.”

“It’s a public witness of our faith to the young people, and it’s also symbolic because the high ground is education because it forms our leaders of tomorrow,” he told CNA.

“Mary is sick of the devil taking the high ground, and so she wants it back.”

While much of the faithful were families from surrounding parishes, many college students also joined in the event, Ringer added.

“There were people out in the dorms that saw the rosary going on so they came down and participated in it,” he said.

Many college students joined in the rosary. Photo courtesy of the Southern Nebraska Register.

Participants in the rosary gathered along a 2.5 mile perimeter and were asked to bring along portable radios, so that they could follow along with a pre-recording of the rosary led by Bishop Conley, as a way to keep everyone’s prayer in unison. Sections of the ring were assigned to parishes from the surrounding area to ensure a full coverage.

Ringer said he heard nothing but positive things from the community about the event, including a powerful conversion experience of a student who had recently joined the Church. The event was also featured as the top story on a local news channel Sunday evening.

Besides showing the faithful's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, praying the rosary in public is also a powerful witness to Jesus Christ, Ringer said.

“Because when you pray the rosary, what are the mysteries all about? The life of Christ, the mystery of salvation. It's a witness of Jesus Christ to a world that badly needs it. There's so much unhappiness and people don't know why they're unhappy. They're missing Christ, they're missing the light of Christ and the real purpose of our life,” he said.

“So hopefully that will inspire some, and if nothing else it will get a conversation going and that is a positive thing.”

Participants in the HuskerCatholic Candle-lit Rosary Crusade. Photo courtesy of the Southern Nebraska Register.

Father James Kelleher S.O.L.T., is the founder and director of the Eucharistic Family Rosary Crusade, and was present at the HuskerCatholic rosary on Sunday, having been invited into the diocese by Bishop Conley.

The group was formed on Oct. 19, 2003, the day of the beatification of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, as a way to honor her love for Mary and the Eucharist, Kelleher told CNA.

The goal of the group is to support family prayer, particularly devotion to the rosary and to Eucharistic adoration. They have hosted numerous public Eucharistic adoration and rosary events throughout the United States and the world.

“I have a saying – public witness, public faith,” Kelleher told CNA.

“These (large-scale) events give people an opportunity to come out into the public square and adore Jesus in the blessed sacrament and to pray with Mary to Jesus, because Jesus is in the center, our Lady is there praying with us directly to Jesus for peace in our nation and throughout the world.”

“It’s a very powerful prayer because when we pray it we’re asking the Virgin Mary to pray it with us to Jesus, and while you and I pray the rosary imperfectly, Mary is always praying with us perfectly, so we receive a superabundance of grace,” he said. “That’s why there’s so many stories of healings and prayers answered as they’ve prayed the rosary.”

The group is planning additional events in the diocese, including a Eucharistic procession around the capitol and a rosary in the stadium of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.