

Markham, Stouffville parishes help World Youth Day pilgrims

BY CHRIS O'BRIEN
Special

York Region families are opening their homes to young people who will attend World Youth Day celebrations next month in the region and the Greater Toronto Area.

"A lot of people stepped up when we initially put out the call last summer, and about 115 families in our parish have opened up their homes," said Ian Buzon, pilgrim hosting co-ordinator at St. Justin, Martyr Parish in Unionville.

Mr. Buzon is hopeful the church community can host more people.

"Parishioners are not sure they'll be in town, or they say they don't have enough bed space."

The aim of finding host families is to add to World Youth Day celebrations which will bring together close to 200,000 young people from around the world between

July 22 and 28.

Buses will come from across Canada and from the U.S. to park at local parishes. That's where host families will meet the pilgrims.

Demographics for the areas where pilgrims will stay have been carefully considered by organizers.

"We want them to be in areas and in homes they will be comfortable," said Mr. Buzon.

"It's a faith journey, it's not about coming to experience Markham, but they will live in the culture here. The pilgrims are coming to take classes across the GTA in church doctrine and faith sessions."

The host family participation is also intended to give pilgrims

someone to interact with in the morning and when they come home from World Youth Day events.

"Their purpose is to learn about their faith and see how we practise ours," said Mr. Buzon, "We don't want them to be alone."

St. Patrick's Parish in Markham has also encouraged parishioners to volunteer their homes.

"We have 127 host families; some are not even members of our

parish but volunteered through their neighbours," said Jim Mitchell, chairperson of the pilgrim hosting committee at St. Patrick's Parish in Markham.

Mr. Mitchell says as July 22 draws near, more Markham families are volunteering their homes.

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Stouffville will receive an influx of young people as well. Betty Anne Brown, pilgrim hosting co-ordinator for St. Mark's Catholic Church says the community has opened its homes to an expected 140 World Youth Day celebrants.

"There is one host family with a horse farm so that will be fun," Ms Brown said.

"I hosted Youth Day pilgrims myself years ago. The children had such fun learning about other

countries and learning about how they party. It really enriches people's lives."

Local schools are readying to house pilgrims in their gymnasiums on sleeping bags and blankets donated by parishioners.

"We have to be prepared for people to come our way," said York Catholic District School Board representative Chris Cable, whose board is offering 33 schools for pilgrim accommodations.

Camp teaches kids art basics

The Markham Guild of Village Crafts' annual summer camp is back, offering basics in perspective, colour and more to children.

Instructor Anees Vakharia's aim is to fill the void left by cutbacks in school art programs.

Most of his students range from five to 18 years old.

The camp runs between July 1 and 19, from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m.

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