

'Rosary Bowl' seeks to revive a once-vibrant tradition

By REBECCA TROUNSON
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For many years, Southern California was home to annual outdoor celebrations of the Roman Catholic rosary and the Virgin Mary, events that drew thousands at a time to the Hollywood Bowl, the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and Dodger Stadium.

The devotional service, known as Mary's Hour, began at the Bowl in 1948 and drew its largest audience, about 100,000, to the Coliseum in 1954.

But crowds of the faithful dwindled over time, and Mary's Hour was last held on an annual basis in 1969, with occasional smaller services in the late 1980s.

The tradition is scheduled to be revived today, when organizers say 50,000 to 75,000 people are expected to gather for the "Rosary Bowl," the first celebration of the rosary to be held at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

Organizers say the event, from 6 to 9 p.m., will include prayer, music and cultural exhibitions and is expected to draw participants from across Southern California.

"The intent is to encourage families to come together to pray the rosary and pray for peace," said Beth Mahoney, mission director of Holy Cross Family Ministries of Easton, Mass. The group is sponsoring the gathering with its local affiliate, Family Theater Productions of Hollywood, and the support of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

The event, "A World at Prayer Is a World at Peace," is free and open to the public. More than 75,000 advance tickets have been distributed, the organizers said, and tickets may still be obtained at the Rose Bowl today.

Father Willy Raymond is the president of Family Theater Productions, which was started in 1947 by Father Patrick Peyton, an Irish-born priest who helped popularize daily reciting of the rosary through large public celebrations and the religious dramas his company produced. Pey-

ton died in 1992 after carrying his rosary crusade to an estimated 27 million people worldwide.

Raymond said part of the impetus for today's event was a 2002 decision by Pope John Paul II to add a new set of mysteries, or meditations, to the rosary, which is a traditional Catholic devotion that involves a string of beads and the recitation of a set number of prayers.

Previously, Catholics were asked to use the rosary to reflect daily on one of three sets of scenes from the Gospels: the Joyful, Sorrowful or Glorious mysteries, which focus on Jesus' birth, crucifixion and resurrection.

The additional set, the Luminous mysteries, fill in key scenes of Christ's public life, including his baptism and the Last Supper.

"That really reminded everyone that the rosary, although addressed to Mary, is focused on Christ," Raymond said. "And while it can be a very precious, intimate form of prayer, it can also be very meaningful as a public devotion."

Raymond said his organization would like to restart the tradition of public rosary festivals and chose Los Angeles for the first event because of the large, ethnically diverse Catholic population here and the area's history of holding such celebrations.

Today's celebration, which is described at www.rosarybowl.org, will include music and processions, along with prayers and inspirational words from Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, Bishop Oscar Solis and Immaculee Ilibagiza, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide.

The Rose Bowl's parking lots are scheduled to open at 1 p.m. and the stadium gates at 5 p.m. Although the tickets are free, parking will cost \$15 for cars and \$40 for buses.

Life's Mysteries 101

Several universities are taking steps to help students explore spiritual and religious is-

suues, in response to studies showing that large majorities of American undergraduates are interested in spirituality or searching for meaning in their lives.

Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, for example, plans to launch a residential program for freshmen this fall that will ask them to ponder and discuss questions about the meaning of life and definitions of success.

Miami University of Ohio says it will extend existing theme programs in some of its dorms to incorporate conversations around spiritual topics.

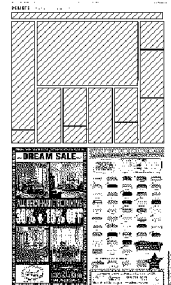
And Florida State University is promoting interfaith dialogues and planning training sessions for faculty and staff on how to lead and participate in conversations with students on spiritual issues.

The programs grew out of discussions held at UCLA in November as part of the 4-year-old Spirituality in Higher Education project at the school's Higher Education Research Institute. Teams of faculty, staff and administrators from 10 colleges and universities across the country gathered at the institute to develop plans for programs that would allow students to explore questions of meaning, purpose, value and other such issues.

"We wanted to engage a variety of faculty and others in talking about this sometimes difficult issue, the question of spirituality in higher education," said Jennifer Lindholm, the project's director. "Some came because they were skeptics and many of the others because they were at least marginally receptive to trying to work with students on these issues. And we had a really interesting conversation."

A 2004 institute study of entering college freshmen nationwide found that four of every five had an interest in spirituality, three-fourths were searching for meaning or purpose in life and more than three-fourths — 79% — believed in God.

"The research shows that



many are searching for something larger than themselves," Lindholm said.

University faculty and administrators, especially at public institutions, are often reluctant to become involved in such issues both in the classroom and in other official settings, she said. But that may leave students struggling for answers.

"We feel that there are appropriate ways to talk about these issues and always underscore that this is not to indoctrinate or validate one belief or another, including non-belief," she said. "But we need to be aware that there's a lot going on with undergraduates along these lines and figure out ways to help them explore the issues."

Darfur observance

In an effort to draw attention to the continuing bloodshed in Sudan's Darfur region, an ecumenical service at First AME Church of Los Angeles on Sunday will feature Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and leaders of various religious denominations and community organizations.

The Los Angeles Darfur Observance Day will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. at the church, 2270 S. Harvard Blvd.

It will include an interfaith choir performance, speeches by Villaraigosa and others, and a display of video and photographs documenting violence in the African nation.

The Bush administration has described the situation in Darfur, which includes assaults by Sudanese troops and allied militias against civilians, as genocide. The United Nations estimates that more than 180,000 people in the region have died since 2003, when a civil war began.

Among the event's sponsors are the American Jewish Com-

mittee of Los Angeles and Jewish World Watch, which have been active for several years in trying to raise awareness about Darfur.

"The genocide is an issue that resonates with the Jewish community because of its experience with the Holocaust," said Dean Schramm, vice president of the local office of the American Jewish Committee. "What we're trying to do collectively here is to say to Khartoum that this must stop, to say to Washington that we have to do more and to say to the people of Darfur, 'You are not alone.'"

Expected participants include the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Islamic Center of Southern California and UCLA's Darfur Action Committee.

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RICARDO DEARATANHA *Los Angeles Times*

A CELEBRATION: The Catholic rosary, long a symbol of faith in the power of prayer, returns to center stage during an event at the Rose Bowl expected to draw tens of thousands of worshippers today. The event is open to the public.