



Students walk the holy path at shrine

By Vanessa Renderman

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ST. JOHN | The morning of Holy Thursday, seven buses pulled up to The Shrine of Christ's Passion in St. John, and hundreds of children piled out.

Led in small groups by volunteers at the prayer trail, the 359 students from St. Ann School in Lansing were among the first to see two new statues on display.

A statue of St. Peter asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane and a statue of Jesus' ascension into heaven were installed this week at The Shrine of Christ's Passion, joining the other life-size bronze statues along the trail that depict Jesus' final hours.

The shrine, located on the west side of U.S. 41, about a mile south of 93rd Avenue, will be open this weekend, including Easter Sunday, said Paul Anderson, visitor center and store manager at the shrine.

The shop was open during Easter last year, but this is the first Easter season that people can walk the prayer trail. Traffic has been especially heavy this week. A group of 70 Norwegian choir members visited, and Thursday welcomed the St. Ann schoolchildren, Anderson said.

Principal Elizabeth Gard said the students have studied the Stations of the Cross at school. Gard said she wanted the visit to give the children a deeper understanding of their faith.

"It's a very moving experience," she said. "It's wonderful to watch the children's reactions."

With an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 visitors having toured it, the popularity of the trail has convinced the management to double the size of the gift shop on site. Construction is expected to begin Monday and be finished by August.

Aside from 100 volunteers signed up to work at the trail, a new program called Adopt-A-Station has started. People sign up to maintain the statues, Anderson said.

The trail, which sits at the foot of St. John the Evangelist Church, is a separate entity from the church. The trail managers work closely with all churches, he said.

For more information, visit www.shrineofchristspassion.org. HOURS OF OPERATION

The Shrine of Christ's Passion, 10630 Wicker Ave., will be open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. today; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday; and from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Easter Sunday. Normal hours are from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sundays.

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