

## Downsview Stories

# THE POPE COMES TO DOWNSVIEW—TWICE!

By the time Pope John Paul II paid his first visit to Canada in 1984, he was already six years into his pontificate, had made twenty-two foreign trips, and visited forty-four countries, several of them more than once. But who's counting?

Canadians were happy to wait their turn. And when John Paul II arrived in Quebec City on September 9 to kick off a twelve-day cross-country tour, he became the first Pope to touch Canadian soil.



Pope John Paul II holds the Downsview Mass, 1984

For people in southern Ontario, the highlight of the trip would be a giant outdoor Mass to be celebrated on September 15, 1984 in Downsview Park, the only location that could hold several hundred thousand worshippers and was accessible by public transportation. But the weather wasn't cooperating: torrential downpour the night before the Mass had transformed the Park into a swamp. The weather cleared in time for the Pope's helicopter to arrive, and about 400,000 people braved the soggy ground to attend the Papal Mass.

Eighteen years later, the Pope was back in Downsview Park on July 28, 2002, to mark the conclusion of World Youth Day, and once again, bad weather presented challenges for City and church officials. A violent rain and windstorm descended over the Park the night before the Mass, soaking the hundreds of thousands of young people who were camped there. The storm nearly prevented the Pope's helicopter from delivering him, and the wind ripped off part of his stage roof. But the storm cleared in time for the Pope to lead the Mass in front of a crowd estimated at 700,000 people.

"You are young, and the Pope is old," the ailing 82-year-old Pontiff told worshippers, "but he still identifies with your hopes and aspirations." Despite the weather, World Youth Day ended on a high note for attendees and for the City.

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