

City hosts religious icons



By KELLY LEWIS

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THE Christian symbols of the world's largest youth event toured the region over the weekend as part of a nation-wide journey.

The 3.8 metre-high World Youth Day Cross and Icon of Our Lady are travelling around Australia for World Youth Day, launched by the late Pope John Paul II two decades ago.

Arriving in the South East on Sunday, the cross began its journey in Keith, before stopping in Penola.

It reached Mount Gambier on Sunday evening and was officially welcomed and blessed by Mount Gambier Parish Priest Father Richard Morris and Mount Gambier Mayor Steve Perryman.

More than 300 people young and old joined the procession, which began at the Blue Lake Pumping Station and proceeded down Bay Road and Penola Road before arriving at Saint Paul's Catholic Church.

Once at the church, a special service was held to celebrate the arrival of the cross, icon and message stick to Mount Gambier.

World Youth Day Cross committee member Nathaniel Sutton said the cross arrived in Millicent's Saint Alphonsus Church yesterday, where a liturgy and barbecue breakfast was held as the cross completed its final leg on its South East journey.

Mr Sutton said it was a great privilege to have something connected to a major event like World Youth Day arrive in the



More than 300 people joined in the procession to welcome the World Youth Day Cross into Mount Gambier on Sunday evening. Picture: SARAH DUFFIELD.

Limestone Coast.

"It was a fantastic day and brought to Mount Gambier the wonderful feeling of World Youth Day, the sense of belonging to the Church - that our faith is in fact shared by millions of people who believe in Jesus and want to make the world a better place," he said.

"It was wonderful to see the cross and icon, the core symbols of the Christian faith in the region, and to be able to share that feeling of unity and prayer that Pope John Paul II has inspired in so many young people."

He said the cross was not only a sign of sorrow and suffering, but through the resurrection of Jesus, it had become a sign of new beginnings, of salvation, love, and hope.

"The arrival of the World Youth Day Cross to the region was such a blessing and there was a joyful reverence as the procession with the Cross travelled along the streets of Mount Gambier," Mr Sutton said.

World Youth Day gathers hundreds of thousands of young people around the world to celebrate and learn about the Catholic faith and to build bridges of friendship and hope between continents, people and cultures.

The cross and accompanying icon will go through every diocese in Australia before arriving in Sydney for the World Youth Day celebrations in July 2008.

More than 50,000 people are expected to take part when Sydney hosts the event from July 15 to 20 over a three day period.

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Government of South Australia

Pilot shortage hits region

REGIONAL Express (REX) Airlines has been hit by pilot shortages, leading to the cancellation of two Mount Gambier flights last week.

Pilot shortages have come as a result of major Australian airlines "poaching" pilots from regional airlines and pilot training schools, according to a Rex spokesperson.

The shortages have had a devastating effect on the airline, which last week was forced to suspend flights from Brisbane to Maryborough until March 2008.

Rex managing director Geoff Breust said due to the shortages the airline had to choose to either suspend some of its regular services to build up a reserve buffer, or cancel ad hoc flights each time a pilot called in sick.

"Rex has traditionally been the airline with the lowest cancellation rates in Australia and we intend for it to remain that way even in these trying circumstances," Mr Breust said.

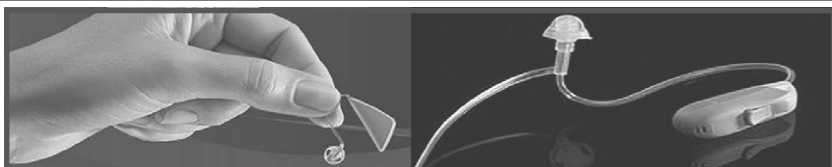
Mr Breust said he did not foresee any further suspension of services, but could not guarantee more cancellations would not follow, stating the situation would be monitored closely.

The chief pilot of Qantas described the shortages as being more catastrophic than the collapse of Ansett and said all airlines had been badly hit.

Mr Breust said he remained confident the problem would only be a temporary setback.

"We have more than 700 applicants for our pilot cadet scheme and the first batch of 20 selected candidates will commence their 32 weeks of training at the Rex pilot academy on December 10 this year," he said.

"We call on the other major airlines in Australia to train their own pilots instead of simply poaching massively from the regional airlines and the pilot training schools."



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