Crowd of Filipino Catholics gathers amid fears

More than 800,000 follow statue of Christ barefoot

> **By JIM GOMEZ** Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines A mammoth crowd of mostly barefoot Filipino Catholics joined a raucous procession Wednesday of a centuries-old black statue of Jesus Christ despite terrorism fears and amid the president's attacks on the Catholic faith.

Police said they have not monitored any specific threat but that they deployed more than 9,000 police and troops, including bomb squads backed by a surveillance helicopter, to secure the annual procession of the wooden Black Nazarene along Manila's streets. Police were expecting up to 5 million people to join the dawnto-midnight procession.

More than 800,000 devotees attended a Mass and the first few hours of the procession, national police Director General Oscar Albayalde said. Tens of thousands of others joined in and went as one of Asia's biggest religious events unfolded.

Authorities imposed a gun and liquor ban and cellphone signals were jammed in the vicinity of the procession. Flights over the area were prohibited along with sailing in nearby Manila Bay and along a key river where special police and coast



AP Photo/Bullit Marquez

Coast Guard vessels keep a close watch as thousands of Roman Catholic devotees cross the bridge in a raucous procession of the Black Nazarene to celebrate its feast day Wednesday in Manila, Philippines.

guard forces guarded bridges that the mass of devotees passed through.

Despite the threats and the tropical heat, mobs of devotees in maroon shirts dangerously squeezed their way into the tight pack of humanity around a carriage carrying the life-size statue of Christ. They threw small towels at volunteers on the carriage, which was being pulled by ropes, to wipe parts of the cross and the statue in the belief that the Nazarene's powers cure ailments and ensure good health and a better life.

"I'm praying so I can walk again and be cured of depression," said Pochi Maximo, who held on to a wheeled walking device as she waited along a road with her daughter for the procession to pass.

The 58-year-old housewife said she has joined the religious gathering since childhood as part of a family tradition and persisted to be at Wednesday's procession despite debilitating knee and spine ailments that were diagnosed last year, along with diabetes, that drove her into pits of depression.

Another devotee, Ryan de Vera, a 29-year-old former finance officer at a local bank, said he squeezed his way through the crowd to touch the hand of the Black Nazarene, which he credited for the recovery of his father from prostate cancer. After the dangerous feat, he was pushed uncontrollably aside by the mass of humanity to a roadside, where his left foot sustained a deep wound caused by a sharp metal piece of debris.

After getting treatment at a first-aid station, he limped back to the crowd, still barefoot and smiling. By nightfall, more than 1,000 devotees had been treated by Red

Cross volunteers for minor injuries, exhaustion and high blood pressure.

A tourist from Denmark, Jens Mikhelsen, said the intense religious outpouring was important because it drew Filipino Catholics closer to their faith and sparked hope.

"It's very, very impressive ... It's a bit away from my way of thinking but I respect the people," said the 75-year-old engineer, who is a Protestant.

Such religious passion was under the spotlight amid President Rodrigo Duterte's stepped up attacks on the Catholic church, faith and bishops, who have criticized the thousands of killings under his anti-drug crackdown. In June, Duterte sparked outrage among many Catholics when he called God "stupid" and later questioned the basic tenets of the Catholic faith. He offered to immediately resign if anybody can prove that God exists

Crowned with thorns and bearing a cross, the Nazarene statue is believed to have been brought from Mexico to Manila on a galleon in 1606 by Spanish missionaries. The ship that carried it caught fire, but the charred statue survived. Some believe the statue's endurance, from fires and earthquakes through the centuries and intense bombings during World War II, is a testament to its powers.

Conference urges personal encounters with God

By TAMMY MALGESINI East Oregonian

A faith-based conference with the theme of "Cover the Earth" features live music, inspirational speakers and top-notch performances.

"It talks about the idea to cover the earth with the presence of God," said Rev. Terry Haight of the Hermiston Assembly of God Church. "Pursuit is the idea of going after God."

In its seventh year, Pursuit kicks off Friday, Jan. 18 at 7 p.m. at the Assembly of God Church, 730 E. Hurlburt Ave., Hermiston. There is no admission charge. It continues with sessions Saturday, Jan. 19 at 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Also, the church is hosting Pursuit



Audience members raise their hands in praise during Pursuit 2018. This year's faith-based conference is Jan. 18-20 at the Hermiston Assembly of God Church.

Sunday during its regular worship time Sunday, Jan.

20 at 10:30 a.m. Haight invites every-

one to attend, regardless of their level of faith or religious affiliation. In addition, he challenges people

to pursue God.

There's more to it than just checking into a church," Haight said. "There's a real

encounter we can have with God."

special guests include Jeremy Johnson of Fearless Church LA, Becky Johnson of the Jesus Culture Church in Sacramento and Matt Molt, lead pastor of New Vintage Church in the Tri-Cities. Each of the speakers, Haight said, address challenges that people are facing. In addition, they will share about the importance of a personal connection with Jesus

"We talk about salvation and eternity because every one will live for eternity it's just a matter of where," Haight said. "It's more than just going to church. It's a

relationship with God." Haight said while the ini-

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tial focus of the conference was geared for the youths and young adults, its open to everyone.

"It's for ages 0 to 99," Haight said. "The music is going to be more contemporary but the speaking is kind of middle of the road — it will speak to all ages."

Also, there are still volunteer opportunities available to help with the conference. People are needed to do everything from hospitality and greeting to cleanup, food preparation and security. Those interested are invited to a volunteer's meeting Thursday, Jan. 17 at 7 p.m. at the church.

For more information, visit www.pursuitconf.com, www.facebook.com/pursuitconf or call 541-567-5831.

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Pastor Sharon Miller 541-278-8082

www.livingwordcc.com

Redeemer **Episcopal** Church

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WEEKLY

Groups For All Ages AN ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH 1911 SE Court Ave. 541.276.6417 • pendletonfirst.com



Grace Baptist Church 555 SW 11th, Hermiston 567-9497 Nursery provided for all services Sunday School - 9:30 AM Worship - 10:45 AM

6:00 pm Wed Prayer & Worship 7:00 PM "Proclaiming God's word, growing in God's grace"

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Pastor Dan Satterwhite 541.377.4252 417 NW 21st St. • Pendleton, OR 97801 www.facebook.com/ PendletonLighthouseChurch

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Worshipping God Loving People

108 S. Main • 541-276-9569 **Pastor Jeff Geesey** Worship Service: 10:30am pendletonfaithcenter.church

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH

in Mission for Christ LCMC Sunday Worship......9:00 AM Bible Study.....10:00 AM

Red Lion Hotel (Oregon Trail Room) www.faithpendleton.org

2 CALVARY CHAPEL OF PENDLETON

1909 SW Athens Ave., Pendleton Come join us for Worship at 10:45am on Sunday ⑥) 541-966-8912 (⑥

Community Presbyterian Church 14 Martin Drive,

Umatilla, OR 922-3250 Worship: 10 AM

Sunday School at 11:30



Scripture, Tradition and Reason Family service 9am Sunday N.E. Gladys Ave & 7th, Hermiston PH: 567-6672 We are an all inclusive Church who welcomes all.

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541-289-4535 Tom Inch, Pastor

Tom Inch, Pastor Grace and Mercy Lutheran Church, ELCA (First United Methodist Church) 191 E. Gladys Ave. / P.O. Box 1108 Hermiston, Oregon 97838

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church LCMC

Sunday worship at 11:00 AM Pastor Michael Smith 420 Locust St. • Boardman, OR 541-481-6132

call 541-278-2678 Seventh-Day Adventist

Church Saturday Services <u>Pendleton</u> 1401 SW Goodwin Place 276-0882

Sabbath School 9:20 am Worship Service 10:45 am

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