Doll given assignment for book on Italy

Fine arts professor photographs Vatican, Pope

by Diane Theisen
Reporter

“I was just thrilled with the opportunity,” said the Rev. Don Doll, S.J., professor of Fine Arts, of his trip to Rome as a photographer for “A Day in the Life of Italy.”

“I received quite a plum when I was asked [by the assignment editors] to photograph the Vatican and the Pope,” Doll said.

He attended a papal reception for the president of Portugal, Mario Soares, and was one of a few photographers, outside of official Vatican photographers, allowed into the event which occurred in the private library of the Papal apartments. Doll described the event as absolutely elegant.

“The president and the Pope stood beneath a huge painting of the Resurrection by Rugerji,” he said.

“At one point, I was about four feet from where the Pope and the president were exchanging gifts,” Doll said.

He photographed the Swiss Guards, the Vatican Gardens and scholars in the Vatican library.

“I photographed the grade school there, which is basically an altar boy school for St. Peter’s,” Doll said.

He photographed nuns who were repairing huge Vatican tapestries. Behind them was cabinet after cabinet of different-colored spools of thread.

“I took pictures of nuns, basically from around the world, answering the Vatican switchboard. They often answer calls from grade-school kids who like to call the Pope,” Doll said.

Doll took photographs of St. Peter’s at sunrise and at sunset. The only lights in the nighttime photographs of St. Peter’s and the Vatican came from the Pope’s apartment where he was working late, he said.

Doll shot 45 rolls of 36-exposure film of the 50 rolls given to each photographer. He said he was so nervous he did not have enough film, he requested and received 100 more rolls of film.

The president of Italy hosted a reception for the 100 participating photographers, which included 25 Italians, 50 Americans and 25 others from around the world.

There were several sponsors: Kodak donated the film, Pan Am provided flights for all 100 photographers to Rome and their assignments in Italy and Nikon presented each participating photographer a new camera.

Doll has participated in five similar projects: “A Day in the Life of America,” “A Day in the Life of California” and “Christmas in America” have all been released. “Mission Earth” about environmental issues and “The Power to Heal” about health care will be released in October.

“A Day in the Life of Italy” should also be out in October, Doll said.

In addition to the Italy assignment, Doll is working on a book for Creighton.