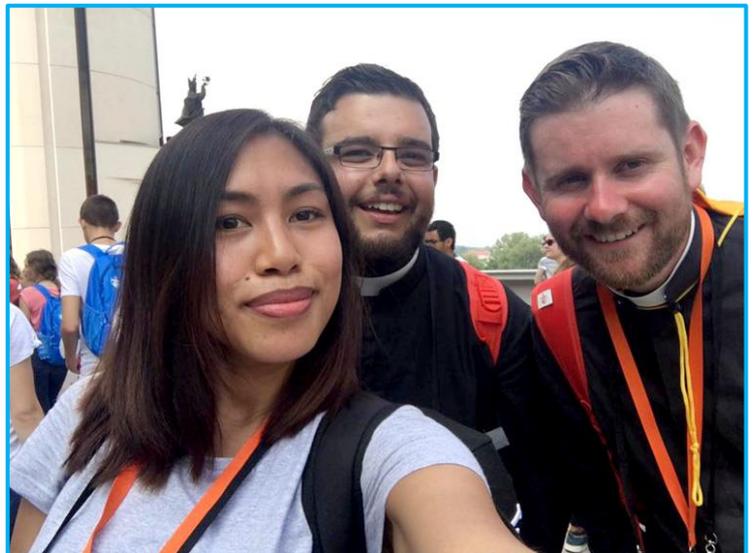


## WYD FROM DIFFERENT VIEWS

### FROM A CHAPLAIN'S VIEW:

Kraków 2018 is the third World Youth Day I have attended, but it's the first World Youth Day I've attended as a priest. The priest's perspective is very different. I think I heard up to one hundred confessions of pilgrims from all over the English-speaking world and I provided spiritual direction to thirty or forty pilgrims from Victoria.

Those ministries give me a glimpse into the impact of WYD on the interior life of pilgrims, but of course I'm not at liberty to relate any of that. That's privileged information, unique to God and each pilgrim, and I was only eavesdropping.



Even if I remembered it, I couldn't repeat it. As it happens, I have a terrible memory, so I forget very quickly. I ask the Holy Spirit to take care of the rest. However, Maya Angelou's famous aphorism still applies:

*"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

There is a general feeling I experienced as a WYD chaplain which is vivid and unforgettable. It evokes a few thoughts that I can comment on. Everything that follows derives from external observations and public conversations and testimonies.



Where two or three are gathered in my name," our Lord assures us. "There am I in the midst of them". (Mt 18:20) When two or three million are gathered in his name, the Lord's presence is palpable. I know so many pilgrims who experienced a wondrous personal encounter with Christ during World Youth Day, often for the first time.

Typically, pilgrims met Christ in their fellow pilgrims. The Victorian pilgrimage adopted an inspired arrangement which meant that every pilgrim spent the bulk of their time with six co-pilgrims and a small group leader. At the start of the trip, those co-pilgrims were random strangers, with disparate backgrounds and often opposing temperaments. By the end of World Youth Day, new and sincere friendships were forged on common experiences and shared faith. As a chaplain, who did not belong to a small group but moved between them, I could observe how important each pilgrim is to God's divine work.

From the start, many pilgrims were well-established in the faith. Maybe they are members (or leaders) in a vibrant parish youth group, or maybe they are the only young person in their entire Sunday Mass congregation, but still they come, week after week. Probably, these pilgrims were looking forward to having their faith confirmed, and meeting like-minded peers who “get” them. God’s thinking is different, instead of blessing these pilgrims with consolations, He put them to work knowing that their knowledge of the faith and love of God would profoundly impact pilgrims with less faith or none.



Many pilgrims signed onto World Youth Day with caution and hope. They were wrestling with sincere doubts, or maybe their faith and love of God had become lukewarm. Many hoped that the catechesis and experiences of World Youth Day would assuage doubts, or reignite previous fervour. God’s thinking is different. The excitement and enthusiasm of co-pilgrims baffled many, and it isolated them. But they met the like-minded too. A Syrian pilgrim shared her testimony at the papal vigil. She described the horrors of civil war, the gut-wrenching fear which becomes a daily companion and the subsequent doubts in God’s mercy. Ultimately, this heroic young woman has resolved her doubts and loves God very much. Her words touched pilgrims at all stages of faith, many of whom return home still wrestling with big questions unresolved.



Many pilgrims signed onto World Youth Day with little or no faith. Often they started with a “scientific curiosity”, disinterested observers who looked forward to learning more about Poland, or experiencing a global event. God had different plans for them too. Many were swept up and swept off their feet by the sincere love and unembarrassed faith of young people who are just like them.

*Fr John Corrigan*

## **FROM A LEADER’S VIEW:**

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.* (Mt5:7) World Youth Day in Kraków, Poland brought together young Catholics from around the world to celebrate and learn about their faith. In a world where it is not always popular, or easy, to be a Catholic, over 2 million young people gathered with Pope Francis at "Campus Misericordiae" (Field of Mercy) to celebrate the young heart of the Church.

I was privileged to be the Pilgrimage Coordinator for one of the four pilgrimages from the Dioceses of Victoria. It was an honour to lead a group of inspiring young men and women on the John Paul II Trail. During our pilgrimage, we walked in the footsteps of JP II. We prayed at his tomb in St Peter’s Basilica, we visited the town where he was born and we walked the streets of Kraków, where he was the Archbishop. We visited and prayed at various holy sites,

including St Francis' tomb in Assisi and at the Icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa and we reflected at Auschwitz and Birkenau. Throughout the pilgrimage, we were all strengthened in our faith by those that we walked besides.

Each of the four pilgrimages had amazing experiences and opportunities to grow in their faith. Throughout the WYD week we listened to Cardinals and Archbishops speak to us about the theme "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy (Mt5:7)", we attended large scale events, including the Opening Mass, Papal Welcome and Stations of the Cross, and we had quiet moments of prayer and reflection.



It is extremely challenging to capture the entire experience of WYD in a few paragraphs. Each pilgrim will have their own moments where they were touched, where they learnt something, felt something and where they were transformed. There were moments where I was challenged, where I felt complete joy and where I experienced the mercy of God in those I journeyed with. No pilgrim returns from WYD the same.



As a leader, and someone who has attended previous WYDs, I was really touched to see the enthusiasm and witness of the pilgrims. One of my favourite days was the Papal Welcome. We walked in pelting rain to Blonia Park to our designated section of the field. Like the thousands of other pilgrims, we positioned ourselves near a fence with the hope that Pope Francis would drive by us in his famous Popemobile. The arrival of Pope Francis was indeed very special. However, it was what happened after this that was the real highlight. This included each area of the world being celebrated with a presentation of a saint from that area and with music. When Australia was mentioned and we saw a gigantic image of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, the crowd around me erupted. We jumped. We cheered. We danced. A small circle of dancing pilgrims quickly multiplied and before long hundreds of pilgrims were involved. The energy was amazing and it is something that I will never forget.

Pope Francis himself was a particular highlight. He not only embodies joy, but he speaks in such a way that inspired us all. At the vigil he called on young people to avoid being 'couch potatoes'. He went on to say to all those present that, "Today's world demands that you be a protagonist of history because life is always beautiful when we choose to live it fully, when we choose to leave a mark."

This is the challenge for all pilgrims who attended World Youth Day. How do we live out this challenge to fully live our lives and our faith on our return to our 'normal' lives?

Thank you to all those people who have supported our pilgrims, our Diocese was always in our prayers. I encourage all members of our Diocese to keep supporting their local pilgrims as they continue on the journey that they have begun at WYD in Kraków.

*Stacey Atkins*

