

FESTIVAL BLESSINGS

Three and a half thousand young people and leaders contributed to the success of the 2nd Australian Catholic Youth Festival held recently in Adelaide, 3-5 December. The Festival hosted by the Australian Bishops presented an extraordinary and broad range of witnesses, talented performers and speakers, including eighteen Bishops, all supported by a very hard-working and cheerful team of youth ministers and technicians.

The Ballarat Diocese was very well represented by one hundred and eleven young people and leaders. New friends were made and faith was explored and deepened. Among the many highlights, praying in song with Steve Angrisano (*Lord, I'm amazed by you*) and lots of dancing, Fr Morgan speaking on mountains and trust, the inspiring welcome from the Governor of South Australia, a man who came from Vietnam as a child refugee migrant and was sustained by his faith and the welcoming kindness of people in Australia, Sr Hilda talking about God as love, the social justice activity centre full of people caring about others. Priest and poet Fr Andrew Hayes, from Ararat, spent three days talking to participants about their Festival experience, helping them process it through reflection and the poems he created.



One of the objectives of the Festival was for the Bishops to talk with young people and this was enthusiastically done. Bishop Paul was involved in two 'Exchange' discussion groups - one on *A Place at the Table - including Everyone in the Liturgy* and one on *Global Poverty and Ethical Consumption*. Additionally he was regularly at the Bishops' stall in the Expo talking with young people from around Australia.



Early on the final day, the groups from the Ballarat Diocese gathered together with Bishop Paul for prayer and reflection on the scripture of the day, "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few." It was wonderful to be together and pray together. Special thanks to the students from Loreto College and St Patrick's College who beautifully sang a motet *a capella*.

In one of the plenary sessions two questions were asked: "Who is the Church? Three thousand young voices answered: "We are."

“Where is the Church?” All the voices together: “Here, and everywhere!” A special thank you to everyone who assisted in getting the Ballarat Diocese groups to Adelaide, especially Ben Van Styn, school staff, parish people, parents and Bishop Paul. We also thank the Ballarat Diocese, the Catholic Education Office Ballarat and the Diocesan Foundation for their financial support.

The next Youth Festival has been announced: 6-8 December, 2017 in Sydney to be followed by a **Year of Youth** in the Australian Catholic Church in 2018.

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Read below a reflection from Ben Van Styn on his time at the Festival

ACYF 2015

On Wednesday, December 2, two buses pulled up at St Patricks Cathedral, Ballarat and eighty-five people boarded the buses which were headed to Adelaide for the Australian Catholic Youth Festival. As they boarded, these young people had no idea just how fruitful, fun, and exhausting the next five days would be!



The eighty-five was made up of five different groups which included St Patrick’s College Ballarat, Loreto College Ballarat, Damascus College Ballarat, Ouyen/Birchip Parishes Youth Group and St Patricks Parish Cathedral Youth Group - YESS Youth along with young people from the Beaufort and Timboon Parishes. All these groups were joined at the Festival by Bishop Paul Bird, the Mildura Parish Youth Group, the combined Hamilton area Youth Group including Parishes of Hamilton, Casterton, Edenhope, Harrow and Portland as well a group from Trinity College which combined to make one hundred and eleven people representing our Diocese at the Australian Catholic Youth Festival. There we were joined by 3,500 young people from over Australia who all came for the same reason, to share their Faith with one another and to grow closer to Christ.



Over the three day Festival period, our group was able to hear talks from many famous international speakers, but also many Bishops and other inspirational people from our country. There was the opportunity for concerts and fun activities throughout the duration of the Festival but there was also the opportunity for prayer and the Sacraments. The Sacrament of Reconciliation saw a steady flow of young people constantly throughout the duration of the Festival. The example of

humility, sorrow for sin and acceptance of God's forgiveness brought me much joy and peace. It was that constant reminder that at any stage of life God is there waiting for us and He is ready to forgive us always. Regardless of what we have done or what we will do, God constantly loves us. It is a love that has no limits, and it is a love that we will never fully be able to understand. The Festival for me was a great example of that love. To see 3,500 young people filled with the love of God and ready to share it with all those they came in contact with, was the greatest witness of what it means to be a Catholic. We are all called to share God's love wherever go and with whomever we meet. I am positive that the wonderful people I was able to share the experience with came away with a sense of that love. I hope and pray that they will continue to not only spread that love with others but also come closer to that love, and in doing so be brought closer to God. I would like to give all Praise and Glory to God for letting me share in this amazing experience.

