

As previously mentioned over the last couple of editions of e-News we have featured stories from pilgrims who attended WYD 2016. Here are the last two accounts bringing an end to our WYD series. We feature recollections and reflections from Aloisia Mafi from Mildura and Chloe Mason from ACU Ballarat and we thank all the pilgrims who have shared their stories with our readers.

ALOISIA MAFI FROM THE MILDURA PARISH:



Attending my first WYD in Krakow, Poland I didn't know what to expect but I did have some idea of what it could possibly be like. In the end I never expected to fall in love with a country with such a rich history and beautiful culture, which wouldn't have been such a perfect and memorable experience without the strangers from the Poland Encounter we met at the formation sessions in Melbourne, to the family we became by the end of the pilgrimage.

There were many great highlights from my WYD journey but for now I will share one special moment. Before coming to WYD, I had been seeking answers I knew only God could answer and the major one was "What is my vocation"? What was God calling me to be or how could he use me for his greater glory? I guess I might have known what it was but for selfish reasons I ignored what he wanted to say in hope that he would give me the answer I wanted.



So it was during our first catechesis with Cardinal Dolan where he responded to a question of 'Mercy for oneself', that I was touched from his words of love and wisdom that resulted in my deep need to go to reconciliation. Coming back from confession and gazing upon our Lord in adoration, I couldn't help the tears that continually flowed from the overwhelming feeling of love and forgiveness I'd just experienced and it was in this moment that I felt Jesus speak to me in my heart and say "Yes that's what I want you to do". This confirmed my question to be truly open and explore the possibility that he might be calling me to the religious life. Having said "Yes" to him I decided that's what I would do when I returned home from Poland.

Having faced many challenges along the way, overall it was the most amazing and best time of my life, spent with fantastic companions and meeting such beautiful people, particularly my host family. I am very grateful I had the opportunity to go on a journey I will cherish forever.

CHLOE MASON - ACU BALLARAT STUDENT - BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (PRIMARY)

I left my hometown of Ararat on July 15 feeling very excited and nervous about what I was about to experience.

When we arrived in Greece, we visited Philippi, the location of the Acts of the Apostles Chapter 16, following the journey and hardships of Silas and Paul. Philippi was filled with ruins of churches, prisons and amphitheatres. It was in this moment where I could feel and see the historical landmarks within the Bible,

an experience I will never forget. Mass was held in St Lydia's Baptistery. It was my first experience having Mass outside and it was a beautiful place for it.

We travelled onto Berea where on this day, Mass was held at St Paul's Altar. We also visited a place where religious icons are handmade and we were allowed to watch as the artist painted them.

As we moved onto the fifth day of our trip we spent the day travelling picturesque mountains where we visited a few Monasteries. These Monasteries had been there for centuries and I couldn't believe how long it must have taken them to get the materials to build them from the bottom of the mountains to the top. The beautiful artworks displayed inside each Monastery were the same, but were painted by different artists who interpreted the pictures differently.

We travelled then to Athens and we were able to see some ancient Greek buildings in Acropolis and Corinth. To physically see centuries old architecture was incredible. It was an amazing experience to think people from centuries ago had been going about their daily lives in these ancient structures.



We were lucky enough to go to Patmos, one of the Greek islands and we travelled there by ferry from Athens. We were taken to the cave where John was inspired to write the Book of Revelations and at this point I sat in complete awe of what we were seeing. We were shown the fissures in the rocks that represented "The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". We also got to sit in an evening prayer called the "Vespers" in a Monastery which Monks prayed. It was an interesting experience to see this evening prayer that has not changed for centuries.

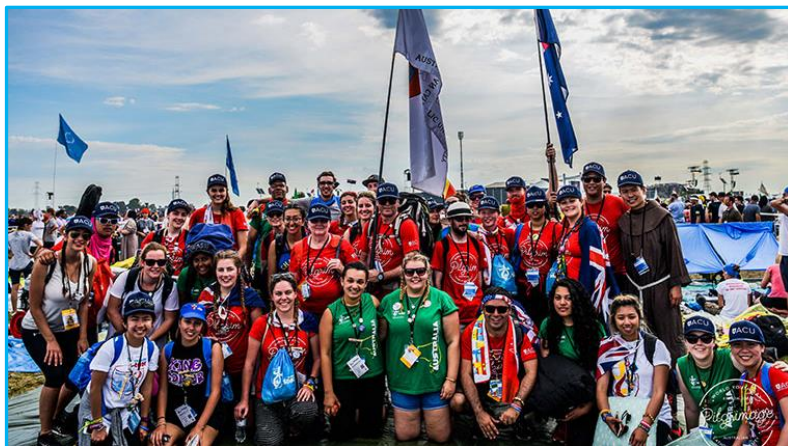
After another ferry ride we arrived on the Greek island called Kos. There we saw the tree of Hippocrates. This tree is known in the medical field as it is one of the earliest forms of medicine. I couldn't believe this 2000 year old tree was right in front of my eyes, the very start of the medical world as we know it today. The rest of the day was spent exploring this beautiful island.

We took a plane from Kos to the Czech Republic and then we drove the rest of the way to Krakow for World Youth Day week. We made a stop in the Czech Republic for lunch and there were about ten other buses with pilgrims on them. I was overwhelmed by the amount of people and this was only a small proportion of what I was going to experience on the World Youth Day week. When we finally got to Poland, we were greeted by many other Australian pilgrims.

Over 1500 Australians gathered in the Tauron Arena. We were told there were going to be 3000 Australians at World Youth Day, which is the most any World Youth Day has had with the exception of the Sydney World Youth Day. Later Mass was held, on very large grounds where there were thousands of people around us. Unfortunately, it rained for three hours with lightning and thunder but it finally lifted right before the Mass began. It was a sea of blue, yellow and red as the World Youth Day packs we were given supplied us with ponchos. Mass was not spoken in English, but in Polish, so we all huddled around a few radios that were playing the translation.

The next day was very hot and humid and we were tightly packed in lines to see the St John Paul II Sanctuary and the Shrine of St Faustina. It took about two hours to get to each place. It was well worth the wait as both places had very beautiful architecture and artworks.

On the fourth day of World Youth Day Week I was privileged to experience catechesis, something I have never heard of before. I really enjoyed myself and was inspired to hear from Priests from around the world. After this we explored more of Krakow - it was so beautiful. We also had the welcoming ceremony of Pope Francis. So many flags surrounded us, we could only see him through a screen, but it was still amazing to be in his presence.



The next day we engaged in the Stations of the Cross with the Pope. It was so amazing, as they took each Station through many different forms including interpretive dance, a sand artist, an oil painter and acrobatics.

As we approached World Youth Day we left our accommodation at 6.00am to start our fifteen kilometre pilgrimage to Blonia Park, where the Vigil and the Mass were going to be held the next day. The Vigil was a unique experience which we shared with two million people. Everyone had lit candles and were completely silent during Adoration and at this point I felt especially close to God.

We had finally reached World Youth Day. We had Mass with Pope Francis and listened to his inspiring homily. Everybody there was bound together with their faith. It was an amazing experience to be a part of something so special and monumental and it will be a time of my life I will never forget.

Read more ACU student WYD stories here - <http://blogs.acu.edu.au/wyd/>