

Reflection on ACYF from Fr John Corrigan

I accompanied eight young parishioners from St Joseph's College Mildura to the ACYF Festival. Watching their anticipation and witnessing their eagerness to connect with the broader Catholic community reminded me of the vital role that peer witness had on my own faith journey, which eventually led to my priestly vocation. I knew this Festival could be a transformative experience for them, and I felt called to walk alongside them as they encountered Christ and his Church.

I came to ACYF to pastor others, but I also anticipated (and received) personal renewal and encouragement in my vocation. In the daily slog of parish life, it's easy to become depleted, so the ACYF's well of communal worship, inspired witness, and shared prayer is always rejuvenating.

The highlight of ACYF for me wasn't a single moment, but rather the overwhelming experience of the Catholic Church: a beautiful, messy universality. There were moments at the festival that made me wince, and even cringe. But if I'm at a Church event that pleases every personal taste and preference of mine, is it even Catholic? James Joyce famously said that "Catholic means here comes everybody", and ACYF embodied that truth. The festival presents the width and breadth and depth of "the Catholic Thing": its perennial truth, beauty, and goodness expressed through diverse charisms, cultures, and styles of worship. Everyone can find their home somewhere in the Catholic Tradition, because Jesus has prepared a room for each one of us in His Father's House, and the Church on earth anticipates what awaits us in Heaven. Contemplatives found stillness in Adoration; the exuberant found joy in charismatic praise; intellectuals found rigour in the workshops; the wounded found healing in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

I want to create spaces in our parish and school where the young can encounter the Lord, and where their enthusiasm isn't met with cynicism but with genuine curiosity. But more than programs, I hope to carry back that spirit of joyful catholicity — the reminder that our local community is just one beautiful thread in the global tapestry of faith.