

John Paul II, We Love You

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World Youth Day Reflections, 1984–2005

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Dedication

For the young people of the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, especially those in the mountains, and for the diocesan Department of Education, 1993–2004.

I would like to thank those who took the time to contribute their experiences to this book: Kathleen A. Carver, Robert Collins, Chris Docherty, Andrei Gotia, Paul Henderson, Rev. Rafael Hernández Urigüen, Melissa Hines, Nicholas Huck, Colette A. Kennett, Gail Lubahn, Charles Mwongera, Anthony Ramuscak, and Gottfried Wölfl. The true impact of World Youth Day shines through their words and makes this book relevant to the lives of others. It is evident that their experiences and great love of Pope John Paul II inspired their writings.

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Table of Contents

Preface	7
The Road to World Youth Day	10
1 The Seeds of World Youth Day (1984–1985)	25
2 Buenos Aires, Argentina (11–12 April 1987)	37
3 Santiago de Compostela, Spain (15–20 August 1989)	47
4 Czestochowa, Poland (10–15 August 1991)	56
5 Denver, United States (10–15 August 1993)	66
6 Manila, Philippines (10–15 January 1995)	76
7 Paris, France (19–24 August 1997)	86
8 Rome, Italy (15–20 August 2000)	97
9 Toronto, Canada (23–28 July 2002)	108
Journey of the World Youth Day Cross	118
The Past, the Present, and the Future	127
Contributors	134
Acknowledgments	137

Preface

The tears spilled down their faces; their voices grew hoarse from screaming their welcomes. They waved their bandanas over their heads, their action resembling the whirlybird that carried the only person who could draw the world's young people together in this celebration of their Catholic faith. Jumping up and down, they strained toward this man; they yearned to touch him, to see him closely, to be near him, even though they were far above him in the upper tiers of the stadium. Their excitement was palpable and contagious. With eager anticipation they watched the big-screen monitors that showed Pope John Paul II descending from the helicopter and walking to his pope mobile. As the Pope entered the stadium, those closest to his path reached out their hands, hoping to touch him. And when Pope John Paul II finally exited his pope mobile, mounted the stage, and greeted the thousands gathered, there was little doubt that the presence of God's love was flowing back and forth between the leader and his young Church. It was their moment.

This is my description of World Youth Day (WYD) in Denver in 1993, and yet, over the years, the same experience has touched thousands more in cities both familiar and unfamiliar to the world's youth: Rome, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Compostela, Czestochowa, Manila, Paris, Toronto, and Cologne. Each gathering has produced similar dynamics. This Pope loves the young people and they know it. And they love him and he knows it!

Pope John Paul II's accomplishments during his long tenure as pontiff are too numerous and too far-reaching to assess in this book. Certainly the creation of World Youth Day and its international gatherings marks his greatest achievement in his relationship with young Catholics around the world. Through these gatherings Pope John Paul II consistently challenges young people to

follow Jesus and to live a life of commitment, hope, and love for all, especially for those the Scriptures call poor.

This book attempts to capture in words and pictures the magic, the mystery of the gift these World Youth Days have been for the young Church. *John Paul II, We Love You* is designed to sustain the good memories of those who participated and to remind all young people of the words of encouragement, trust, and challenge the Pope has directed to them alone. And finally, I hope this book inspires others to consent to and prepare for their own pilgrimage to future World Youth Days.

Though World Youth Day is commemorated annually, the international celebrations—those the Pope calls the young people to at a particular time and place—are usually held every two years. And the days are indeed celebrations. At every international World Youth Day gathering, the young people spend their mornings in catechetical sessions taught by bishops from all over the world. The afternoon and evening events they attend are opportunities for them to get to know one another and make friends, experience various cultures, and visit holy sites. At the heart of these days are the liturgical celebrations the young people share with their Pope. They experience the Way of the Cross, the Vigil, and the Sunday Eucharistic celebration with the Angelus. This is indeed a time when the world Church gather to proudly proclaim their faith.

These pages offer you a bit of the history of how the international celebrations came to be and perhaps a better understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in that process.

To begin each year's World Youth Day pilgrimage, the Pope issues his "Message of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Youth of the World," presenting the theme for that year and spiritually preparing the young people to meet with him at the designated site. Each chapter in this book begins with excerpts from those messages. Following the Pope's words, young people who have

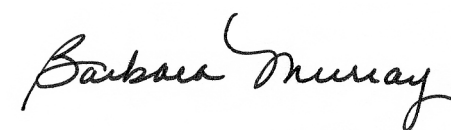
attended various World Youth Days offer firsthand reflections, illustrating how those events have changed their lives and touched the hearts of many. My friend Gail writes:

What a thrill to be so close to someone like the Pope and to be able to watch young people sing, chant, dance, and pray with such love and respect for this man. To watch a frail, yet strong man love and respect each of these young people was something I will never forget. He was one of them—maybe not in body, but definitely in faith and love for the Catholic Church. His spirit never faltered in each of the speeches he gave these pilgrims, and their respect for him never diminished.

Every attempt was made to solicit reflections from attendees of each international celebration of World Youth Day. I received responses from Kenya, Austria, Scotland, Germany, Canada, Spain, and the United States. The submissions appear as they were written. Few changes have been made to the grammar and no changes to the style, so that you can taste the remarkable international flavor so central to World Youth Days.

This book is a book of love—a book that shows how close Pope John Paul II holds the young people of the world to his heart. It is a book that shows the incredible love the young people return to him.

I hope your memories are enlivened, your commitment is deepened, and your challenges are accepted. May you be reminded in your reading that one day a young Pope John Paul II decided to call the world's young people together, and that call has made a tremendous difference in the life of the Church.



The Road to World Youth Day

Vatican II, WYD, and Young People

Did you know that the roots of World Youth Day can be traced to the Second Vatican Council? Many people are not aware of the document “Message of the II Vatican Council to Youth” of 7 December 1965. This brief document is clear in its focus on young people and its challenge to them to live a life in Christ:

For four years the Church has been working to rejuvenate her image in order to respond the better to the design of her Founder, the great Living One, the Christ who is eternally young. At the term of this imposing self-examination of life, she now turns to you. It is for you, youth, especially for you that the Church now comes through her Council to enkindle your light, the light which illuminates the future, your future.

This document was released during a time of great change and upheaval in the world. The first and second world wars had concluded. The United States was recovering from the assassination of the young President John F. Kennedy and deepening its involvement in Vietnam. Social and cultural traditions and values were changing, and the Church looked to the next generation—the young people of that time—to be the beacons of hope in a world torn apart. The document tells the young people just what their Church expects of them:

The Church is anxious that this society that you are going to build up should respect the dignity, the liberty, and the rights of individuals. These individuals are you. The Church is particularly anxious that this society should allow free expansion to her treasure ever ancient and ever new, namely faith, and

that your souls may be able to bask freely in its helpful light. She has confidence that . . . you will know how to affirm your faith in life and what gives meaning to it, that is to say, the certitude of the existence of a just and good God.

You can see that the Vatican Council II fathers had a lot of confidence in the young people of the time. They wanted the young people to know the basics of Catholic social teaching. They had faith that the young people understood and believed in respect for the dignity, liberty, and rights of individuals. In the face of those tumultuous times, the Council fathers believed that the young people had the strength to claim their belief in God’s activity in their lives and in the world and that God was just and good. Their message to the youth goes on to express their trust and conviction in the ability of young people to stand firm in their faith in life and in what gives meaning to life:

It is in the name of this God and of His Son, Jesus, that we exhort you to open your hearts to the dimensions of the world, to heed the appeal of your brothers, to place your youthful energies at their service. Fight against all egoism. Refuse to give free course to the instincts of violence and hatred which beget wars and all their train of miseries. Be generous, pure, respectful, and sincere, and build in enthusiasm a better world than your elders had.

And so the task of the young generation in 1965 was clear: to receive, announce, and work toward the reign of God. The young people were to be partners with God, their fellow Christians, and all people of faith in creating a more just, more loving, and more compassionate world—a world that would reflect the love of God for creation, the compassion of Christ for all people, and the will of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of every disciple. You have a share in this same partnership. You too are meant

to create a better world, and the Church looks to you with hope. Pope John Paul II has made the message of the Second Vatican Council his own and has shared it with the young people of all the World Youth Days.

The Impact of World Youth Day

Kathy writes:

My first knowledge of World Youth Day came when, as a member of the diocesan staff for youth ministry in the Archdiocese of Louisville, I learned that the Pope was coming to Denver in 1993. I remember the questions and uncertainty that raced through my mind. How many young people are going to attend? What are their age ranges? How are we going to get to Denver? Where are we going to sleep? What's the vigil? Do we have the option of not going? (No.) So, I learned about World Youth Day by being thrown into it with 180 young pilgrims.

Those of us in the diocesan youth ministry community became knowledgeable about group travel in its many forms, altitude sickness versus homesickness, walkie-talkies and their limitations, the challenges of managing large groups of enthusiastic young people and tired adult chaperones. We also witnessed the power of young people when you gather in the name of Christ and the Church. We observed your openness to others of various cultural and social backgrounds—how enthusiastically you greeted one another and found something in common. And we were deeply touched by how you prayed together—often in different languages.

Without hesitation you shared your faith with one another, your love of Christ, and your deep affection for Pope John Paul II. Sometimes our best learning comes when we least expect it. Sometimes we learn in spite of ourselves.

One of the many graces of World Youth Day in Denver was that the Church in the United States, without reservation, fully embraced and supported its young members. One hundred eighty thousand young people from the United States gathered in Denver. Your presence in Denver was a testimony to the common, concerted, and committed effort of the adult faith community. Whether the need was financial, material, or human—the resources were made available. And when the Church's young members dispersed from Denver, you were welcomed home to communities that wanted to further the young faith alive in their sons and daughters. World Youth Day in Denver energized the Church community in the United States, focused on the good "in" and "of" the young, and validated the efforts of the youth ministry community. It served to integrate youth ministry much more deeply into the mainstream of the Church in the United States.

After Denver, the international celebrations of World Youth Day—and large group gatherings like the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC)—found their rightful place in a holistic vision of Catholic youth ministry in the United States. You may have been to NCYC and know what a unique experience the conference is. You know your faith has been grown and that you share the experience with other young people just like you.

In addition, the United States Catholic community became more and more aware of the full scope of these World Youth Day gatherings. We began to realize that young people from around the world

were involved and that there was something to be learned by traveling to other countries. And we recognized the incredible dynamic of having the Pope and you, the Church's young people, together in one place. As a result, World Youth Days are now anticipated events in the life of the U.S. Church, and the messages from the Pope to the young people of the world are eagerly anticipated.

John Paul II wants the World Youth Days to become an opportunity for young people to encounter the risen Christ. He wants you to be able to meet and gaze upon the face of Jesus, the one who proclaimed in John 14:6, "I am the Life" and that "I came that they might have life" (*John* 10:10, NRSV).

Overarching Themes

by Kathy Carver

Are you aware that several themes consistently run through the various messages to youth that Pope John Paul II has issued to young people before every World Youth Day? Underscoring those themes is the constant and clear message that you—indeed all of humanity—are loved by God. There exists also the unambiguous call to discipleship, to follow Jesus on the journey of life. The Pope articulates his abiding trust and confidence in you to be fervent evangelizers of your peers, witnesses to the Gospel and to the redemption of Christ through the cross. He expresses his hope that you will play a central role in creating more just societies—of furthering God's reign. The principles of Catholic social teaching are deeply woven into all his messages to you. The Pope really wants them to be a part of your life.

The Pope is unshakable in his belief in you. He holds up to you only the highest of ideals; he demands of you no less than what you were created for. In speaking with young people, the Pope often speaks of truth, moral formation and ethics, the sacraments, vocations, freedom, and love. Let's consider his thoughts on these topics.

Truth

John Paul II consistently points young people toward Christ. He understands the questions that lie in your minds and hearts. The questions you ask are many and deep: you want to know who you are and what your purpose in life is, and you wonder who you are to become. You have questions about the world around you and your place in that world. The Pope loves your enthusiasm and recognizes your painful searching, and like a patient grandfather, he slowly steers you in the right direction. John Paul II knows that each of you must discern what God—this God who gave you the gift of life and who loves you beyond measure—is calling you to become. The Pope also knows that you are often bombarded with messages that distract, distort, or lead you away from the truth, the truth of your own being—whom you have been created to be—and the truth of Christ (see Pope John Paul II, XII WYD 1997).

Moral Formation and Ethics

Your adolescent and young adult years are very important years in your moral formation and education. John Paul II sets before you the goal of living a moral life—a life guided by clear principles so that you may form your conscience and become a person who lives with and models moral integrity. He helps you understand personal morality in your decision making, and he longs for you to comprehend how your own moral life affects the

lives of others. The Pope sees being a person of moral principles as one of the most important contributions you can make to society and to the world (see Pope John Paul II, International Youth Year 1985).

The Sacraments

Pope John Paul II consistently invites young people to a deeper understanding of and fuller participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Through the sacraments everyone experiences the grace of God. This grace gives you courage and supports you in your life. It draws you more deeply to Christ, and it strengthens you for service to your brothers and sisters in Christ. In Baptism we all become new creations in Christ, people who are dedicated to responding to the call to Christian discipleship. Through the sacrament of Penance, we acknowledge our sinfulness before God and the community and experience the healing that is only possible through God. And in the Eucharist, our true source and summit of being, we all share in the death and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (see Pope John Paul II, XII WYD 1997).

Vocations

In Mark's Gospel (10:20–21) Jesus speaks to the young man and tells him to sell or give away all that he has and to "come follow me." Jesus's invitation was not just for that one young man, but for each one of you today. John Paul II reissues that same invitation to you—to follow Jesus, to be his disciple. Being a disciple of Jesus can take many forms. Your task is to quiet yourselves enough to be able to hear the call, to understand its meaning, and then to follow that call. For some of you, the call will lead to the ministerial priesthood. And some of you will dedicate yourselves to the religious or consecrated life.

Many of you will marry or remain single. However you experience the call, if you respond and follow it, you will live into your vocation and into becoming the person God has created you to be (see Pope John Paul II, VIII WYD 1993).

Freedom

Pope John Paul II often warns young people of the dangers that may deter you from your search for the truth. These dangers take many forms, from false beliefs and promises, to temptations, cynicism, and doubt. The Pope does not chastise you for your mistakes. Rather, he wants you to have a higher ideal, and he supports your right to exercise your own free will. He says free will is like an "immense gift," and he points you to the Holy Spirit who can guide you in choosing what is moral and what is good, over that which is sinful. By choosing the good, you will live more into what God hopes for your life (see Pope John Paul II, VI WYD 1991).

Love

True disciples of Christ are characterized by love, but not the love that is fleeting or fake. The Pope challenges young people to the love that Jesus lived out on this earth. That love is patient and enduring and is a love that seeks to meet the real needs of others. To discern others' needs—whether they are food or forgiveness, clothing or compassion, medicine or mercy—is to feed, clothe, and care for Christ. This is the true measure of Christian love and how you can partner with God in furthering the Kingdom (see Pope John Paul II, VIII WYD 1993).