

e-News continues with stories from pilgrims on their experiences from World Youth Day 2016. Below, Fr James Kerr reflects on his experience as chaplain and Robert James offers his testimony of his journey to Krakow for WYD.

Fr James Kerr:

To be entirely honest I hadn't given all that much thought to the upcoming pilgrimage as I packed my bags for World Youth Day Krakow. I was very grateful for the invitation from the Bishop to accompany the group as a chaplain, but as a chaplain I figured I was going not so much for myself but for the pilgrims I would minister to.

Perhaps this allowed me to simply take the pilgrimage as I found it, I'm not sure. What I can say is that going as a priest chaplain was a tremendous blessing. I was able to live the experience through the eyes of the hundred pilgrims I accompanied, as well as through the many others I encountered during the week in conversations and in confession.

If there was a common theme to their experience it was this; they had had an encounter with Christ. The shape of that experience was unique to each pilgrim. For some they were overwhelmed with joy, surrounded by so many like-minded young pilgrims ready to embrace their faith. For some they were consoled with a deep and profound peace, firm in the knowledge they were known and loved by Christ. For others still, their path was not as easy. For various reasons they might have experienced great difficulties while on the pilgrimage. In that desolation though they were able to find love, and in that love Christ showed his face to them.



Love by its very nature is something shared, and in being shared is strengthened. When we are filled with love for a person, we have a deep desire to share that love with those around us. As a priest therefore I live for nothing other than that others may come to know and love Christ. To see this encounter in the lives and hearts of those I serve is my deepest joy and reward.

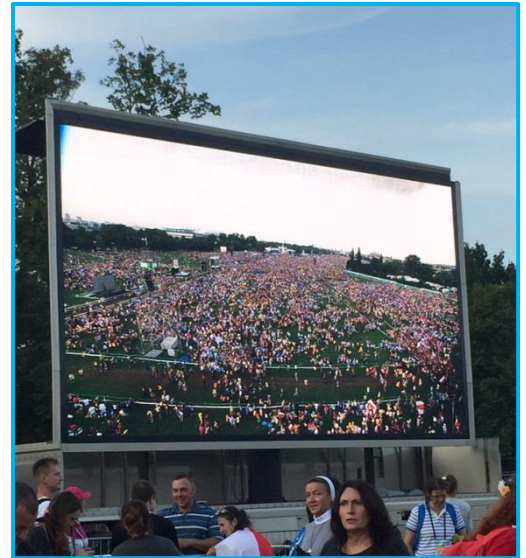
I am deeply grateful therefore to have had the opportunity to attend World Youth Day as a chaplain, and would like to pass my thanks on to the Bishop and all the faithful of the Diocese who made it possible.

Robert James:

Earlier this year, as part of the Victorian Pilgrimage "John Paul II Trail", I attended my fourth WYD in Karkow, Poland. My WYD story begins as many do when this Catholic Youth Event founded by Saint John Paul II in 1985 came to our

home country of Australia and hosted in the city of Sydney 2008. Experiencing such a large gathering of Catholic young people renewed my Christian faith and set me on a path that had led me to Poland in 2016.

World Youth Day, celebrated Internationally every three years, is a week-long series of events designed to celebrate young people and their faith in the Church. Beginning with an Opening Mass held on the Tuesday evening, four other main events make up the core of WYD. The Papal Welcome which takes place on the Thursday Evening and the Stations of the Cross on Friday Evening are two of these main events that help lead to the final weekend events. The events on Saturday and Sunday include a pilgrimage walk to the site of the final two events, the Vigil Mass and the Final Mass, ending with the announcement of the host of the next WYD.



World Youth Day 2016, was a unique and powerful experience for me in my faith journey. This trip of a lifetime had found itself happening at a time when my life was throwing some serious obstacles at me and getting away for three weeks was the ideal opportunity to rediscover the path I was supposed to be following.

My World Youth Day Week experience began on the Tuesday, leading our pilgrimage group through the crowds to Blonia Park, and settling an area for us to enjoy the Opening Mass. Unexpectedly cloudy and cold, with a chance of rain, I'll never forget this Mass because from the moment it started, the clouds parted and a ray of sun shone down on the cross above the altar for the duration of the Mass.

It was after this Mass, returning back to our accommodation and food court, that I experienced one of the many joys about WYD. Standing in line I became great friends with a young Alaskan pilgrim from America.

The Wednesday, Thursday and Friday Mornings involve Mass and Catechesis with a bishop. This is a chance to hear from some of the leaders of the church and to enrich our faith with a better understanding of some of the themes associated with each WYD. A particular highlight was Friday morning getting to attend Catechesis with Bishop Prouse, whom I had known from attending WYD13 with him in Rio.



Wednesday Night is a chance for the youth to attend Festival Events, and I was lucky enough to attend in a big basketball stadium, a night of mercy. This was a particular highlight I experienced through music, adoration and meaningful testimony.

The Papal Welcome and Stations of the Cross provided their own good memories, but my spiritual experiences came from the Candlelit Vigil Mass, Testimonies from the Youth around the World, and the Final Mass, with the announcement of the next WYD.

World Youth Day is one of those experiences that if you have the opportunity, take it with everything you have. You never know what it may bring to not only your spiritual journey, but your life direction.