

What's with the youth?



Those with internet access may already know about some of the spectacular Catholic gatherings which take place annually in America. I first became aware of them when I saw videos of the Catholic Education Congress held in Los Angeles earlier this year. This month, from Nov. 17th- 19th, the Indianapolis Catholic Youth Conference has seen a gathering of Bishops, priests and religious, together with guest speakers, musicians and artists to work and pray with 25,000 young Catholics from both America and abroad.

The vast preparations and organisation for such an event can only be imagined, but from what we can see on the carefully prepared website, the results must have been exhilarating and enlightening for all concerned.

For more information click on the following image:

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 2011 National Catholic Youth Conference website. At the top left is the "CALLED to GLORY" logo with the event details. The main background image is a large, brightly lit arena filled with a massive crowd of people. In the center, a stage is visible with a large screen showing a speaker. Below the main image, the text "2011 ncyo" is displayed in yellow. On the bottom left, there is a "Photos" section with the text "See the latest photos in our albums on Facebook." and three small photo thumbnails. On the bottom right, there is a "Were You There?" section with the text "Please complete the evaluation so we can continue improve NCYC!" and a "Relive It or See It For the First Time" section with the text "That's right! Throughout the conference, the general sessions and parent mega-workshops were live streamed and then recorded by our friends at My Catholic Voice. Just click the session title below to see the recording..."

What's with the youth?

by Bishop Doherty

After the U.S. Catholic bishops finish our annual meeting in Baltimore, many of us will migrate to the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), Nov. 17-19. I will be there in Indianapolis on the last day, and for the closing Mass on Saturday evening. Planners tell me that 25,000 youth, leaders and chaperones will be there.

Why am I going? “Supporting youth ministry” does not begin to explain.

One obvious reason is to support our diocesan and Indiana youth. This is true, with a secondary twist: I can learn things there that are not available in articles or second-hand reports. I have heard this from bishops for years; now it is my turn to find out what they mean.

What might I be looking for? This kind of conference is a pilgrimage of sorts. Pilgrims look for celebration, renewal and growth by changing their surroundings. While faith and prayer will receive much attention, so will our world. Our daily contexts will reflect a different light. That light is the Holy Spirit.

I am also looking for expressions of faith, hope and joy that do not carry all the freight of tradition (small ‘t’). I sometimes muse that it has become too difficult to become a Catholic, too hard to stay one, if we mistake academic proficiencies for believing. Doctrinal knowledge and moral living are essential to Catholic life. But the sentence “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know” is worth considering. We meet and praise Jesus Christ. This is the foundational relationship. These youth conferences celebrate the actuality, not just the potential.

Whatever else happens at a massive youth conference, it seems to energize participants and leadership. It encourages budding leadership among participants. It presents possibilities that people can bring home to their parishes and dioceses. And for all the craziness (isn’t that half the fun?) of such a gathering, there comes a deeper sense of what it is to “be” a Catholic. It can actually be enjoyable as well as profound. Why is this last note important?

Vocations are nurtured at World Youth Days and such giant rallies. Apparently many young women and young men are able to imagine themselves, if only for a few hours, considering a religious vocation. A door opens in the mind’s eye where they are part of the crowd that Jesus addresses. They know that Jesus does call, that he does not send us out alone. It will help this bishop to know what this is all about, if God grants me the eyes for it.

I figure that the vocations aspect is sufficient reason for my participation. Each person will gain something. In my experience, God is efficient. When people give God their time in gathering, God will grace them with what they need in those moments. Not everyone is conscious of the gift in the moment it is received, but the germ of it endures.

Our diocesan Pastoral Office for Catechesis, a Fruitful Harvest ministry, has been deeply involved in planning the NCYC for a couple of years. This office and many of our parishes are supplying hundreds of volunteers. Keep us in your prayers.

To learn more about this upcoming conference, click on <http://ncyc.nfcym.org/>

Angela McGhin