

International Meeting on WYDs 2012

Australian Pilgrimage to WYD 2011 Reflections

Good Morning

For the past 3 years, the Church in Australia has been living in the presence of the Holy Spirit delivered through WYD 2008 in Sydney. The journey to WYD Madrid has made manifest the theme of WYD 2011, and assisted the youth and the Church to be *'Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in our faith'*.

Upon leaving the final mass in Sydney 2008, the youth of Australia have had their sights set on WYD 2011 in Madrid. They returned to their communities enlivened by the event and replicated their experience through local catechesis sessions, celebration of the sacraments and continued relationship building with their priests and in particular their Bishops.

In late 2009 and early 2010, preparations for WYD 2011 began in Australia. With such a long way to travel and such a large group expected, we had to start early. Also Australia typically makes additional pilgrimages while travelling to WYD as it is such a long journey and it is important to make the most of our time on the other side of the world.

We estimate that approximately 3600 Australians made the pilgrimage to WYD Madrid. Of this, 3054 travelled as part of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference pilgrimage.

Some statistics taken from our national pilgrimage are as follows:

Total no. pilgrims	: 3054
Gender	: 54.5% female 45.5% male
No. of itineraries	: 62
Average time away	: 18 Days

Australia's pilgrimage to WYD Madrid was approximately 40% larger than its pilgrimage to WYD Cologne in 2005

Australia's Pilgrimage to WYD Madrid has been our largest ever pilgrimage to an international WYD (that is, excluding WYD 2008 Sydney). The number of groups and number of pilgrims in the Australian Pilgrimage increased by approximately 40% compared to the number who attended WYD Cologne in 2005.

I believe one special statistic from our participation is that 24 Bishops attended from Australia. This represents 55% of the Bishops in Australia (24 from 43); an astounding commitment by our Bishops.

No. of Accompanying Bishops:	24 (of a total of 43 Australian Bishops)
No. of Accompanying Priests:	111
No. of Brothers	6
No. of Sisters	18

It also reflects the passion of our youth to travel with our Bishops. Of the 3054 pilgrims who were a part of the national pilgrimage, 86% travelled with their Bishops as part of a diocesan pilgrimage.

Diocesan	86%
Religious Orders	7%
University	3%
Ecclesial Communities	3%
Ethnic Community	0.5%
Family Groups	0.5%

WYD Madrid was also the first time Australia has provided Animation Teams and Festival Acts (again before WYD Sydney). We provided 3 Catechesis Animations Teams and 3 Festival/Cultural Acts; each giving positive feedback for being a part of the experience. This contribution from Australia was very important given the distance and costs associated with travel.

Catechesis Animation Teams	3
Festival/Cultural Acts	3

First ever pilgrimage options for:

- Deaf Young people
- Disabled Young People

Also, Australia was able to provide for the first time, a specialised pilgrimage for deaf young people, and for disabled young people thanks to the Archdiocese of Sydney and the Knights of Malta.

Beyond the statistical analysis of our participation, our preparation as a Church was also very significant.

After coming away from WYD 2008 with such great joy and excitement, the theme of WYD 2011 *'Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in our faith'* continued to challenge the young people of Australia to deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ. It was the perfect theme for us to ensure the impact of WYD 2008 went beyond the memories of a great event, as it asked young people to live and be in the presence of Christ every day; so significant focus was given to the theme in our preparations.

Focus was also given to discussing the personal and powerful nature of the Holy Father's message to young people for WYD 2011. Several resources were provided nationally to assist young people and their leaders access this message and spend time reflecting upon it.

The theme and the Holy Father's message were the focus of many pastoral programs in the lead up to WYD 2011. I believe their impact went beyond the pilgrim group attending WYD in Madrid, and touch the lives of many more involved in ongoing youth ministry programs around the country.

Our ongoing reflection and sharing of stories in the lead up to and during WYD Madrid also identified a new area of pastoral formation which we have embraced. Through researching and reading about the story of the Church in Spain, lives of saints, and through contact with a variety of communities, many leaders and pilgrims embraced the universal story of the Church, particularly Spain's story. The challenges of diverse cultures and the historical tensions between Church and State have encouraged many to reflect on our own local situation.

Overall, our participation has again assisted young people in Australia to experience and learn that we are a part of a universal faith. We thank the Church in Spain for not only sharing their homes and cities, but for also sharing their story with us.

Since WYD 2011, the focus has been on supporting local sharing of stories from WYD Madrid. We have provided several multimedia tools to help young people share the vision and excitement of their experience in WYD Madrid. Nationally we have been focused on preparing for WYD 2013. With such a short turn around and our required lead in time for making travel arrangements, there has been little time for any national coordinated approach to building upon WYD 2011.

Finally, as I reflect on our journey from WYD Sydney to WYD Madrid, I must identify a number of key moments; some joyful and some sad.

Following WYD 2008, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference implemented a three year staff position to support and resource youth ministry in our country. In May 2011, the Bishop Conference voted to continue this position in an ongoing capacity and to further build upon and support ministry with young people in Australia.

In November 2008, inspired by WYD in Sydney, we held a Youth Leaders Gathering with some 350 attendees which set out a blueprint for youth ministry in Australia. The outcomes from this gathering were approved by the November Plenary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

In July 2009 the Bishops Conference launched a document call *Anointed and Sent: an Australian vision for Catholic Youth Ministry*. This document has been well received by the Church in Australia and continues to inspire the message of Jesus Christ to be presented to young people.

In October 2010, we held our first national conference for youth ministers. Over 400 youth ministers from schools, parishes, dioceses, movements, religious orders and communities of the Church came together to reflect, discuss and learn about youth ministry in an Australian setting. Our second conference will be held in September this year and we anticipate 500 youth ministers attending.

In December 2010, we were saddened by the sudden passing of Bishop Joseph Grech, the Bishop Delegate for Youth. This was a sad time for youth ministry in our country, but his memory lives on in our work and our faith in Jesus Christ.

At WYD Madrid, we held an Australian pilgrim gathering. Over 3000 pilgrims attended and many identified this as a highlight of the week. It was a celebration of the Church in Australia in the context of the Universal Church, celebrating some of our momentous achievements over the past 3 years; including WYD 2008 and the canonisation of our first saint, Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

Finally in November 2011, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference approved the first Australian Youth Gathering to be held in December 2013. This event will seek to gather over 4000 young people as a follow up to WYD Rio. It is anticipated to be the largest gathering of Catholic young people in Australia since WYD 2008.

These national initiatives which supplement local ministry and formation, have built upon the graces of WYD 2008 in our country; but have also enhanced our pilgrimage to WYD Madrid. As we travel the road to WYD Rio de Janeiro, the inter-relationship of local, national and international youth ministry will continue to combine to assist young people to encounter the Risen Christ in their lives.

Thank you.

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