

INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF WYD ORGANISERS
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The impact of WYD in the United States of America

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Dear friends, buenas dias, g'day, good afternoon. My name is Sister Eileen McCann and I represent the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It is an honor to be able to share briefly with you this afternoon. However, let me begin with a few disclaimers. First, I am from the United States and do not speak the Queen's English. My Aussie colleagues and friends claim that they can never understand me. I say the same about them! Second, my comments will be about the United States experience. I did contact my neighbours to the north, Canada, asking them for their experience but we were not able to connect. I wouldn't presume to speak for my neighbours to the South. Third, the United States is a culture of tremendous diversity so my remarks will be generalized. No one experience can capture the experiences of all. Finally, a clarification: in the United States we distinguish between youth ministry (ages 13-18; adolescents, teens) and young adult ministry (ages 18 -30).

My intent in this brief time is to look at the impact and challenges WYD presents for our teens and then for our young adults. I will then attempt to focus a bit on how WYD is modelled in our pastoral ministry. Because of my role I would be remiss if I did not talk about WYD and our bishops and our expectations for Madrid.

As I begin, allow me to put WYD in context. In 1993, we hosted the event in Denver. At that time, I was the director of youth ministry for a diocese in central New York State. I also sat on the board of directors for the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and served as the Treasurer. The Federation, as I will refer to it from now on, was a young, struggling national organization. It was struggling to become a national voice for youth ministry and it was also struggling financially. The Federation was very instrumental in WYD Denver and was the lead in organizing the papal welcome. In 1993 the resources of all US dioceses --- both personnel and financial --- were devoted to organizing and participating in WYD. This, of course, would be expected. However, the Federation was also scheduled to host their National Catholic Youth Conference in November, 1993. This event happens every other year and plans were well underway for this prior to the announcement of WYD. Naturally, we were concerned about the impact of the Denver event on the National conference for the Federation relied on this event to finance its organization. Obviously the lead personnel for diocesan participation in Denver would be the same people that would need to lead delegations to the national conference. But Denver WYD turned out to be a watershed moment in youth ministry in the US. We needed 3000 delegates to meet the budget for the National Catholic Youth Conference. 7000 came! Thus began a surge in youth ministry in the US.

What happened for Sydney in '08 was our experience in '93. Now, 16 years later, some of that fervor has diminished but there is still fruit and spirit! The National Catholic Youth conference that drew 7000 peaked at 25,000 in 2001. Today it averages 22,000 young people and the next one is scheduled for later this year. Likewise, Life Teen and the Stubenville conferences hosted by Franciscan University are experiencing continued growth each year. WYD influenced our bishops in the writing of the two pastorals, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* and *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A*

pastoral response for young adult ministry. The Federation publishes a resource manual annually and in that manual is a guide for the national celebration of WYD which we celebrate the last Sunday of October. We develop a study guide for use with the Pope's annual address to young people.

Our challenges include strengthening youth ministry on the parish level. We have a strong national organization fortunately. Working closely with the Bishops' conference, the Federation serves diocesan offices. The stronger the diocesan leadership, the stronger youth ministry in parishes. From recent studies, we know that adolescent catechesis needs special attention. We have created a partnership to address this that consists of three national organizations and the bishops' conference.

Looking at our young adult population, the major impact of WYD for this population appears to be limited to those young adults who attended a WYD as a teen. Unfortunately, the young adults in the US view WYD as a teen event. Those that do attend as young adults are energized by meeting their peers from other countries but remain discouraged by the US emphasis on teens. That, obviously is a challenge for us. However, we have discovered that those young adults who have attended a WYD are the people participating in young adult ministry on the local level and they report that their faith has been strengthened by their participation. One of the major impacts of WYD on this age group is that we are seeing an increase in vocations to church ministry both as ordained and as lay ecclesial ministers.

More and more we are using the WYD model in our programs and events. The Federation's national conference now focuses more intentionally on catechesis as does their resource manual. Starting with the 2009 manual the emphasis will be on presenting catechetical models for using the Catechism of the Catholic Church to our teens. Our bishops involvement at the national conference continues to increase. More and more of them attend this event. We have a vocations exhibit at this conference. There is increased emphasis on Eucharistic liturgy and Eucharistic adoration. At the 2009 conference we are using the WYD model for Eucharistic adoration.

During actual World Youth Days, more and more at-home activities are occurring for those unable to attend the actual event. Interestingly enough, these are being aimed at our young adult population. During the Sydney event our local folks hosted an event in Sidney, Ohio. So we had more than 20,000 in Sidney!

One other interesting thing to note is that the Bishops' conference in collaboration with other organizations is hosting a young adult event in 2010 that will mimic the most recent International Youth Forum on "Witnessing to Christ in the World of Work." There is growing excitement around this.

WYD Denver had a significant impact on our Bishops. This is noted most clearly in their pastoral documents cited earlier: Renewing the Vision and Sons and Daughters of the Light. Our bishops remain very involved in WYD. 50 from the US attended in Australia. They want to know all details about WYD as it unfolds and my role is to keep them in that loop. They look to us and the national organizations for assistance in helping them to maximize the effects of World youth days in their dioceses.

As we move toward Madrid we have four goals: to continue the strong involvement of our bishops, to strengthen our ministry to our Hispanic youth and young adults of which we have a large number, to emphasize this as a young adult event and, thereby, increase the involvement of this age group, and to be intentional about using this opportunity for strengthening our catechetical efforts to our teens. My personal goal is to learn Spanish and I am working on that now!

In conclusion let me say that in the US we continue to celebrate the growth enabled by WYD while acknowledging the challenges. This is an exciting time to be church! We are very much looking forward to Madrid!