

INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF WYD ORGANISERS
FROM SYDNEY 2008 TO MADRID 2011
Rome, 3-5 April 2009

Words of welcome

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Cordial greetings to all the participants in our “International Gathering of WYD Organisers: from Sydney 2008 to Madrid 2011”, organised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Special greetings to the Australian delegation led by His Eminence Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, and the Spanish delegation led by His Eminence Cardinal Antonio Rouco Varela, Archbishop of Madrid.

What is the main objective of our gathering? Why has the Pontifical Council for the Laity asked you to make the journey, for some of you a long and difficult journey, in order to be here in Rome at this time? There are many reasons, and so let us try to briefly summarise them.

First of all we wish to give God thanks once again, all of us together, for the gift of the 23rd World Youth Day that took place in Sydney last year. It was a memorable event, a new Pentecost, a wonderful “epiphany” of a youthful Church, full of the joy of faith. Young people surprised us yet again by the quality and quantity of their participation. Again they amazed us with their beautiful testimonies of faith. WYD 2008 was a precious gift, not only for the Church in Australia and Oceania, but for the universal Church. This is confirmed by numerous testimonies that continue to come from all over even after almost a year has passed.

We all wish to express our gratitude to Pope Benedict XVI for his presence in Sydney and for the words he addressed to the young people present. WYD in Sydney left a deep impression on his heart. In his address to the Roman Curia before Christmas, His Holiness dedicated some time to this topic and presented WYD as a sort of profile of the year 2008. The Pope regarded the event in Sydney as “a great celebration of faith” with “shared joy in being Christian”. He spoke of how, in order to understand the “secret” of the success of this event, we must take into account “a long process of preparation both practical and spiritual [...] The solemn World Youth Days are nothing if not the culmination of a long process in which the young people turn to one another and then, together, turn to Christ”. It is on this spiritual and educational “process” that our shared reflection will be centred.

In launching the path of preparation for the next WYD, we cannot fail to restate our expression of gratitude to the Church in Sydney and its Archbishop, Cardinal George Pell, and to all the Church in Australia, for the exquisite welcome extended to the youth of the world who journeyed to that land in order to meet the Successor of Peter. Thank you for the enormous task of preparation for WYD that was carried out, and thank you for the generosity and intelligence in your commitment that produced wonderful fruits. We express our gratitude to the Australian Bishops’ Conference for the hospitality extended in all the dioceses to the young pilgrims. Thank you to the organising committee that guided the work of preparation with professional skill and great love, to the chairman Bishop Anthony Fisher, to Danny Casey and to all the staff!

Our gathering marks another important stage in the history of WYD, a stage that initiates a spiritual journey that will lead the youth of the world to Madrid in 2011. On Palm Sunday, which is fast approaching, we shall assist at the handover of the WYD Cross and Icon of Our Lady *Salus populi romani* from the youth of Australia to the youth of Spain. It is a moving and eloquent sign that the

journey of faith of young people throughout the continents does not stand still but continues to advance. The next goal indicated by the Pope for young people is contained in the theme: “Rooted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith” (cf *Col 2:7*). Hosting WYD is a huge undertaking because the entire Church always has high expectations, and this includes the Pastors and especially the young people. So we say to our Spanish friends: have courage! Do not be afraid! We are with you! You can count on our help! We know that WYD is important for the great undertaking of the Church: the evangelisation of the younger generations - certainly a priority in the mission of the Church in all eras.

In this gathering we have delegates from about seventy countries in five continents and representatives from thirty-four international ecclesial movements and youth associations. This participation signifies the deep and essential link between WYD and regular youth ministry in the local Churches around the world.

WYD has providentially become a “catalyser” for pastoral engagement in the Church towards the younger generations. It carries out a wonderful function of guidance, inspiration and encouragement. Over the years it has also proved to be a terrific observatory of the world of youth on a planetary scale that allows us to identify emerging tendencies among the youth that are not easily represented through the media. It is thanks to WYD that a new generation of young people have emerged that are capable of going against the tide with respect to the dominant post-modern culture. These are youth who say “yes” to Christ and his Church. They are young people searching for the true meaning of life. Statistically, they are a minority, but they are a “creative minority” - a term coined by Arnold Toynbee to which the Pope often makes reference. They are one of those creative minorities that are decisive for the future of humanity.

The Servant of God John Paul II, “the brilliant founder of World Youth Days” (Benedict XVI), defined them as “faith laboratories” for the young. Over the years, WYDs have also become “youth ministry laboratories”. Not only do we owe a “new generation of youth” to WYD, but also the emergence of a “new generation of youth ministry workers” who are able to respond to the real problems of the youth of our times and the intense longings of their hearts. They are people who are capable of inferring and accepting the “challenges” of WYD which Benedict XVI spoke of when addressing the German bishops in Cologne in 2005. He said: “... that the young people with their questions, faith and joy in faith will continue to challenge us to get the better of our faint-heartedness and weariness and urge us, in turn, with the experience of the faith that is given to us, with the experience of pastoral ministry [...] to point out the way to them, so that their enthusiasm may be properly directed”. The Pope used the German word “Provokation” to render the idea of “challenge”, and this aptly describes the pastoral challenge that WYD represents for the Church. It reminds us that the pastoral ministry of the younger generations is not an appendix to regular pastoral ministry in the Church, but is at the centre, at the very heart. It is an extremely demanding task because young people have demanding expectations with regard to adults. They not only want to find teachers, but most of all they want authentic and coherent witnesses. Youth pastoral ministry is a ministry that cannot permit routine and mediocrity. It calls for ongoing conversion of heart and searching for new ways to proclaim Christ. It demands real “pastoral passion” for young people. In our present cultural context that contains a notable “educational emergency” to which Benedict XVI is very attentive, this is a particularly arduous task. However, it is also a challenge that youth pastoral ministry must be able to meet.

I conclude with the wish that this international gathering that takes us from Sydney 2008 and projects us towards Madrid 2011, may rekindle in us the living flame of “pastoral passion” for youth. God bless the work!