

WORLD YOUTH DAY'S LASTING IMPACT

Australian Study Reveals Positive Effects

Seven out of 10 young people who attended World Youth Day in Sydney last year rated it as one of the best experiences in their life. This was one of the findings of a survey carried out to measure the impact of the event.

The "Pilgrims' Progress 2008 research project" is lead by Father Michael Mason and Professor Ruth Webber from Australian Catholic University, and Dr Andrew Singleton from Monash University.

The study was based on interviews, personal observation of the participants, and two large-scale Internet surveys of pilgrims: one before and the other after World Youth Day.



The findings of the Preliminary report concentrate on Australian pilgrims only. For 93% of them it was their first experience of going to a World Youth Day. Almost half of the local participants were in the 14-18 age bracket. World Youth Day attracted more young women than men and that is reflected in the study, in that 68% of respondents were female.

Some of the highlights of the findings were the following:- More than 40% said their faith in God had been strengthened: A third or more stated that they were now not embarrassed to let others see that they believed, that they wanted to live as disciples of Jesus, that they wanted to learn more about their faith.: Asked what they found most fun, pilgrims chose being part of the huge happy crowd walking together through the streets, and making new friends: Over half of the respondents said that they were determined to change their behaviour towards others – to be more considerate, more "Christ-like": Significant proportions reported changed attitudes and behaviour on a range of social-ethical issues:

Superficial or spiritual?

Critics of World Youth Days, both within and outside the Church, have frequently questioned the spiritual value of the events. So one of the aims of the survey was to determine if it's just an enjoyable spectacle or whether it does make a significant spiritual impact.

Contrary to the somewhat feverish speculation in some of the local secular media, the pre-event survey showed that pilgrims did not see World Youth Day as an opportunity for romantic encounters. The options of "Perhaps meeting someone I really like," was the lowest priority for all the age groups.

Instead their highest priorities were listed as: seeing the Pope; wanting to experience the presence of God; and to feel 'part of a large crowd united by shared beliefs.' Generally, the older pilgrims were somewhat more interested in the devotional and religious aspects: the Masses, catecheses, and prayer services. The youngest group were more attracted to the youthful aspects of the event: making new friends, feeling the "buzz," and sharing their faith with other young people. Nevertheless even among the teens, the options of "experiencing the presence of God," and "seeing the Pope," were ranked highly. Only a minority of the youthful Australian pilgrims went hoping simply to have a good time.

The answers also depended on the existing level of religious practice. Those who did not regularly attend Mass were more likely to give a higher priority to the social aspect of the event, while those who were regulars at Mass indicated they were more interested in the spiritual activities.

The top three benefits hoped for those surveyed prior to the event were: living what you believe (85%); a closer relationship with God (81%); and a stronger sense of Catholic identity (78%). There was very little variation by age: these were the top three priorities for pilgrims of all ages.

Spiritual help

Turning to the post-event survey the study found that regarding the spiritual benefits most of the respondents said that what was most helpful was the experience of being with so many people who shared the same faith.

This sharing of the faith corresponded to what the majority of pilgrims had said before World Youth Day, and their hopes were fulfilled – they found the experience powerful and significant.

In the personal interviews pilgrims explained that it was very important to them to be part of a big crowd of people around their age who were expressing their faith. They said that in their experience, it was mostly older people who took faith seriously. Young people, by contrast, even if they were Catholic, were not interested in religion, or inclined to make fun of it.

They were also used to keeping their faith discreetly private. Normally only close friends would know if they continued to believe, attend Mass, or take part in other religious groups or activities. In fact, a 11 year student in a Catholic school said in an interview that "it's social suicide" to speak out in religion classes.

Pride

Other benefits singled out by pilgrims included the sense of Church and pride in being a Catholic also rated highly. Many pilgrims also mentioned the sense that God was present in the large gathering of people sharing and the feeling that World Youth Day brought out the best in everyone.

Another highly-rated option was that of feeling themselves part of a community that transcended them in space and time and fused them into a unity with others and with God.

In terms of the event pilgrims singled out the Vigil, the Mass with Pope Benedict and the Stations of the Cross as occasions of strong experiences of the presence of God, and also as most spiritually helpful.

The morning catecheses also received a favourable response and according to the survey it seems that the catecheses played a more important role at the Sydney event than at previous World Youth Days. Only a small proportion (10%) of pilgrims rated the catecheses "not so helpful."

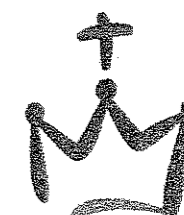
The report commented that during the event in Sydney even casual observers were struck by the infectious joy, friendliness, and enthusiasm of the pilgrims. But, it noted this positive atmosphere was founded on a deeper level, the experience of communing with others who shared the same faith, and the experience of the presence of God.

In conformity with the pre-event survey the social side of World Youth Day was not considered very important among those who replied to the post-event study. Making new friends was often mentioned, but all of the social aspects, including the beauty of the sites and the good weather were rated well below the spiritual benefits.

Following-up

The survey participants were also asked about what activities they felt would be most beneficial as a follow-up to World Youth Day. Over half of them chose first the option of retreats or camps for people who want to grow in faith.

(concluded overleaf)



JMJ2011
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New WYD2011 logo launched

The logo designer, José Gil-Nogués, explained that the image symbolizes "youth of the whole world united to celebrate their faith together with the Pope, at the foot of the cross, and they form the crown of Our Lady of Almudena, patron of Madrid. Like youth of the 21st century, it is close, friendly, open, joyful, carefree and positive. "The crown," Gil-Nogués added, "forms the 'M' of Mary and of Madrid. And the cross, symbol of Christianity, presides over the event."

There was also strong support for regularly getting together with their fellow pilgrims, for more youth-oriented Masses, and high-quality teaching of the Catholic faith. Over half of the group was very keen to attend the 2011 World Youth Day in Madrid.

“There is clear evidence that many pilgrims have changed the ways in which they think about and respond to others, and that they attribute the changes to their participation in World Youth Day,” the study concluded. A finding that should lay to rest the doubts about the benefits of such an event, and spur efforts to give continuity at a local level so that young people will continue to be confirmed in their faith.

Fr John Flynn, LC

POSTSCRIPT:

There are two groups of people to whom our Cathedral is much indebted: The ‘Friends’ and the ‘Guardians’

The ‘Friends’ number about 140. A subscription is invited each year (\$20) and it is hoped this will be augmented by a donation. Since September ‘09, subscriptions/donations from the ‘Friends’ have totalled \$2,400.

The ‘Guardians’ are a small group of volunteers who assist the sacristan in caring for visitors to the Cathedral, as well as providing a presence to ensure its protection. They too have served us well in 2009.



‘Friends of the Cathedral’ Newsletter: Cathedral House, PO Box 4544, Christchurch

NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF THE CATHEDRAL



No.80 : DECEMBER 2009

END OF YEAR WRAP UP

It is quite some time since I wrote about things in and about the Cathedral! But only towards year’s end have significant things begun to happen. The Cathedral Trust has continued to meet at regular intervals; its personnel has remained stable: Bishop Jones, Prof. H.J. Simpson, Mr J. Brandts-Giesen, Mrs N. Pascoe, Ms A. Flett, Fr K. Clark, Mr R.D. Sullivan, Mons J. Harrington, and Fr J. Fitzmaurice. The recent announcement that on January 31st, Fr Fitzmaurice will take up an appointment as Parish Priest of Addington, will probably mean a change in the Trust’s personnel.

The new Administrator of the Cathedral will be Monsignor Charles Drennan. He came out of the Parish of Riccarton and did his ecclesiastical studies at Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, and the Pontifical College de Propaganda Fidei, Rome. He was ordained by Bishop Cunneen in 1996 and served briefly in the parishes of Hoon Hay and North Timaru, before being sent back to Rome for post-graduate studies in 1999. Rome, of course, knows a good man when they see one, and he was subsequently seconded to the Secretariate of State, where he is presently ‘head’ of the English speaking desk. He was named a Chaplain of His Holiness by Pope Benedict XVI.

Monsignor Drennan has been a good friend to clergy and others from the Diocese visiting Rome, and he will be of considerable assistance to our Bishop in his new post. With the help of Fr Chris Orr, he will have care of the Cathedral Parish now widened to take in St Anne’s Woolston. Fr Andrew Bernady, who has been resident at the Cathedral for most of this year, will become assistant to the Parish of Timaru/Waimate, and Fr Denis Collins, while remaining at the Cathedral, becomes the Chaplain to the Carmelite Sisters.

The other significant change at the Cathedral has been the departure of Helen Powell as sacristan. A replacement will have to await the arrival of the new Administrator, but all who have known Helen agree that with the ‘Guardians’ she has done an excellent job.

The November 15th ‘Gathering of the Friends’ drew a group of seventy plus. A highlight of the luncheon was a reflection by Don Whelan on his forty years as Musical Director at the Cathedral. Those who were present had a treat. The choir, orchestra and supporters go off for yet another overseas tour in mid-December.

Thank you to all who have responded to my invitation to renew their subscription to the ‘Friends’ – most of whom enclosed a donation as well. Receipts are enclosed with this newsletter.

And to end where I began – the Cathedral Trust has almost completed documentation on works to begin early next year. The monies needed for the new Chapel of Reconciliation are at hand, an appeal to parishes from the Bishop to help fund the new ‘user-friendly’ toilets has gone out, and the cost of two new burial vaults in the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral will be met by the Diocese.



Monsignor Charles Drennan, the editor, and Fr Steve Lowe, Holy Cross Seminary, on the balcony of the Secretariate of State in Rome.

A BLESSED CHRISTMAS
TO ALL THE ‘FRIENDS’



For the Cathedral Trustees

Monsignor J.M. Harrington