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Celebrating World Youth Day locally and globally

WYD South Florida style

Archdiocesan youths hold all-night music, prayer and worship festival

JIM DAVIS
Florida Catholic correspondent

MIRAMAR | They couldn't go to Poland for World Youth Day, so they held one themselves — as an all-night festival for young Catholics. About 100 youths from at least 19 parishes — from St. Martin de Porres in the south to St. Clement in the north — converged on St. Stephen Parish for the 13-hour celebration.

Just like their friends who made the pilgrimage to Krakow for the celebration led by Pope Francis, they sang, prayed, worshipped and heard rousing messages. They even got to join their friends in spirit in Poland, via Internet feed.

"I couldn't go to Poland, so I'm glad to be here," said Paola Suarez, who attends St. Brendan Parish in Miami. "So many people are here, from different backgrounds, praying."

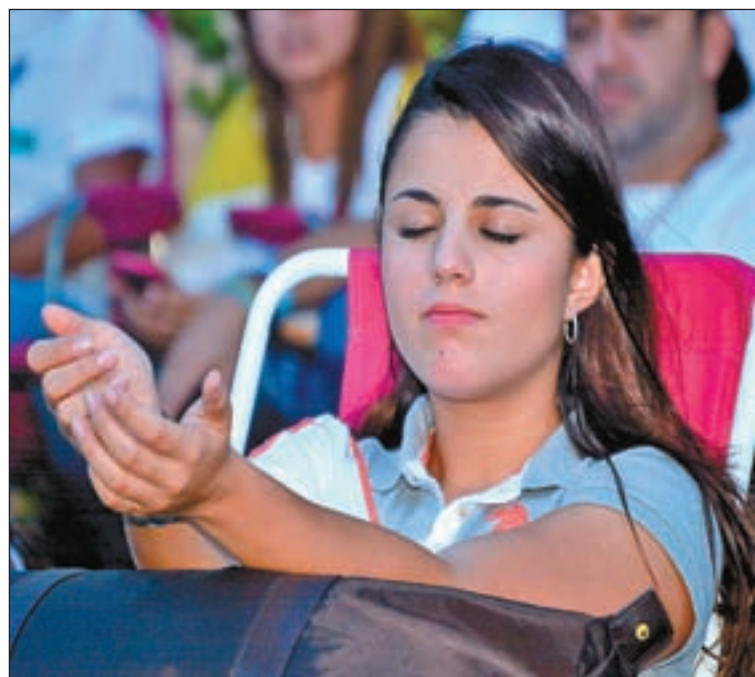
As Griseli Molina, one of three co-hosts, called for homeland shout-outs, various sections of the audience applauded from at least 10 nations — Peru, Cuba, Argentina, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere. Organizers of the July 30-31 event decorated the stage with poster backdrops, including a WYD sign and a Di-



Francisco Pino, one of the featured singers, wears the flag of his native Ecuador.

vine Mercy painting, for a shrine in Krakow that many pilgrims visited. Even Pope Francis took the stage

PLEASE SEE **LOCAL**, 15



Paola Suarez of St. Brendan Parish prays during a local World Youth Day event at St. Stephen Parish. (PHOTOS BY JIM DAVIS | FC)

World Youth Day in Poland: brutal and beautiful

Organizers hope the event yields dividends in faith, a changed world

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
of the Florida Catholic staff

KRAKOW, Poland | Exhausting and exhilarating. Brutal and beautiful.

That's the paradox of World Youth Day. Exhausting because of the late nights and early mornings, the constant walks to and from the different churches. Exhilarating for the sights and sounds of youthful faith: the singing in the streets; the sud-

den silence of more than a million people during adoration and Benediction at the Saturday evening vigil.

Brutal because of the eight-mile — really closer to 10 — walk in humid heat both to and from Campus Misericordiae; the press of bodies packed into a streetcar; the two-hour wait in the hot sun at the John Paul II Center. Beautiful because of a vast meadow lit by more than a million flickering candles. And the hope they symbolize.

"You saw the light spread and it was person to person. So it was that sense of unity," said Dee Layman, theology teacher at St. Thomas Aquinas High School, and one of four adult chaperones for the 23 teens in the school's group.

A little later, her co-chaperone and fellow theology teacher, Michael McCormack, called World Youth Day — specifically the overnight stay at Campus Misericordiae — "a teenager's dream: an all-night outdoor party."

But a party with a purpose. "God expects something from you," Pope Francis told the young people, warning them against "confusing happiness with a sofa. ... God wants something from you. He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different."

A beautiful challenge to a crowd primed to hear it, precisely because they were experiencing that "different world" throughout their stay in Krakow:

PLEASE SEE **WYD**, 8



Pilgrims from St. Philip Neri Parish in Miami Gardens keep up with other pilgrims' claps and chants as they walk to the John Paul II Center. (ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO | FC)

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

Auschwitz-Birkenau: No words, only tears

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
of the Florida Catholic staff

Oswiecim, Poland | I thought I was prepared.

Truth be told, I've visited many historical sites; tried mightily to connect, by walking the same path, my present with their past.

But I could never feel it, really. Put myself in their shoes.

Then I came here: Auschwitz and Birkenau. I really wanted to come here. I figured I had seen the pictures, the barracks and barbed wire, the striped uniforms and cadaver faces. I knew the history. Just add it to my bucket list.

But this — nothing prepared me for this: a place where veteran tour guides pause to choke back tears.

A place of sparseness, of minimal imagery, save for empty barracks and dusty streets, for smokestacks and forest.

A place where silence speaks more than any words can express.

A place that moves visitors to touch the bricks and bow their heads and pray for people whose names they will never know, but whose shared humanity becomes instantly palpable.

A place that simply makes us weep.

The two most notorious concentration camps of World War II sit amid green fields and white houses ringed with blooming flowers.

Which always raises the question in my mind: How could this happen? How could no one see? It took hundreds to keep these places going — humming, really, the machinery of death.

And when it became too much, too many, too small — Auschwitz — they built another one — Birke-



Father Bryan Garcia, parochial vicar at St. Andrew Parish in Coral Springs, pauses to pray at a wall near the courtyard where prisoners were executed by the Nazis.

nau. Not a repurposed, make-do, Polish army barracks, but a thoughtfully designed German killing machine, with railroad tracks leading straight to the entrance gate.

Again the haunting question: How could this happen? The hopeful answer: Never again.

But really it keeps happening and we're still not seeing: Bosnia. Rwanda. Iraq. Syria.

They've actually found that there's a pattern to genocide, said Hugh Huck, St. Thomas Aquinas High School theology teacher and World Youth Day chaperone. He spoke to the students in his group while the bus waited its turn behind a long, long line of buses bringing visitors to the site.

These are the stages of genocide, Huck said, noting that it doesn't happen overnight. "Genocide really begins with divisiveness."

It's a slow rebranding of people by means of:

- Classification: us versus them.
- Symbolization: swastikas and



Visitors make their way through Auschwitz.



Pilgrims from St. Ann Mission in Homestead pause in front of a crematorium in Auschwitz. (PHOTOS BY ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO | FC)

yellow stars.

- Dehumanization: They're not human. It's an infestation.
- Organization: Start building walls, send people back.

- Polarization: "They" can't be educated, must not hold certain jobs.

- Mobilization: Start creating ghettos and camps.

- Extermination: Once the genocide begins, "it's fast and it's

brutal," Huck said. In Rwanda, 1 million people were killed in four months.

- Denial. "When we deny these things happen, we dishonor the dead. And in some ways, we all fall into it," Huck said. "Genocides are well planned, years in advance. So we have time to intervene."

And so history becomes the present.

Erick Frederick, 20, gets that.



Pictured above is a tower of one of the crematoriums in Auschwitz.

He's one of four WYD pilgrims from San Isidro Parish in Pompano Beach. "So looking at Auschwitz it was, yes, a death camp and yes, this number of people died but it's not only the death camp," he said. "The reason these places stand is a memorial to everyone who was lost ... But it's not just for (that). It's for other reasons, so other people don't have to suffer."

At the halfway point of the two-mile walk through Birkenau, where the railroad tracks end, stands a memorial to the victims. Nearby are places to sit and reflect, or simply take in the whole picture. Today, for many of Miami's pilgrims, it's where the tears began to flow, and where the prayers began.

Pope Francis was right: When he visited here, he did so in silence. As we did.

But I don't think he would mind hearing what we heard: a slow chant, sung by a large group of WYD pilgrims, that doubled as mourning and prayer: "For the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world." ■



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Local pastor sits at saint's desk, touches relic

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
of the Florida Catholic staff

CZESTOCHOWA | When Father Jeff McCormick sat in the cell of his parish's patron saint, he felt a moving moment enveloped in prayer.

"I got to go in there," said the pastor of St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish in Pembroke Pines as he recalled sitting at the desk in St. Maximilian's cell. "Oh my gosh, it was so moving. Very, very moving."

He also was able to touch a first-class relic of the martyr-priest, who died at Auschwitz after offering his

life in exchange for that of another prisoner, a husband and father.

"His barber kept the beard fragments because he knew there was something special about him," Father McCormick said of the relic.

Father McCormick traveled to Krakow with a group of nine teens and five young adults, plus adult members of his Life Teen board. The contingent was not part of the official archdiocesan pilgrimage group, but instead joined a Life Teen group of 273 from parishes across the U.S. They ran into the Miami contingent while having

lunch on the grounds of Jasna Gora, the monastery that houses the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

Father McCormick recounted how he and his group had visited Niepokalony, the monastery founded in 1927 by St. Maximilian Kolbe, and located about 20 miles outside of Warsaw. While there, he was granted the special privilege.

St. Maximilian Kolbe hid nearly 2,000 Jews at the monastery during the Second World War — part of the reason the Nazis sent him to Auschwitz. He and his Franciscan

monks also published a magazine denouncing both the Nazis and religious apathy. St. Maximilian Kolbe also spearheaded the building of another Franciscan monastery in Nagasaki, Japan, when he served there as a missionary.

"When the (atomic) bomb hit, the monastery was the only thing in Nagasaki to survive," Father McCormick said.

On Aug. 14, the Pembroke Pines parish marked the 75th anniversary of St. Maximilian's death with a Mass celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Peter Baldacchino. ■

PAPAL MASS



Above, Mary Ann Wiesinger, left, and Lorelle Watkins, both of the Office of Evangelization and Parish Life, who led the group composed of young adults from different parishes, prepare for the Sunday Mass with the pope. Left, Pilgrims from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Miami begin their long walk back to Krakow from Campus Misericordiae after the papal Mass. On Saturday, pilgrims attended an early morning Mass with Archbishop Thomas Wenski and other priests from Florida, and then began their long walk to Campus Misericordiae, joining thousands of other World Youth Day participants going in the same direction.



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Pilgrims journey to Poland

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Priests escorted by European boy scouts begin to make their way throughout the vast Campus Misericordiae in order to distribute Communion during the Mass. (PHOTOS BY ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO) [C]



Stephen Colella, director of the secretariat for Parish Life, wakes up happy July 31 after sleeping on the grounds of Campus Misericordiae.



Archbishop Thomas Wenski greets Miami pilgrims at World Youth Day before entering St. Joseph Church to deliver an English-language catechesis.



The cassock worn by St. John Paul II when he was shot in St. Peter's Square in 1981 is displayed at the John Paul II Center.

Archbishop Wenski: 'Hopefully this experience has changed you'

WYD
FROM 1

a world of joy and cheers, of faith and prayers, of music and banners.

World Youth Day gave teens an experience of life not the way it is, but the way it could be. It was a "high" in the most natural sense of the word, for young and old alike.

For some, including this reporter, it was the "high" of being

moved to tears by man's inhumanity at Auschwitz, and also by the melody of a post-Communion meditation: "Lord, I need you. Oh, I need you. Every hour I need you. My one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need you."

It was the "high" of wandering through gothic churches filled with candles and icons and side chapels and wooden confessionals that just scream, "God!"

It was the "high" of watching a young man, speaking in accented

English, approach a makeshift fence in one section of a vast field and ask for a priest. And watching as that also-young priest — Father Bryan Garcia — nestled into the crowd with that young man, a purple stole around his neck.

"This is an experience of personal faith that we try to provide for our young people," said Rosemarie Banich, archdiocesan director of the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, and chief organizer of the archdiocesan pilgrimage.

"We know that this type of situation can reach a young person in a way that nothing else does," she added, noting the many priestly and religious vocations that have been attributed to participation in World Youth Day.

"Hopefully World Youth Day has changed you," Archbishop Wenski told the archdiocesan pilgrims at the farewell dinner, after their return from what for one group was a seven-hour walk back from Campus Misericordiae.

"Look how beautiful it was: two and-a-half million people there today; no fighting; no shooting; no drugs. People there were happy, were sharing. They were full of faith.

"I hope that you share this experience with your peers and in your parishes," the archbishop continued. "When you feel pressured either to hide or to go along (with people who don't share your values), remember the two-and-a-half million people that were here."

That's the trick, said Banich. Hanging on to that "high" when the melodies fall silent, when the higher flickers, when the cheers subside and the memories fade. It's why the follow-up in the parishes is so important. It's why the pilgrims are being asked to reconvene at home, to process and share their experiences with their peers and fellow parishioners.

"Just like with any retreat or other type of mounting experience, you inevitably come down from the mountain," Banich said. "The trick is to convert that high into something internal. So they don't have to have the high, the big candlelight 2-million-people experience to tap into that spirituality inside of them."

A spirituality that continually whispers: "Lord, I need you. Oh, I need you. Every hour I need you. My one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need you."



Students from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale pray during the opening Mass of World Youth Day in Krakow.



Erick Frederick, center, is happy to meet a fellow pilgrim from his family's home country of Ecuador. At left is Julie Gonzalez from St. Andrew Parish in Coral Springs.



Miami pilgrims take part in the vigil and eucharistic adoration led by Pope Francis July 30 at Campus Misericordiae.

Trader Colin meets the world

St. Thomas Aquinas student 'loving every minute' of trinket collection at World Youth Day

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
of the Florida Catholic staff

KRAKOW, Poland | A few days into the pilgrimage, Colin Apruzzese had amassed the following collectibles from World Youth Day:

- A bracelet from the Holy Land.
- A handmade bracelet from Mexico.
- A handmade rosary bracelet from Iraq.
- A wristband that reads, "JESUS LOVES ME" from a German group.
- A button that reads, "Jesus loves me" in French.
- And one large Portuguese flag.

That last one, which he wore like a cape on his back, had caused him a bit of trouble. "A bunch of French people started looking at me because Portugal beat France for the European cup. It was funny when I figured it out," said the 17-year-old, an incoming senior at St. Thomas Aquinas High School.

Of the 23 St. Thomas students who traveled with the Archdiocese of Miami for World Youth Day, Colin was the one most likely to shout out to passing groups to ask where they were from and give them a high-five.

And when he encountered one of the many groups from France, he would join their chants with a hearty "Vive la France!"

"Being able to see this many people from around the world is just incredible for me. So I'm loving every minute," he said.

Being crammed into a streetcar along with dozens of other WYD pilgrims put him in conversational beavers with some Swedish girls. "I had a long conversation with them. They were pretty nice, too," he said.

So were the Iraqis. "I really love this rosary bracelet that one of them gave me." Then there was the Malaysian girl he met while waiting for dinner one night. He gave her a St. Thomas Aquinas High pendant and got a button in return.

"She came back five minutes later with five or six things. Then, for your friends," Colin recalled.

Headgear: a little Greek flag from a Slovakian. "I don't really know



Colin Apruzzese, 17, shows off some of the bracelets, pins, flags and other items he acquired during World Youth Day. He will be a senior at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale.

how that happened," he said, breaking into laughter.

When trading, Colin used the school pendants that theology teacher Dave Layman brought along. All the students also received buttons that said "Fort Lauderdale 2016." Of course, they could use their own WYD acquisitions in future trades.

The typical transaction went down like this: Two teens make eye contact along some street and one of them (usually Colin) shouts, "Hi, where you from?" (It seems most of them can speak a few words of English, enough to be understood.) They briefly face each other and say, "Wanna trade?" or simultaneously hold up their wares — it's usually bracelets — and take one off. The conversations are necessarily brief because each party is headed in the opposite direction and under pressure from a chaperone to keep up with the group.

Unless, of course, they're all stuck in a street car. Colin got the Portuguese flag in exchange for a St. Thomas pendant. After handing it over, he asked, "Do you have a flag or something?" expecting a tiny pin or the hand-size version. His counterpart instead pulled the flag one off his back and gave it to him.

But Colin said it's really not about acquiring things. He often gets without giving, and vice versa. "It really is like being united with your family again," he said. "It's just incredible that everyone is so friendly and so outgoing. You just talk to them and you make them smile."

Colin only bought one item as a souvenir: a Polish flag, the same size as the Portuguese one, which he also began wearing on his back. It, too, led to a little confusion when he had to explain to passing groups that he's not Polish. But Americans.

But his mother's grandparents came from Poland through Ellis Island, and Colin would have loved for his maternal grandfather to come on the pilgrimage. "So I figured I need to represent Poland!"

A visit to Poland's 'spiritual lung'

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
of the Florida Catholic staff

JASNA GORA, Poland | On his first trip outside the U.S., Marcus Mickey got the honor of a lifetime. The 18-year-old graduate of Cardinal Gibbons High School in Fort Lauderdale proclaimed two readings inside one of the most visited shrines in the world: Our Lady of Czestochowa.

He stood beneath the icon of Poland's beloved Black Madonna as a multitude of people, standing shoulder to shoulder, looked on, and an endless stream of devotees, many walking on their knees, snaked their way around him.

"My knees were shaking," Mickey told his excited friends a few minutes later. "There were so many bishops and tall hats."

Indeed, less than a foot away from the ambo where he stood sat six American bishops — from Camden, N.J.; Buffalo and Syracuse, N.Y.; Springfield, Mass.; Bridgeport, Conn.; and Fargo, N.D. — not to mention four dozen priests and Archbishop Thomas Wenski, who celebrated the Mass July 24.

Mickey volunteers as lector, altar server and extraordinary minister



Simon Rave, one of two young adults from St. Sebastian Parish in Fort Lauderdale who traveled to World Youth Day, looks at the innumerable rosaries that have been left as promises to obtain Our Lady of Czestochowa's intercession. (PHOTOS BY ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO | FC)

of holy Communion at St. Sebastian Parish in Fort Lauderdale. He is one of two young adults from the parish who traveled to World Youth Day with the Miami archdiocesan group. The two joined the 27-member group from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale.

They and the other archdiocesan pilgrims spent the day touring as much as they could of the

monastery of Jasna Gora, home to members of the Pauline community, which was founded there in the 1300s. The multitudes made movement sluggish: Polish families on a Sunday outing as well as conga lines of young people from all over the world already in Poland for World Youth Day. But Rosemarie Banich, archdiocesan director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, said the



St. Sebastian parishioner and Cardinal Gibbons grad Marcus Mickey leads the response to the psalm during Mass at the shrine.

crowds were just as big on a weekday in February, when she came to prep for the pilgrimage.

In his homily, Archbishop Wenski called Jasna Gora — which translated means "mountain of light" — "the spiritual lung of Poland, where Poland draws its breath." He noted how for centuries — through invasions and occupations, Nazism and communism — "many people of simple faith came here to ask Mary to intercede for them."

"The witness of the Polish people

is an example of the power of that intercession," Archbishop Wenski said. "The prayer of the Polish people did not go unheard."

As for Mickey, he has a date pending with Michael McCormack, St. Thomas Aquinas theology teacher and World Youth Day chaperone. McCormack chose Mickey after Banich asked for a student to read at the Mass.

"You owe me big time," McCormack said, inviting himself to a steak dinner. ■

Teacher's dream inspires students to go to World Youth Day

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
of the Florida Catholic staff

KRAKOW, Poland | Four years ago, a teacher shared a dream. Her former students just made it come true.

Carolina Vizcaino, a teacher at St. Theresa School in Coral Gables, traveled with the group from Little Flower Parish. Three of her former students were also pilgrims, primarily because of what she told them when they were in sixth grade.

Vizcaino, a theology teacher, had never been to a World Youth Day, but the stories she shared about what it was and what took place sparked excitement in her students. "She talked to us about World Youth Day for the first time. We all got super excited and we all wanted to go one day," said Daniela Ordonez, 16. "Never did we think we could go with her."

"I instantly fell in love with the idea of coming and meeting new people from around the world and even the pope," said Katarina Sori, 16.

"My parents said you're crazy," said Isabel Rennella, 16. Eventually they relented. But the year was 2012 — too late to plan for



Part of the group from Little Flower in Coral Gables poses for a picture, joined by two students from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale. From left are Maria Ordonez; Katarina Sori, 16; Daniela Ordonez, 16; and Isabel Rennella, 16; with Rebecca Jean, 16; and Mackenzie Bartlett, 17, from St. Thomas. (ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO | FC)

World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013.

When the girls found out the Archdiocese of Miami was organizing a pilgrimage this year, they signed up right away. About a month ago, they ran into Vizcaino and excitedly told her they would be traveling to Krakow. She wasn't planning on going — until that moment. She booked the trip at the very last minute.

"Having her here with us is so special," Katarina said.

"She's the one that gave us the dream, and now she's here for us," Daniela said.

Vizcaino sees it differently. "The irony is that I inspired them to come to World Youth Day years ago, but it is because of them I am here today. When I found out they were going I ran to see if I could join the group." ■

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Why do this? For the kids

Older chaperones reflect on their reasons for leading groups to World Youth Day

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
of the Florida Catholic staff

KRAKOW, Poland | It was the kind of question Barbara Woroniecki didn't want to answer. "Do you think I have to do this? He drove me here. Do I really want to do this?"

That was nearly two years ago, and as coordinator of religious education at St. Matthew Parish in Hallandale, she had just attended a meeting where the archdiocesan pilgrimage to World Youth Day was mentioned.

She went back to her then-pastor, Father James Quinn, and told him about it. "Should we do it?"

"Do you want to do it?" he replied.

"For some reason God is saying to me, 'Barbara, you gotta do this,'" she answered.

So after a year and a half of fundraising and preparation, she traveled to Krakow with a group of seven teens, ages 15 to 18, and one young adult, age 24. Her co-chap-

erone was Max Pakyz, 77, the oldest pilgrim in the group.

He, too, walked more than eight miles from Krakow's city center to the Campus Misericordiae July 30, spent the night outdoors sleeping on the ground, and then repeated the trek after the papal Mass July 31 — clocking nearly 20 miles in 24 hours, in stifling heat, after spending a night with little sleep and less food.

Woroniecki might have doubted she could do it. But once she made the decision, she was quite deliberate in whom she chose to take along: students in the parish's religious education program. Aside from one girl who knew Krakow because her father was born there — "She's going to be our guide," Woroniecki wisely thought — none of the others has ever attended Catholic school.

"I felt we had to do this because they don't get as much religion," she explained. "This is something that will help them."

"The people in our parish have been very supportive," she added, including her new pastor, Father Daniel Kubala.

ONLY 10 PERCENT YOUTHS

Another parish that might seem an unlikely participant in World Youth Day is Blessed Sacrament in Fort Lauderdale. "The majority is an older group of people," said Margarita Bogle, estimating that only 10

percent of parishioners fit the definition of "young."

She and her husband, Randall Bogle, chaperoned an eight-member group. Along with another chaperone, they took one teen and four young adults, ranging in age from 16 to 29.

"They all supported us," Margarita Bogle said of her fellow parishioners. "They gave additional donations to support our trip over here."

"We didn't have to raise the money," added Randall Bogle. "Father Bob (Tywoniak, pastor) wanted us to focus on spirituality."

"Every day we got messages from Father Bob, telling us the congregation is praying for us," Margarita Bogle added.

THE LEGACY

Deacon Thomas Dawson, 68, and his wife, Brenda, led a group of four from St. Philip Neri Parish in Miami Gardens — themselves and two teens. Brenda Dawson served as coordinator of religious education and youth minister at St. Philip for many years. Her husband also was assigned there as a deacon until recently.

"We had our doubts," she said about taking on the physical toll of World Youth Day.

"We are old!" he chimed in.

But she pointed to the two teens they brought along, ages 15 and 17. "That's the reason," she said. "We've got to find young people and turn



Barbara Woroniecki, far right, and Max Pakyz, far left, sit with their group of teens from St. Matthew Parish in Hallandale, waiting for Mass to start at Sts. Peter and Paul before heading out to the Campus Misericordiae on the outskirts of Krakow. (PHOTOS BY ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO | FC)

them on" to the faith.

They were speaking just hours after returning from their 20-mile round-trip trek to the vigil and Mass with Pope Francis. The teens — Adena Abraham, 15, and Quinten Lockhart, 17 — were already talking about the next World Youth Day — 2019 in Panama.

"I don't know about her but I'm going back," said Quinten. He's talking about reaching out to kindred parishes such as Holy Redeemer in Liberty City and Visitation in North Miami, to perhaps develop an inter-parish youth group. Talk that's music to the Dawsons' ears.

"It's about the legacy," Brenda Dawson said. "I knew it would be hard but it's worth it." ■



Barbara Woroniecki, leader for the pilgrim group from St. Matthew in Hallandale, waits for the papal Mass to start in Campus Misericordiae.

Despite cancer, diabetes, priest concelebrates Mass with Pope Francis

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
Florida Catholic staff

KRAKOW, Poland | Nothing was going to stop Father Silverio Rueda from concelebrating the final World Youth Day Mass with Pope Francis.

Not the pain caused by walking long distances. Not the heat. Not the humidity. Not his diabetes. Not the fact that he just fought a bout with cancer.

Along with his tremendous sense of humor, the Colombia-born priest brought his wheelchair and a friend from St. Ann Mission in Homestead, Salvador Plasencia, to help out. But Plasencia is not a priest so he did not have the credentials to accompany him to the sacristy at Campus Misericordiae.

Father Rueda did not spend the night in the field with the St. Ann pilgrims. He and another priest who joined the Miami group, Father Alejandro Lopez-Cardinale

of La Red (National Catholic Network of Hispanic Pastoral Ministry), set out together early Sunday morning. They took a cab, which took them all the way to the area behind the altar where more than 4,000 priests were vesting.

The way back was tougher. It was past noon and the heat was unbearable. But neither cabs nor public transportation were available. Walking was their only option. They moved slowly, resting often, but at one point, Father Rueda simply couldn't walk anymore.

"I was not in any pain, but my legs just wouldn't move," he recalled.

Father Lopez-Cardinale found a policeman who drove them about 100 yards ahead to one of the many ambulances that lined the road from Krakow to the Campus Misericordiae.

The medical staff rubbed a gel on Father Rueda's legs, gave him an injection for the pain and found



Father Silverio Rueda, now recovered from his return trek from the papal Mass the day before, points out some of the artistic details of the church in Zakopane. (ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO | FC)

that his blood sugar was over 300. They suggested he go to the hospital to get it stabilized. But that would mean at least an overnight stay, and the Miami group was

traveling to Zakopane the next morning.

Forget it, both priests said. They kept walking and finally found a cab just as they neared central

Krakow. They had walked about two-and-a-half hours.

Father Rueda did not attend the farewell dinner that night with Archbishop Thomas Wenski. He got to the hotel and went straight to bed.

The archbishop noted Father Rueda's sacrifice and praised him. "What a model of a priest, of a human being, of a Catholic," he said. The pilgrims prayed for him. Many asked how he was doing.

Father Rueda put all the worries to rest the next morning when he presided at the Mass the pilgrims celebrated in Zakopane. At the end, he took the time to play the tour guide — something he loves — and point out some of the historical and artistic features of the church.

One St. Ann pilgrim recalled what he had told her when she asked how he felt earlier that morning. His reply: "I feel 15 years younger." ■

LOCAL

FROM 1

— if only through a full-size cardboard cutout image.

Attendees sported capes made of national flags. A beach ball got batted around the courtyard as the youths sang along to five scheduled groups. Heart and Soul, a 13-member group from St. Boniface Parish in Pembroke Pines, performed original music and praise and worship standards such as “Our God” and “Open the Eyes.”

“The music is fine, but at the end of the day, it’s all about Jesus,” said Gerard Calilung of Heart and Soul. “Our goal is to bring people closer to him.”

Some participants helped infuse the night with their own World Youth Day pilgrimages. Francisco Pino, one of the singers, said he went to WYD in 2008 in Sydney and in 2011 in Madrid.

“Once you’ve experienced one World Youth Day, it lasts a lifetime,” Pino said. “You want to relive it every World Youth Day. It’s like an itching in your body.”

The keynote speaker, Julissa Lopez of St. Stephen, encouraged her young listeners to recognize their spiritual potential. “You are the image of the invisible God,” she said, in a talk alternating between English and Spanish. “You don’t know the charisma you have



Participants listen to the music lineup at a local World Youth Day event in Miramar. (PHOTOS BY JIM DAVIS | FC)

until you put it into practice. ‘Fear not,’ said the Lord. He will give you the words, and you can go and tell everyone.”

Lopez led a prayer for the youths to give Jesus their lives and to make the changes he wanted. And it seemed to inspire Angel Calana immediately.

“I need to change,” said Calana, of Mother of our Redeemer Church, Hialeah. “I can touch a lot of people with the word of God. Before, I was afraid. But now I believe I can do it.”

The event was a personal project of Yomaria Diaz, an administrative assistant in the archdiocesan Office of Catechesis. She was disappointed that she couldn’t attend the 2013 WYD in Rio de Janeiro. Then she remembered a

similar youth gathering in Puerto Rico that year, and she decided to try it in South Florida. For her workforce, she turned to Anchors of the Lord, the young adult group at St. Stephen. She also got help from *Pastoral Juvenil Hispana*, part of the Southeast Pastoral Institute.

“I’m blessed to have friends and family and young leaders,” Diaz said.

The event also included a rosary and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, led by Father Diego Florez of St. Boniface. Celebrating Mass was Father Odin Perez, also of St. Boniface. Members of St. Clement Parish in Wilton Manors did a graceful liturgical dance titled “Magnificat.” And Anchors of the Lord performed two skits: “Chains” and



A colorful poster provides a backdrop to a local World Youth Day event at St. Stephen Parish in Miramar.



Angel Calana of Mother of Our Redeemer Parish prays at St. Stephen Parish’s World Youth Day event.

“You Love Me Anyway.”

“With all the craziness going on in the world, this is a good time to grow closer to God, so we can be positive influences in society,”

said Karen St. Hilaire of St. Clement.

Around 3:15 a.m., the group linked with the Mass in Krakow via the Vatican website. They watched quietly on a projection screen as Pope Francis preached, then announced the next WYD in 2019 in Panama.

“I was sad that I couldn’t go, but the Church is universal — we’re praying the same here as they are on the other side of the world,” said Rebecca Garcia of St. Kevin Parish in Miami, sporting a T-shirt from the *Encuentros Juveniles* youth ministry.

Diaz said the night was everything she’d wanted. “Seeing how everybody was engulfed in everything, they were so connected with Jesus,” she said. “For that night, we all lived as one family. And we saw the Catholic Church as one.” ■



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