

INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF WYD ORGANISERS
FROM SYDNEY 2008 TO MADRID 2011
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Concluding remarks

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What I wish to say to you all now cannot really be called concluding remarks for the simple reason that the culminating point of our gathering is tomorrow. We could say that everything is still before us, and that is the celebration of the 24th World Youth Day in the Pope's diocese of Rome.

What I would like to offer you are some reflections to help better comprehend what has been happening during our few days together, and I would like to begin with this beautiful icon we have here of the Pentecost Cenacle. Perhaps we have not really thought about it, but I believe that our experience of these few days was inspired by the Pentecost Cenacle, that is, the experience of a very young Church two thousand years ago, of a missionary Church that explodes with missionary zeal right to the ends of the earth, an experience of the Church that listens to the Holy Spirit. We have heard various testimonies and talks, but the underlying voice that quietly spoke to us was the voice of the Holy Spirit.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church at this moment in time? The Holy Spirit calls the Church to the same mission as always: to evangelise, and in particular to evangelise the younger generations. How many times have we heard over the past two days that the evangelisation of youth is an undisputed priority in the life of the Church! You who work in this sector must be convinced - here I am repeating what I said at the beginning - you are not an extension added on to make the action of the Church more attractive just because it can be seen that young people are involved. You are at the very heart of the evangelising work of the Church. This is a first principle for all of us. The apostles, as you know, were different when they emerged from the Pentecost Cenacle. They were hardly recognisable. My desire for all of us - and this includes all of us on the staff of the Pontifical Council for the Laity - is that we may return home as changed people who are stronger and motivated to continue along this path. This is very important, and it is worthwhile investing all our forces and best resources in this great cause of the evangelisation of young people today.

These two days spent in Villa Aurelia were for each one of us a time of spiritual recharging. Perhaps those of you who live in countries that are undergoing particular difficulties and obstacles might feel somewhat forgotten by the rest of the world as you deal with huge tasks and challenges. I hope that here you feel that you are at the heart of the Church, and welcomed and supported by the Church; that you feel that the Church is with you, that the Church supports you in your work which may not be very visible, perhaps sometimes not really appreciated, but nonetheless extremely important.

These have been days of spiritual recharging that should reignite our missionary zeal among young people.

Bishop Clemens has admirably explained the meaning of the Message and the theme chosen by the Pope for the 24th World Youth Day. I would just like to say that this theme - *“We have set our hope on the living God”* (1 Tm 4:10) - reminds us that the essential virtue of every missionary, of every pastor, is the virtue of hope. Without hope there is no mission, without hope there is no true evangelisation. Each person working in youth ministry should feel and be real witnesses of hope. In fact, I would say that they should be teachers of hope for the young people. We live in a world suffering from a lack of hope. How often we see an expression of despair in the eyes of young people! It is because they do not have the “great hope” that Pope Benedict XVI spoke of, a hope built upon rock. There is only one rock, and that is Jesus Christ. I invite you once again to be enlivened by that hope, and never hesitate to confidently bank on young people in your mission.

WYD came into being through the great hope of John Paul II. At the start of the 1980s he had the courage to trust young people to help in his great project of the new evangelisation of the world. He discovered that young people were the most important allies in this great cause of the new evangelisation: new generations, new evangelisation. Let us not forget that the early 1980s was not an easy period. At that time youth were still being looked upon with a certain amount of distrust. The Servant of God John Paul II had faith in young people and he had the courage to trust them. Today we see the blessed fruits of that trust. The Church looks on young people with great hope because Christ looked on young people with great hope. We recall the beautiful scene in the gospel where Jesus is speaking to the rich young man. The evangelist says that Jesus looked at him and loved him. That gaze, that love, has come down through the centuries. You as youth ministry workers, in your local Church or in the associations and movements that you represent, you must be that gaze of Christ directed upon the young people of today. You must be that love of Christ.

This meeting sets into motion a process that is similar to that of the past, yet new at the same time. WYD always has the same structure, but it is different each time. There is always a different ecclesial context, and cultural and geographical. We are now on our way to Madrid 2011. Pope Benedict XVI insists very much on the importance of this spiritual and practical preparation and followup to WYD. We could say that in a certain sense WYD resembles an iceberg: the small tip that emerges from the water is the celebration of the event - in Sydney, in Madrid ... - but the large part that supports this fascinating tip of the iceberg is the hidden base of each World Youth Day. It is this that you build in your local Church and in your associations and movements. You have this very essential assignment. The more you invest in the groundwork of building this foundation, the more fruits and benefits will result. Do not hesitate, I repeat, to invest your best resources, your spirit, your intelligence, your missionary creativity, in this very important work. Here is hidden the most profound and critical secret of the success of each World Youth Day.

We set out from this Pentecost Cenacle strengthened in missionary zeal for young people and strengthened in hope. As I said, the culminating point of this meeting will be tomorrow when we celebrate Palm Sunday with the Holy Father and witness the handover of the Youth Cross from the youth of Australia to the youth of Spain. That will officially open the path to Madrid. As you observe the handover of the Cross, remember that it was 25 years ago, on Easter Sunday, when Pope John Paul II entrusted to young people the Cross that had been present throughout the Jubilee celebrations

of 1984. It was a prophetic gesture - and here we can really see the meaning of the term “prophetic”. At the beginning, no one could have imagined the significance of that Cross. Actually, everyone was happy that the youth had taken that Cross. They, however, were wondering what they should do with the Cross. The first time that Monsignor (now Cardinal) Cordes took the Cross to Buenos Aires with the young people, people looked at that Cross and wondered why it was there. Here we can see that God already had a plan. At that time we did not know what it was, but we have been discovering it little by little. Today the story of the WYD Cross is dotted with real miracles of grace and conversion. Everyone was amazed: how can such a poor simple Cross have such a strong spiritual attraction that it can draw thousands and thousands of young people from every continent? Tomorrow when we are present for the handover of the Cross, think of John Paul II who had the providential idea of entrusting it to young people at the historical closing of the 1984 Holy Year, and let us give thanks to the Lord for the gift of this Cross. We can say that, thanks to this Cross, WYD is a continual event in the Church because wherever the WYD Cross goes, there it is World Youth Day. It is truly a providential gift that we are discovering step by step and for which we must thank the Lord.

Now it is time to say thank you. Thank you above all to all of you, dear friends - bishops, priests, religious, lay people, young people - because each meeting of this kind is a joint creation. I must say that you have made this a truly blessed meeting with your participation, commitment, and willingness to contribute your ideas and experiences. We have learned so much, discovered so many things, that we leave this meeting spiritually richer. Thank you to each and every one of you.

I wish to express particular gratitude to our friends from the Spanish Committee: you will be the main players during these three years of preparation. Today we wish to say to you: courage! Do not be afraid! The task is huge, but you are not alone. Above all, do not forget that this is not an exclusively human task. In this great work of the evangelisation of youth, there is the hand of God!

Thank you to the John Paul II Youth Foundation. The bags that you have received are a gift from the Foundation, and inside there is something of particular importance, and that is the latest issue of *WYD Magazine* which recalls those memorable days we experienced in Sydney. The Psalms say, “do not forget the [great] works” and this publication is to help us not to forget, not only in the sense of a photograph album that we can look through again from time to time, but in the spiritual sense of not forgetting to always give thanks to the Lord for the love and goodness he has shown us in this WYD. Our deepest gratitude goes to Marcello Bedeschi for this initiative.

I would like to thank the volunteers of the Foundation who have provided an important service - transport -, headed by Fabio Donegà. Thank you, dear friends.

Finally, on behalf of you all, I thank the staff of our Dicastery, in particular, the Youth Section. This was a “debut” at these meetings for Fr. Eric, successor to Msgr Kohn. Many of you will have met him, and no doubt it has been a successful debut.

How can we conclude this meeting without thanking our team of translators? Thank you for having helped so much to transform this room into a Pentecost Cenacle with the gift of tongues!

Finally, I would like to thank Villa Aurelia where we have been so wonderfully received.

Dear friends, tomorrow we enter Holy Week and that will lead us up to Easter. I shall take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you our best wishes for a happy and holy Easter of the Lord.

I conclude with an exclamation popular with our Spanish friends. In the Middle Ages the pilgrims on long and dangerous journeys heading for Santiago, encouraged each other by calling out: “E ultreia, e suseya!”, which means: “Come on, let’s go!”. We learned it in 1989. So, I shall finish by saying: *E ultreia, e suseya!* Come on, let’s head for Madrid!