

July 27, 2008

Last week, pilgrims from across the globe gathered in Sydney, Australia, for World Youth Day festivities, culminating in a closing prayer vigil and Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI.

Pope Benedict XVI witnessed to the enormous love he has for young people as he did for many of us personally when he addressed the youth and seminarians this past April in New York. In turn, the pope was highly energized by the loving and enthusiastic way the young people embraced him. His message to the youth was challenging: “You are Christ’s disciples today. Show the world the reason for the hope that resonates within you. Tell others about the truth that sets you free.”

The theme for this year’s World Youth Day was: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). The pope challenged our young people to say yes to the fullness of truth, to experience the joy and freedom which comes from the truth, and to carry that message of hope and joy to everyone they meet.

While our diocese did not send a group to Australia, our Diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adults made every effort to bring World Youth Day to Northwest Indiana. The fifth annual Catholic Youth Xperience, a three-day comprehensive youth ministry conference for high school youth and their adult leaders held at Valparaiso University and the St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Student Center, intentionally coincided with World Youth Day this year.

In addition to the careful blend of prayer, catechesis, and community, teens took part in a variety of activities inspired by World Youth Day traditions,

including a pilgrimage walk to a moving Via Cruces and candlelight vigil at Camp Lawrence.

A record number of teens participated, a sign that teens are embracing this annual summer encounter with Christ, and indeed witnessing enthusiastically to their friends and fellow parishioners.

The goal of Catholic Youth Xperience mirrors Pope Benedict XVI's message in New York: embrace the powerful and joyful experience of Christ and take it back to your parishes, inspiring others to share in the love of God.

I am most grateful for all that our parishes do to give priority to sharing the Good News of Jesus with our young people. Their answer to a joyful and meaningful life is found in the person of Jesus and in His message, not in the false hopes that our culture extends to them. Please encourage our young people and be prepared to catch the infectious enthusiasm their witness of faith provides.