

World Youth Day 2023

Hi everyone, for those of you I haven't met yet – my name is Olivia Eagan. A little bit about me: I'm a junior at Indiana University this year and I grew up going to Catholic school my whole life, from St. Josephs to St. Mary's and then Bishop Dwenger for High school. Like Father said, I had the pleasure of attending World Youth Day over the summer in Lisbon, Portugal. The theme for this was "Mary arose and went with haste" and really placed an emphasis on how saying yes to God means a call to action and a call to make Him a part of our lives every day, showing others how important a relationship with the Lord is.

Like I mentioned earlier, I grew up going to Catholic school, so my sophomore year at Bishop Dwenger was the first year I really learned what World Youth Day was because of all the students that had decided to go to Panama. After their return, I saw the joy they had experienced and the passion that they shared for the Lord. I knew that if I had the opportunity to attend the next World Youth Day, I would take advantage of it – and so I did.

When I had signed up to attend, I was in my sophomore year of college at that time. Going to a school where you have to actively seek out a community that shares a love for God was something I had never had to do before, and I knew that meeting people my age who cared for not only themselves but also the spiritual wellbeing of the people around them was something I wanted so desperately. Going on this pilgrimage, I was inspired by how many people had been called to gather in one place. With over 200 attendees from the Fort Wayne – South Bend diocese and an estimated 1.5 million people gathered at the papal Mass, there was no denying that God was present, and he was moving in the hearts of so many.

To outline some of the highlights from my experience and hopefully encourage other young people to attend in the future, I've put together a presentation showing some of the places we visited and the events that were put on at World Youth Day.

Upon arriving in Portugal, we spent the first few days exploring some of the religious sites that the country has to offer. Amongst these were monasteries, churches, and one of the most notable was celebrating Mass at the site of the Eucharistic miracle at Santarem, where upon the request of a sorceress a woman had attempted to steal the host, but it began to bleed as she left the church and was later found glowing.

Another place we visited during our first few days was Fatima- my personal favorite moment from the whole pilgrimage. There, we celebrated Mass with Alianca de Santa Maria, translated to English to mean "Alliance of Holy Mary." Among the sisters was Sister Angela de Fatima Coelho – I mean it when I say she is likely the most knowledgeable person regarding the 3 children of Fatima, having served as the postulator, or person who presents the materials on the cause for canonization, on Jacinta and Francisco, and is now serving as vice postulator for Lucia. Seeing her joy and her passion for the story of these children was so special as we followed her talk with free time to explore the apparition sites, the basilica, and even the homes of the children.

A couple of days later, we became truly immersed in the joy of Lisbon as more pilgrims from all over the world began to arrive, chanting the names of their home countries and waving flags as we proceeded to the first official gathering of World Youth Day – the opening Mass. The distribution of communion to 1.5 million people is something you never forget, but seeing the flags wave during Mass and listening to the chants of the choir was a beautiful experience.

Days later, Pope Francis arrived in Portugal. Our diocese had decided to camp out next to a barricade not really knowing what to expect. Moments later, there were rumors going around that the Pope would be passing through. Getting to be less than 10 ft away from the Pope as he passed by a crowd of millions was nothing short of breathtaking.

As the days passed and more events carried on, we reached the culmination of the pilgrimage and went into a night I will never forget. It began with a 5-mile hike to the vigil site in 100-degree heat, with strangers dangling their heads out of their windows, offering water to the pilgrims as they passed by. The kindness and the hospitality of the Portuguese people as they welcomed us into their city showed how God was working in so many ways.

The vigil night was spent listening to music by artists from other countries, and welcoming Pope Francis into the site. We ended the night in adoration and slept in a field as we prepared for our trek back the next morning. This experience really helped to unite us not only with the people we traveled with, but with each person who had come to World Youth Day on the pilgrimage. Trading, talking, and connecting with the people there was one of the best parts, and experiencing the faith through such a global perspective inspired me to pursue my relationship with Christ more fully upon my return.

I'm blessed to have gotten this experience and thank you so much to each of you for your prayers and support in doing so. I'm excited to see what the next World Youth Day will bring to those who open their hearts to it and say 'yes' to God. God Bless.



World Youth Day 2023

“Mary arose and went with haste.” Luke 1:39

Lisbon, Portugal





















