

A life-changing event

The National Catholic Youth Conference also known as NCYC was held in Indianapolis, Ind. The National Catholic Youth Conference is an exciting, three-day experience of prayer, community and empowerment for Catholic teenagers and adult chaperones. NCYC is open to high school age young people and the chaperones. Most participants are Catholic. Many youth participants are leaders in their local parishes, schools and/or diocese. I went with my church, St. Cecilia's Roman Catholic Church. I also learned that many people are just beginning to connect to their faith and relationship with God.

According to a diocesan website, "NCYC began in 1983 in San Francisco following in the footsteps of its predecessor conference, the CYO biennial national convention. In its early days, NCYC was held regionally, one session for each coast. Combined attendance at the regional conferences was a few thousand. ... In the mid-1990s, interest in NCYC began to increase."

This year's NCYC was not the first time it was held in Indianapolis. In 1991, the two conferences merged into one national event in Indiana. This year, NCYC drew more than 22,000 youths and adults for three days of catechesis, prayer, service and recreation. NCYC is held in U.S. cities every two years and organized in part by the host diocese of the city. NCYC will return to Indianapolis again in 2013.

I was blessed to be able to attend this year's conference for the first time, as an animator. I was in many dances and even did a duet. This conference was a life-changing experience. I say this mainly because, as a teenager, I never even thought about praying to God and praising his name with more than 22,000 people gathered in a stadium and more than 23,000 people tuning in online to praise God as well.

This conference gave me the confidence to show my faith and to stay connected with God. Many of the speakers wanted us to understand that the conference did not end when we all departed from Indiana, but it carried on to our homes. During the conference, I was introduced to different types of music, prayer, workshops, liturgy and opportunities to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation.

I decided to participate as an animator just because of the audition process, which included sending a video of myself demonstrating a talent. This excited me. So I sent in a video and waited to hear from the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Once I found out I was picked to be an animator, I was thrilled. I went to practice in the summer and ended up being a day late. Even with this delay I was able to jump in and learn songs, dances and make plenty of new friends. When I sent in my video to audition, I read Scripture because I read extremely well. But during practice in July for NCYC, my reading talent was not shown but my gift of singing, dancing and stepping was shown in ways I never thought.

During the actual conference, being on stage in front of more than 22,000 people and knowing many more were going to watch online was an incredible feeling. Before each performance we prayed and prayed hard. We prayed that we could help someone in the audience build that relationship with God just by what we did on stage. I was told that we did make a lot of difference in people's lives. Knowing that I could make a difference in someone else's life is a great feeling, one that I would never want to let go.

This was such a great experience for me. I cannot return to NCYC in 2013 because I will be out of high school, but I could attend the National Catholic Collegiate Conference (NCCC). People out of high school will be invited to participate in this second-ever event, also in Indianapolis. NCCC participants will join NCYC participants for the NCYC opening session and closing Mass, in Indianapolis' Lucas Oil Stadium, but, according to a diocesan website, "everything in between will be a unique and powerful faith experience designed just for young adults, post-high school to 24 years old."

I look forward to the future and remain ecstatic to return to grow and learn more than what I did this year.

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