

Curiosity, faith to be answered at World Youth Day

Every few years, Matt and Meghan Sprankle would go to the airport with their father during the summer months and watch as Pat embarked on an international journey to celebrate World Youth Day.

There was always the unknown for the Sprankle children as they saw Mr. Sprankle walk out of sight, through the gates and onto his departing plane.

"I was always curious what he was going to do," Matt said of his father, the youth minister at St. Louis, Clarksville.

The teens are going to find out firsthand this week, as they join some 50 other members of the Archdiocese of Baltimore traveling to Sydney, Australia, for World Youth Day, July 15-20. Matt and Meghan will accompany their father and eight other St. Louis youths and adults for their first trip to World Youth Day, where Pope Benedict XVI is scheduled to preside over his second World Youth Day. A crowd of more than 500,000 people is expected.

"Now that I get to go, I am really excited," Meghan said.

This will be Mr. Sprankle's fifth World Youth Day, but the first where his children are old enough to attend. Matt, 17, will be a senior at Mount St. Joseph High School in Irvington and Meghan is a 16-year-old rising junior at Archbishop Spalding, Severn.

"Each one is unique and different," Mr. Sprankle said of his various World Youth Day experiences. "You always find a larger church. The parish of the church is magnified by a thousand times. Our Catholic family is huge and to have my smaller family share in that is just incredible."

St. Louis had a send-off Mass for the youths heading to Sydney on July 7, where the group of soon-to-be pilgrims wore pink World Youth Day shirts.

Joy has taken hold of the Sprinkle household.

“Just to represent Mount St. Joe’s and my parish is a big deal,” Matt said.

St. Louis has one of the larger Baltimore delegations this year. St. Ann, Hagerstown, has eight youths attending as well.

Once the groups arrive in Australia, a bus could drop them six to 20 miles from their intended destinations, leading to a lengthy walk that has spiritually and physically tested prior Youth Day participants in similar journeys.

“I’ve told the kids that they need to be walking each day to be ready,” Karen Gullace, the Life Teen director at St. Ann, who will attend her third World Youth Day, said. “I think it does help that I have done this before.”

Both St. Louis and St. Ann provided significant support through fundraising efforts held by the youths to offset costs for the trip, which are as high as \$5,000 per individual.

“The World Youth Day is a once in a lifetime experience,” said Scott Miller, coordinator of Adolescent Youth Formation for the Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry. “Some of them spend months and sometimes years raising money and saving for this.”

There was a bit of serendipity for Aurora Ortega, a 26-year-old parishioner of Holy Trinity, Glen Burnie, in traveling to World Youth Day. Ms. Ortega is the recipient of a scholarship and sponsorship from Catholic Relief Services, offsetting her costs for the trip. Originally, the trip had been given to someone else, but that person could not attend.

“I just said, ‘God send me where you will. Just guide me,’ ” Ms. Ortega said.

Ms. Ortega has seen both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI celebrate Mass through the years, but is prepared for a life-changing experience.

“This is more than a blessing. Just to see the pope once just in your lifetime is incredible,” she said. “Seeing how I am going to this time, I think there’s some

higher meaning that I don't understand yet."