

# Fewer youths will attend World Youth Day than in previous years

WASHINGTON – World Youth Day events typically draw hundreds of thousands of youths and in some countries they have reached or surpassed the 1 million mark. This year's event in Sydney, Australia, July 15-20 will be on a much smaller scale.

The largest World Youth Day turnout was 4 million in Manila, Philippines, in 1995. Other big crowds include: 2 million in Rome in 2000; 1.6 million in Czestochowa, Poland, in 1991; 1.2 million in Paris in 1997 and 1 million in Cologne, Germany, in 2005.

World Youth Day officials have been saying they expect 225,000 pilgrims to take part in this year's events, including 100,000 Australians. But local news reports have questioned if the projected figure is accurate, stating the final count may be significantly lower.

Danny Casey, chief operating officer of World Youth Day 2008, said in a statement that World Youth Day officials have "always expected there would be high demand from young Catholics around the world to come to Australia for World Youth Day."

He also noted that the World Youth Day office has received more than 168,000 international registration queries.

"But we always anticipated that a proportion of those were unlikely to follow through with an actual registration because of a range of factors including distance and cost," he added.

The World Youth Day office had projected the United States would be sending about 21,000 pilgrims to Sydney, but as of May 23, the number of registered U.S. pilgrims was significantly lower. Sister Eileen McCann, a Sister of St. Joseph and coordinator for youth and young adult ministry for the U.S. bishops, said 13,400 U.S. pilgrims are registered.

Distance and expense this year are major factors. Twenty-five thousand U.S.

pilgrims attended World Youth Day in Cologne in 2005, compared to 57,000 in Toronto in 2002 and 20,000 in Rome in 2000.

World Youth Day organizers are still waiting on pilgrims to complete the registration process by early June.

Mr. Casey told the Sydney Morning Herald, an Australian daily newspaper, that part of the reason for lower turnout figures for this year's World Youth Day is because of the reluctance of young people to commit to big events until the last minute. He noted that during the last three World Youth Days half of the pilgrims decided to attend in the final three months.

World Youth Day officials will not close the door to late applicants, he added.