

Glyndon parish well represented at World Youth Day in Panama

GLYNDON - A trip to Central America strengthened bonds within Sacred Heart, Glyndon's, Hispanic youth group.

The 11 teenagers and young adults were among the more than 100,000 from around the world who journeyed to Panama for the 15th international celebration of World Youth Day Jan. 22-27, which included fellowship, catechesis, confessions, eucharistic adoration, Stations of the Cross and Mass with the Holy Father.

"Just the feeling of seeing the Pope passing by - your heart stops," 18-year-old Norman Almendarez Colinares said. "You feel peace in your heart."

Preparations began a year before the trip, and were mostly led by Mario Jeronimo, one of the leaders of Sacred Heart's robust Hispanic community. The yearlong preparation included meetings and fundraisers - most involving the sale of Hispanic food favorites, such as tacos and horchatas.

When other Sacred Heart ministries heard about the trip, they were more than willing to donate to the cause, Jeronimo said.

"The community helped a lot," Jeronimo said, adding that the group was able to raise about 80 percent of the funds needed. "That is community love."

Those attending were mostly high-schoolers, all of whom, Jeronimo said, are active in the parish community, from lecturing at Masses to volunteering as assistant catechists.

Most of the pilgrims go to local public high schools. Before Panama, Jeronimo said, many were not close friends.

"Now, they're playing, talking and enjoying life together," he said of the group, which can be found gathered at Sacred Heart on Friday nights.

"They are so happy ... There's more community," said Jeronimo, who did not

chaperone, but can see the effects. “That’s one of the good things that came from Panama.”

Jeronimo did not chaperone, as four other adults accompanied the young people on their nine-day trip. They lodged with local families from St. Monica Parish in Panama.

The pilgrims spent a lot of time walking, and taking public transportation on the bus and metro.

“It was worth it,” said a smiling Jessica Solorzano, who at 13 was the youngest to attend; the oldest was 21.

Father Hilario Avendaño, the associate pastor for Hispanic ministry at Sacred Heart, accompanied the group. He said it was an emotional experience for the youths to see the pope and to be among so many young people from other nations.

The Sacred Heart pilgrims unanimously agree that they would recommend World Youth Day to their peers. The group is already planning its pilgrimage to Portugal for 2022 World Youth Day.

“It’s an experience you’ll never forget,” said 16-year-old Leo Estrada.

Also see:

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