

Impact of World Youth Day still resonates for locals

Raynard Pinckney has spent the last six months unable to contain himself.

If anyone could identify, it was the 30 Archdiocese of Baltimore alumni from the 2008 World Youth Day who surrounded him at St. Veronica's parish hall in Cherry Hill Jan. 3.

He just wanted to talk about Jesus.

"It's kind of hard for Christians as a whole, when you have that relationship with God, to talk about it," Mr. Pinckney, 26, told the group during the reunion. "Now, I just talk about it."

Mark Pacione, director of the archdiocese's Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, rhetorically asked participants if they were different since their return from the Sydney, Australia event.

"We hope that you have journeyed to some place that is hopeful," Mr. Pacione said. "You're back from World Youth Day for six months. What's different?"

When Mr. Pacione saw "the spirit move" Mr. Pinckney, he had no choice but to let others contribute as well. Mr. Pacione found many of the World Youth Day attendees were altered emotionally and spiritually in various ways, some more seismic than others.

They were able to share those experiences, highlighting their favorite and most emotional moments of the trip. Memories of long and often trying walks, trades with international youth and a Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI resonated.

The fire lit in those summer days still burns for some.

Gillian Bourassa, 21, a parishioner of St. Joseph in Fullerton, said she was humbled by the experience.

“What amazed me was that the church was right in front of me,” she said. “I think a lot of our experience with God is very vertical. There, it was completely horizontal. The whole body of Christ was right there in front of you.”

Maureen Rogers, 21, a parishioner of Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie, said she went to Australia expecting a huge personal shift and when she returned, felt slightly underwhelmed. Months of introspection, however, has caused her to re-evaluate the experience.

“It’s kind of like seeds were planted when I was there,” she said. “I’m realizing that more now that I’m back. I’ve come to appreciate the saints more. It has changed my life, just not in the ways I expected.”

While some World Youth Day attendees missed the reunion, those who gathered re-kindled bonds while talking about the possibility of attending the 2011 World Youth Day in Madrid, Spain.

The reunion came as a welcome surprise for Sean Austin, 18, a parishioner of St. Ann in Hagerstown, who said he had experiences with other intense bonding trips where he fell out of contact with his friends.

“I was really excited to get back together with everybody,” Mr. Austin said.

Missionary of St. Paul Father Augustine Etemma Inwang, St. Veronica’s pastor and a World Youth Day attendee, advised the group during a reunion Mass homily to follow Mr. Pinckney’s lead.

“What difference,” Father Inwang said, “will you make?”