

Teens gather for mini World Youth Day in Emmitsburg

Nearly 10,000 miles from Sydney, Australia, students came together July 19-20 to share and learn about their Catholic faith, enjoy music and friends, and listen to Pope Benedict XVI.

In a satellite version of World Youth Day, 29 young people from northern Frederick County gathered at St. Anthony Shrine in Emmitsburg to be part of the excitement going on Down Under.

"We'd like to give them a feel for what it's like to be in Sydney," said Roberta Alvarez, youth minister for St. Joseph, Emmitsburg, and one of the event organizers. "This was our answer."

The event originated with 17-year-old Rebecca Corbell's offer to have some of her youth group friends over to her house in conjunction with World Youth Day, the six-day event making up the world's largest recurring Catholic gathering.

"I knew some people that were disappointed that they couldn't go to Sydney, including me, because of the cost," said Rebecca, who lives in Fairfield, Pa., and attends St. Joseph.

With travel and accommodation costs for a trip to Sydney running about \$5,000 per person, "that's out of reach for a lot of kids," Ms. Alvarez said.

The local event picked up steam when Ms. Alvarez and Rebecca talked with Barbara Anderson, pastoral life director at St. Anthony and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Thurmont.

Ms. Anderson, who helped organize previous World Youth Days while working with the Conference of Catholic Bishops, was able to secure the assistance of Mount St. Mary's University and arrange speakers, including Father T. Austin Murphy, chaplain of the Newman Center at Towson University, and Robert Sutliff, pastoral associate of St. Joseph in Odenton.

She also was able to arrange for Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar, to celebrate the closing liturgy at the Nation Shrine Grotto of Lourdes July 20.

"It's a great opportunity for them (the youths) to join together," Ms. Anderson said. "Young people don't get much of a chance to interact with the bishop."

Becky Clark, the youth minister of St. Paul in Ellicott City, used her four prior World Youth Day experiences to help bring the celebration alive for young people from St. Paul, Church of the Resurrection, Ellicott City, and St. William of York, Baltimore. Participants walked five miles in pilgrimage across Ellicott City, performing the Stations of the Cross and sharing fellowship.

Eventually, they watched the final papal Mass on a large screen at the home of a St. Paul parishioner.

"It was so real," Ms. Clark said. "It was so much the World Youth Day experience."

The students from northern Frederick County spent July 19 listening to speakers, discussing faith questions in small groups, listening to live music and celebrating their belief and friendships.

"It's been fun," said Joey Lyons, 16, who attends St. Joseph, Emmitsburg. "It's pretty cool."

On Saturday evening, the students picked up a full-sized wooden cross and carried it to the Mount St. Mary's campus as a small emblematic gesture of the Journey of the Cross that occurred in Sydney.

"The idea is the community of it all," said Ms. Alvarez. "Of course they are doing it (the Journey of the Cross) many, many miles compared to what we are doing."

"There's a lot of pride (carrying the cross)," said Nathan Poetzsch, 14. "You get a sense of the physical pain Jesus went through."

At the college, the youths watched a live broadcast of Sydney's closing Mass. Celebrated by Pope Benedict, it attracted more than 350,000 to the Royal Randwick Racecourse.

“When it’s small, it’s nice, too,” said Nathan. “It’s nice to have people together, but you know it’s going on around the world.”

After watching coverage of the Mass, the students carried the cross back to St. Anthony, where they participated in fireside chats and adoration in the church, and then camped out under the stars.

They journeyed up another hill Sunday morning for Mass with Bishop Madden at the Grotto of Lourdes.

“We went out with a bang,” Rebecca said.