Youthful enthusiasm still lingers from papal visit

What is God whispering to you?

That was the question Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien posed to a group of youths at St. John, Westminster, June 14, during a Mass that reunited many who saw Pope Benedict XVI during his April visit to the U.S.

“Is Christ whispering something to you? He sure is,” Archbishop O’Brien assured the faithful during his homily. “Prayer is not words. Prayer is opening our heart up to God. He sees great potential in each one of you – more than you ever dreamed.”

The Mass was partly a reunion and partly a call to vocation for the young faithful in attendance. After the Mass, Archbishop O’Brien mingled with each one of the youths, welcoming them to a post-Mass dinner.

Many of the gathered saw Pope Benedict celebrate Mass at Washington’s Nationals Park and New York’s Yankee Stadium and often referred to it as a life-changing experience. Archbishop O’Brien said it was important to engage the youths’ interest in the church.

“I wanted to build on what the Holy Father did and said and just let them know that they’re very important to not only our archdiocese, but our church and our country,” Archbishop O’Brien said.

Many of the youths still found themselves moved by their papal experiences.

“For me, it was a chance to grow in my faith,” said 16-year-old Sara Secada-Lovio, who will be a senior at Mercy High School, Baltimore. “I liked how all the different Catholic schools were there. I realized how much other people are strong in their faith.”

Sara also shared her faith experiences with the crowd assembled at St. John, saying that being active in the archdiocese’s youth outreach programs brought her closer to
Current and aspiring clergy shared their journey to the cloth.

“At one point, I realized just how much I was thinking about the priesthood when I realized I was daydreaming about my first Mass,” Ernest Cibelli, a transitional deacon for the archdiocese, told the youths during the dinner. “I thought, ‘That’s probably a pretty good sign that this is what God wants me to do.’ ”

The archdiocese is hosting several vocational efforts throughout the month, even for those not considering a life as a member of the clergy. A 24/7 Ministry Day was held June 17, giving anyone ages 16-35 insight into the daily lives of those in ministry.

Dare to Follow, a day similar to summer camp, was held for male youths between the ages of 15 and 17 at Holy Trinity, Glen Burnie, June 19. Another version of the day will be held July 22 at a location to be determined.

Operation Genesis, another summer camp day, will be held June 24 at Holy Trinity for male youths ages 12 to 14. A repeat of the day will be held July 22.

Young women at the reunion were also encouraged to attend the first vows ceremony for the Little Sisters of the Poor, which will be held June 28 in Queens, N.Y.

“What the pope wanted to do was fire up our Catholics, especially our youth,” Archbishop O’Brien said. “We had great participation here and (I wanted) to let them know how important they are, take seriously his words and try to build on his words, to open their hearts in prayer, to listen and experience the community of the church during his visit. This is a miniature of that.”

Many of the youths at St. John said they were excited about becoming Catholic leaders.

Sara said she was interested in becoming a youth minister. Chris Gebhart, 15, of St. Anthony Shrine, Emmitsburg, said he was left “breathless” after seeing the pope, adding: “I’ll definitely be active in the church.”