In apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis lays out his vision for Church’s mission of evangelization

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—In his first extensive piece of writing as pope, Pope Francis lays out a vision of the Catholic Church dedicated to evangelization in a positive key, with a focus on society’s poorest and most vulnerable, including the aged and unborn.

“Evangelii Gaudium” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), released by the Vatican on Nov. 26, is an apostolic exhortation, one of the most authoritative categories of papal document. Pope Francis’ first encyclical, “Lumen Fidei,” published in July, was mostly the work of his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

The pope wrote the new document in response to the October 2012 Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization, but declined to work from a draft provided by synod officials.

Pope Francis’ voice is unmistakable in the 50,000-word document’s relatively relaxed style—he writes that an “evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!”—and its emphasis on some of his signature themes, including the dangers of economic globalization and “spiritual worldliness.”

The Church’s message “has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary,” he writes. “In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.”

Inspired by Jesus’ poverty and concern for the dispossessed during his earthly ministry, Pope Francis calls for a “Church which is poor and for the poor.”

“The poor ‘have much to teach us,’” he writes. “We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”

Charity is more than mere handouts, “it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor,” the pope writes. “This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free creative, participatory...”
and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives.”

He adds that the “worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care.... They need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith.”

Pope Francis reiterates his earlier criticisms of “ideologues that defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation,” which he blames for the current financial crisis and attributes to an “idolatry of money.”

He emphasizes that the Church’s concern for the vulnerable extends to “unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us,” whose defense is “closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right.”

“A human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development,” the pope writes, in his strongest statement to date on the subject of abortion. “Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be.”

The pope writes that evangelization entails peacemaking, among other ways through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. He “humbly” calls on Muslim majority countries to grant religious freedom to Christians, and enjoins Catholics to “work for peace and reconciliation with Jews, and encourage dialogue and cooperation with other religions.”

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The Holy See has issued a preparatory document and a series of questions to help determine the challenges to family life and marriage. A questionnaire can be found on the homepage of the archdiocese website at www.archindy.org or by going to www.archindy.org/synod.

The questionnaire must be returned to the archdiocese by Dec. 13.

Synod of Bishops questionnaire on the family and evangelization available for participation

Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, in October 2014 on the theme: The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization. Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin is inviting the faithful of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis to take part in a consultation to help the bishops prepare for this synod.

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In words very close to those he used in an op-ed interview with a Jesuit journalist in August, Pope Francis writes that “pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed,” lest they distract from the Gospel’s primary invitation to “respond to the God of love who saves us.”

Returning to a theme of earlier statements, the pope also warns against “spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, [but] consists in seeking not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being,” either through embrace of a “purely subjective faith” or a “narcissistic and authoritarian elitism” that overemphasizes certain rules or a “particular Catholic style from the past.”

Despite his censures and warnings, the pope ends on a hopeful note true to his theme: “I invoke as the mother of evangelization the Holy See has issued a preparatory document and a series of questions to help determine the challenges to family life and marriage. A questionnaire can be found on the homepage of the archdiocese website at www.archindy.org or by going to www.archindy.org/synod.

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- Catholic education and faith formation
- Education for seminarians and deacons and retirement benefits for priests
- Care for people most in need

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Archbishop Tobin addresses youths as ‘parish of the U.S.’ at closing Mass

By Natalie Hoefer

For three days, the energy level of the 23,000 Catholic youths kept soaring. Now their voices, raised in joyous song, filled Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis as wave after wave of nearly 400 bishops, priests, deacons and seminarians processed into the arena.

Taking into that energy, Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin began Mass with the trademark call and response that was shared by the teenagers during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 21-23. “NC!” he shouted. “YC!” the youths thundered in response. “NC!” the archbishop yelled again, raising a fist in the air.

“We live as his servants and as his friends, and we show the world the beauty of belonging to Christ because we are signed, sealed and delivered.”

---Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin

Archbishop Tobin addressed youths as ‘parish of the U.S.’ at closing Mass

With 11 bishops from around the country listening, Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin delivers a homily to 23,000 teens at the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 23 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Unexpected moments show the heart and the success of NCYC, organizer says

By John Shaughnessy

It was a moment Kay Scoville will never forget, a moment that helped define all her planning for the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis seemed to hit a major roadblock in one important area. She quickly realized she needed more volunteers.

Scoville, an archdiocesan director of youth ministry, was in the process of helping plan the event on Nov. 21-23—her attention to detail, her major roadblock in one important area.

Kay Scoville

“VCologists” for all these souls looking for healing, we set up four additional locations for young people to receive the sacrament, and the lines were as long as what you would see at Wal-Mart on Black Friday. It would be impossible to assess the number who went to confession, but God provided the opportunity.”

“Signed. Sealed. Delivered.”

---Kay Scoville

Above, young Catholics from the Diocese of Charleston, S.C., hold hands during the Our Father at the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 23 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Right, Jordan Frederick of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis sheds tears of many emotions after receiving Communion at the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 23 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

In the meantime, experiences shared will be applied, said 16-year-old Hannah Svegal of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minn.

“There were a lot of lessons I learned that opened my eyes to errors in my life that I didn’t even notice I needed to improve in,” said the first-time NCYC participant. “There’s so much higher I can go with my faith that I wasn’t even aware of.

“And seeing all of the different people bonding together, knowing there are so many Catholics my age, it’s really motivating.”

(For more photos of the event, log on to www.CriterionOnline.com.)

In the presence of 12 bishops, 237 priests, 31 deacons and 90 seminarians—as well as the 23,000 teenagers—Archbishop Tobin offered his homily.

“I believe it’s safe to say that tonight we formed the national parish of the United States of America,” he began, opening with comments in Spanish. “Can you recall another occasion when there are people from all 50 states gathered around the Lord’s one table in word and his sacrament? I can’t.”

Archbishop Tobin commented on two events that marked the end of the Year of Faith, and the feast of Christ the King: “When we celebrate the Eucharist, we join our brothers and sisters across time and across space,” he said. “Tonight, in particular, we are a part of a world parish, a parish that stretches across the globe as 1.2 billion Catholics bring to the Lord a love that is one and indivisible.

“Calling Jesus our king means we love him as our Lord and as his friends, and we show the world the beauty of belonging to Christ because we are signed, sealed and delivered.”

As the words of consecration were spoken, a murmur could be heard from the seats surrounding the altar—the voices of 237 priests joining in the centuries-old prayer.

“The contrast between the boisterous enthusiasm of the youths during the three days of the conference and their prayerful composure after receiving the Eucharist was dramatic. Neither the knobby, hard plastic tile covering the field nor the solid concrete in the stands prevented the youths from kneeling in reverence.

As she prayed, 16-year-old Jordan Frederick of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis wiped away a tear that traced down her cheek.

One of the animators, a person we formed the national parish of the U.S. at the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 23 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

She recalled Scoville, archdiocesan director of youth ministry

“His reaction was a true testimony of evangelization activity that we all hope to experience.”

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(For more photos of the event, log on to www.CriterionOnline.com.)
Letters to the Editor

Morning Prayer is a great way to start your day in a centered fashion

Thank you for publishing John Fink’s recent Year of Faith column on the Liturgy of the Hours in the Nov. 15 issue of The Criterion.

He educates your readers about the nature and value of lay participation in the Liturgy of the Hours, and I wanted to thank him for his advice. I also want to give your readers personal witness to the value and impact of his advocacy.

I first learned about Morning Prayer, a specific component of the Liturgy of the Hours, through an article that Fink wrote in The Criterion more than 22 years ago (“The brevity for laypeople? Yes, indeed” in the Aug. 30, 1991, issue).

I then began regular attendance at Morning Prayer every weekday, from 7 to 7:20 a.m., in the presence of the Franciscans at Sacred Heart Church on the near south side of Indianapolis. The timing and location were just right to finish prayer and start my work, then as a scientist at Eli Lilly in downtown Indianapolis.

After I took early retirement from Lilly and no longer had a need to travel downtown in the morning, we started a Morning Prayer group in the Bosler Chapel at St. Thomas Aquinas Church at 46th and Illinois streets in Indianapolis. It meets every weekday from 7:30 to 7:50 a.m.

This December, it will be 10 years since we started our group. Anyone is welcome to join us at St. Thomas, on a regular or occasional basis, and become familiar with Morning Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours.

If our location and time is not convenient, I am sure the Franciscans would also welcome laypeople to their morning prayer at Sacred Heart. Interested individuals might also contact the Benedictine sisters at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove to see if they could attend their Morning Prayer.

This is a great way to start your day in a centered fashion.

Thank you, John, for bringing Morning Prayer into our lives.

Bill Scott
Indianapolis

Constitution’s Establishment Clause not meant to be controversial, reader says

As the Supreme Court today once again faces arguments regarding the real meaning of the U.S. Constitution’s Establishment Clause, I remain astonished that such a simple, clearly stated statement is still so controversial.

The First Amendment reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free practice thereof.”

Reflected in an historical perspective, European citizens cruelly ruled by oppressive, church-dominated national governments. As such, this clause should be easily understood without much question.

The key word here is clearly “establishment,” which by any sense of the English language implies a national, statutory requirement of allegiance to specific religious beliefs with serious economic and personal well-being consequences for non-compliance. The continuing arguments against school prayer, invocations asking God to guide our legislative decisions, Christmas displays, asking a higher power (however defined) for protection, etc. come nowhere close to violating this First Amendment clause because, most fundamentally, there is absolutely no national, legal mandate or consequences for the non-believer.

It might be noted that more than one of our non-believer founders had no trouble with engraving supplication to God into our Declaration of Independence and other significant federal statements, some of which remain engraved on federal buildings to this day. Our current dilemma clearly derives from ignorance of European and national history.

There are understandably atheists, non-Christians, Muslims, believers in celestial gods, tree huggers and others who may be offended by simple prayer to a higher power, but they suffer little consequence other than being offended.

Unfortunately for such, the U.S. Constitution does not guarantee a right not to be offended.

David A. Nealy
Greenwood

The Criterion
Friday, November 29, 2013

Editorial

Bishop John B. Brungardt of Dodge City, Kan., talks to a teenager during the sacrament of reconciliation on Nov. 21 during the National Catholic Youth Conference at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. Dozens of priests and bishops heard confessions of youths and chaperones for hours during the conference.

NCYC shows young people are eager to embrace their faith

There were rings, handshakes and high fives shared throughout the weekend.

Lots of them. When you’re among 23,000 of your peers having the time of your life, teenagers do that kind of thing.

And we can’t forget the hats. Tons of hats. Upside down ice cream cones. Cowboy hats. Replicas of the Statue of Liberty on young people’s heads. To view a photo gallery of them, log on to www.CriterionOnline.com.

But the 2013 National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 21-23 at the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis was about something bigger.

It was a three-day pilgrimage of faith for the young people, their chaparones, and the priests, musicians, priests, bishops, deacons, seminarians and religious who participated during this journey where they had their lives of faith “Signed. Sealed. Delivered,” the theme of the conference.

As Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin, 17, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Indianapolis, said. “You really think more.”

And we can’t forget to thank the hundreds of volunteers who donated their time to help make the weekend memorable for our young church and so many others.

Wondering what the future of the Church looks like? Katie Koehne, a youth minister at St. Joseph Parish in Elkader, Iowa, has a pretty good idea.

“The kids make NCYC. I look around here, and I’m surrounded by all these terrific youths and I truly see the future of the Church and the future of the world,” she said. “It just really gives me a lot more confidence in the future of the world knowing that we have kids like this to carry on what we’re doing.”

More proof that today’s young people love our Church and what it can bring to their lives of faith.

It is a faith they cherish, and want to learn more about to grow closer to God.

May we make the time to continue to nurture each and every one of theirs.

—Mike Krokos

Media use among children 8 or younger

Average time spent per day using:

Any screen media: 1:55
Television: 1:09
DVDs: 1:17
Computers: 1:17
Video games: 1:14
Mobile devices: 1:05

Percent of parents who say media cause them to spend more or less time with family members:

Percentage of children 8 or younger who spend more or less time with family members:

Source: Common Sense Media

© 2013 Catholic News Service
Baptism sets up life of ‘fulfillment, purpose,’ speaker tells youths

By Natalie Hoefer

When Stevie Wonder wrote his hit single “Signed, Sealed, Delivered I’m Yours” in 1970, he likely never imagined the words would form the theme of a national Catholic gathering for youths. But the words reinterpreted through the lens of faith formed a clear message to the 23,000 youths gathered for the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC):

‘Signed’—by the waters of baptism.

‘Sealed’—by the Holy Spirit.

‘Delivered’—from death unto life.

The rain that fell outside Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 21 proved appropriate, with the opening general session focusing on baptism.

Through that rain, Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin of Indianapolis processed with the Eucharist across the street to the Indiana Convention Center. Xander Eisert of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Ky., 15, described the scene: “We were in the lobby of the convention center. (Priests and seminarians) started walking in, group after group, and they were singing in Latin. Everyone was on their knees, our hats were off. It was a really cool experience. I didn’t expect that on the first night.”

Xander was not the only one impacted by the procession. “It was impressive to see that many priests in one area,” said Luke Grant, 17, of the Diocese of Lansing, Mich. “I hope to spend some time in adoration while I’m here. On the bus ride here, our guide talked about how there is a thin veil between God and man, and how in the Eucharist that veil is literally taken away, and you’re in the presence of God. Bishop Christopher J. Coyne, our guide, talked about how there is a problem, sometimes we make a mistake, but he doesn’t.”

“This weekend, God wants to empower you, to help you realize how precious you are in his sight,” said Luke. From the quiet of the adoration chapel in the convention center, the youths made their way to Lucas Oil Stadium for the music performances before the opening general session.

In the stadium, the teens swayed, clapped and even formed a conga line to inspire songs by Grammy-award winning musician Israel Houghton, the energetic tunes of Grupo Huellas and the winning musician Israel Houghton, the other general session.


The problem is, sometimes we make a mess of it. We’re covered in sin. “Your expectation is that God has condemnation or shame for you. But he doesn’t,” the bishop said.

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At the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 21, 23,000 participants sing and move to a song in Lucas Oil Stadium.

Above, Bishop Christopher J. Coyne addresses 23,000 youths during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 21.

Left, singer, songwriter and musician Matt Maher speaks on the theme of ‘Signed. Sealed. Delivered’ during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 21.

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Left, singer, songwriter and musician Matt Maher speaks on the theme of ‘Signed. Sealed. Delivered’ during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 21.

“As the thousands of youth made their way out of Lucas Oil Stadium, joyful calls were met with spirited responses: ‘Who’s the Church?’ ‘We are!’ ‘Where’s the Church?’ ‘Right here!’ ‘What is the Church?’ ‘Welcoming to all!’”

“That’s how the world knows that we’re ‘Signed! Sealed! Delivered!’”

(For more photos of the event, log on to www.CriterionOnline.com.)
Events Calendar

December 1
St. Paul School, 9788 N. Dearborn Road, New Albany, Schenck Hall, Commission Christmas breakfast, Christmas music, 8 a.m.-noon, pictures with Santa, 9:30-11:30 a.m., free-will donation. Information: 812-623-2631 or usnbaker@spu.edu.

December 2-5
St. Joseph Church, 131 E. High St., Corydon. Parish Mission, “Give Me Your Heart and I Will Give You My Heart,” Family of Jesus Father Philip Scott, confession, 6 p.m., mission, 7:30 p.m., Mass each day at 9:30 a.m. Information: 812-738-2742.

December 3
Marian University, Marian Hall, 1st Floor Conference Room, 3200 Cold Spring Road, Indianapolis. Adult programs information meeting, 6-7 p.m. Information: 317-955-6271 or dle@marian.edu.

December 4
Archbishop O’Meara Catholic Church, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Social Justice Catholic, educational, charitable and social single, 50 and over, single, separated, widowed or divorced. New members welcome. 6:30 p.m. Information: 317-503-1189.

December 7

December 7-8
St. Matthew Church, 4100 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent organ recital. Travis Person, organist. 3:30-4:15 p.m. Information: 317-257-4297.

December 7-8
Lawrence Parish, 4650 E. 46th St., Indianapolis, 64th Anniversary weekend, Sat. 5 p.m. Mass; Sun. 8 a.m., noon English Masses; 6 p.m. Spanish Mass. Information: 317-546-4065.

December 8

December 9

December 10
St. Paul Catholic Center, 1413 E. 17th St., Bloomington, Lessons and Carols, 7-9 p.m. reception, 6 p.m., free-will offering. Information: 812-339-5561 or music@boonies.edu.

December 11

December 13
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5535 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent dinner and concert, 6-9 p.m., $30 per person. Information: 317-543-7681 or uncweveryone@archindy.org.

December 14
St. Roch Parish, Family Life Center, 3603 S. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Single seniors meeting. 1 p.m., age 50 and over. Information: 317-784-4539.

December 15

Join French-speaking Catholics for Advent Day of Recollection on Dec. 7

The French-Speaking Catholics Ministry of the Multicultural Ministry of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis is hosting an Advent day of recollection in French at St. Malachy Church, 9833 E. County Road 750 N. in Brownsburg, from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on Dec. 7.

The theme is: “Marie apprend-nous a attendre et recevoir Jesus” which translates, “Mary, teach us to wait and receive Jesus.”

The event, led by the group’s chaplain, Father Michael Hoyt, will include presentations, eucharistic adoration and Mass. Please bring your Bible. The cost is $10, which includes breakfast and lunch. To register or for additional information, e-mail Dubrice Barret and Marie Vallee at sfshindy3@gmail.com.

Child care will be provided.

VIPS

Jerry and Margie (Schuster) Cahill, members of Most Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Beech Grove, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Nov. 28. The couple was married on Nov. 28, 1953, at Sacred Heart Church in Indianapolis. They are the parents of eight children. Christie Denzer, Anne Elliott, Cathy Huser, Helen Stephon, Ed, John, Mike and the late Tom Cahill.

They also have 31 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

St. John the Evangelist Church, 126 W. Georgia St., Indianapolis. Rosary procession, following. 12:10 p.m. Mass, pray and process through the streets of downtown Indianapolis. Information: faith@citizen2016@gmail.com.

Retreats and Programs

November 29-December 1

December 2

December 3
Parish Mission, 9717 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Healing Survivors of Suicide Village, 9 a.m., rosary, mission talk, reconciliation, 4:30 p.m. Information: 317-784-4207.

December 7
St. Patrick Church, 1807 Poplar St., Bloomington. Their Meaning,” 7-9 p.m. Information: 317-543-7681 or music@boonies.edu.

December 8
St. Mary-of-the-Woods, is having a ministry pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., Young Adult and College Campus Ministry pilgrimage to annual March for Life on Jan. 17-20. Information: 812-357-6585 or benedictine@spu.edu.

December 9
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5535 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Parish Mission, “Give Me Your Heart and I Will Give You My Heart,” Family of Jesus Father Philip Scott, confession, 6 p.m., mission, 7:30 p.m., Mass each day at 9:30 a.m. Information: 812-738-2742.

December 10

December 12
St. Paul Catholic Center, 1413 E. 17th St., Bloomington, Lessons and Carols, 7-9 p.m. reception, 6 p.m., free-will offering. Information: 812-339-5561 or music@boonies.edu.

The pilgrimage is open for young adult pilgrimage to annual March for Life Registration is now open for those age 18-25 who want to join the archdiocesan Young Adult and College Campus Ministry pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., for the annual March for Life on Jan. 20-23, 2014. The pilgrimage, which costs $220 per person, includes transportation to and from Washington, D.C., two nights at a hotel, pro-life material and group gear. The deadline to register is Jan. 7, 2014. Log on to www.indycatholic.org for more details.

Moving sale at The Gift Shop at Providence Center through Dec. 15

The Gift Shop at Providence Center, a ministry of the Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in St. Mary-of-the-Woods, is hosting a moving sale through Dec. 15. During this time, everything in The Gift Shop will be on sale, with some items reduced as much as 75 percent. A long-awaited children’s book about St. Mother Theodore Guérin will also be unveiled and orders taken.

The Gift Shop offers Christmas ornaments, Nativity sets and other decorations in time for the holidays. The Gift Shop also offers inspirational music, fair-trade coffee, tea and chocolate mementos from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods such as mugs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, trivets, sister-made items and much more. Because of the construction of the permanent shrine of St. Mother Theodore Guérin and the renovation of Providence Center, The Gift Shop will be closed from Dec. 16 through Jan. 6.

The Gift Shop will reopen on Jan. 6 in its new temporary location on the first floor of Owens Hall on the Sisters of Providence grounds at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, with similar shopping hours. Signage will lead shoppers to the new locale.

During the sale, The Gift Shop will operate under its regular business hours, which are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. on Monday through Friday, and on the weekend from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Call 812-535-2947 for more information, or log on to www.sPGiftShop.com, where some—but not all—items will be on sale.

Advent lessons and carols to be presented at Saint Meinrad Archabbey on Dec. 9

Seminarians from Saint Meinrad Archabbey and School of Theology in St. Meinrad will present an Advent lesson and carol service in the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church, St. Meinrad, at 7:45 p.m. CST on Dec. 9.

The service, titled “From Eden to Heaven: The Story of Salvation,” tells the story of Christ through Scripture readings and singing hymns and carols. The service is expected to last an hour and 15 minutes and is free and open to the public.

Parking is available in the Guest House and student parking lots. For more information, contact Mary Jeanne Schumacher at 812-357-6501.

Domino Jesus

Mark Pereda, left, a member of St. Mary-of-the-Knobs Parish in Floyd County, and Bob Navile, a member of St. Mary Parish in Navilleton, pose on Nov. 23 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis next to a portrait of Jesus made up of more than 7,150 dominoes in a pattern designed by artist mathematician Robert Bosch. Navile and Peredo directed more than 500 teen participants in the National Catholic Youth Conference, held in Indianapolis on Nov. 2-21, in creating the portrait, which was unveiled on Nov. 23.
Faith forms bedrock of who they are, say youths

By John Shaughnessy

In one moment, the hope for the future of the Catholic Church in the United States could be seen in the eyes and the hands of Sarah Bishop and Carmen Miller.

That moment occurred when 23,000 youths from across the country met in Indianapolis for the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 21—three-day event that featured Mass, workshops, musical performances, eucharistic adoration, and a theme park inside Lucas Oil Stadium.

As the action in the theme park whirled around them, Sarah and Carmen kept their focus on the face of Christ—the face they had helped shape from their small part of the 2,000 pounds of clay that event organizers had offered the youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, W. Va.

"It's how I live my life from the smallest choices to the biggest choices," said Carmen, 17. "I don't know what I'd do without faith, without God."

Sarah, 17, a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany, said she's always loved everything in her faith. "I've always loved everything in my faith. It's how I live my life."

As they added the final touches to Christ's face, their thoughts were centered on the emotions that these youths in the large crowd were feeling.

"We are called to love and to reach out in love and support to their adopted brothers and sisters who might be picked on or bullied in their schools or in other settings," Carmen explained how everyone who has been adopted to stand up. Then he added, "We are called to love. I believe this. When Jesus died on that cross, he died for my sins. When he died on that cross, he died for you. I've never been to anything like it."

In one moment, Anthony Washington Jr. smiled and laughed with his friends from New All Saints Parish in Baltimore, Md., as he said that he had been brought up in the presence of the face of Christ. "I've always loved everything in my faith. It's how I live my life from the smallest choices to the biggest choices," said Anthony, who was a t-shirt enthusiast with this verse from Psalms 127:30, "Children are a gift from the Lord. They are a reward from the Lord our God."" I don’t know what I’d do without faith, without God."

"The embrace of faith echoed loudly during the large, general meetings of the youth conference when the youths' display of faith at the conference touched the hearts of the adults who joined in the celebration with them. "It really gives me a great deal of encouragement as I see the young Church alive and well, dedicated to Christ and in love with one another," said Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond of the New Orleans Archdiocese.

"Love as God would love you," he added. "Love as Jesus has taught us."
Holdings a large crucifix, Ansel Augustine, left, talks with National Catholic Youth Conference emcee Jesse Manibusan during his presentation at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on the morning of Nov. 23 in Lucas Oil Stadium.

The spirit of two girls helps the faith of others soar

By John Shaughnessy

He moved to the stage with the strut and the swagger of joyful New Orleans. “I am so glad that he told the Holy Spirit, ‘I don’t want to be a slave to sin any more. I am sorry for what I have done.’”

The laughter of 23,000 teenagers roared through Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

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Teens explore priestly, religious vocations during NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

Tens of thousands of teenagers from across the country weren’t the only people who made their way to Indianapolis for the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), which took place on Nov. 21-23 in the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium.

Some 216 representatives of 62 religious communities in the United States also participated in the biennial Catholic youth event.

They interacted with teens in a variety of settings in two large exhibit halls in the Indiana Convention Center that had been turned into a thematic park called “Inspiration Junction.” It was a place where Catholic teens could create arts and crafts projects, put together meals for those in need, listen to Catholic musicians sing or pray in a variety of settings.

Representatives of different religious communities worked together in groups as they helped the teens in the thematic park.

Sacred Heart Brother Ronald Hingle of Baton Rouge, La., chairman of the board of the National Religious Vocations Council, stood in the midst of Inspiration Junction on Nov. 21 and liked what he saw.

“We want to promote all of religious life in the Church,” Brother Ronald said. “That’s why we need to work together. We’re truly collaborating, and we’re presenting the broad spectrum of religious life in the United States.”

Two years earlier at NCYC, religious orders had booths in one of the connected exhibit halls. Brother Ronald thinks the changed approach this year reflects the place of religious life among the faithful.

“Religious are, by our lifestyle, to be levein in the Church,” he said. “We’re to be a part of the Church and not separated from it. So we’re trying to be all throughout the entire thematic park and the entire conference, as opposed to being separated and segregated.”

Kate Allie, 16, of Cornellus, Ore., first attended NCYC two years ago. She saw the change in how religious were a part of the event this year.

“A lot of the kids get to interact with them rather than just hearing information from them [at booths],” she said. “They’re also getting to do arts and crafts with them, and experience a little bit of what they have to offer. It gives them more of an impression.”

That impression was able to be shaped in a special way in a series of static and dynamic presentations at “Vocations Got Talent.” Throughout the three-day conference, seminarians, deacons, priests and religious showed off their talents and shared their vocational stories in a dynamic format through the vocations office of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and religious orders in central and southern Indiana.

Archdiocesan vocations director Father Eric Augenstein said “Vocations Got Talent” showed the teens at the conference that people who discern a priestly or religious vocation have a life beyond the ministries that they might see them involved in.

“They’re able to continue to do the things that they love, like skiing, playing the violin, beekeeping or walking on stilts,” Father Augenstein said. “We have a nun who walks on stilts. We have a brother who does juggling.”

Frances Seaton was attending the conference from Owensboro, Ky. After listening to transitional Deacon Daniel Bedel of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis play the violin, she talked about how she has an aunt who is an Ursuline sister and a cousin who is a priest. She is considering religious life herself.

“I know that they’re just regular people. They’re awesome, too,” Frances said. “It’s great to see them just at the altar because I think a lot of people think that priests and seminarians just do [ministry]. But they’re really awesome people, and have awesome talents to share with us.”

Teens at NCYC who wanted to have conversations with the religious at the conference could go from the often rancorous thematic park to a quiet corner of the Vocations Nook, furnished with couches and easy chairs.

Alexandra Desrosiers, 16, of Belleville, Ill., chatted with Brother Ronald in the Vocations Nook. She appreciated how the religious at the conference were available to the teens and that a lot of teens were talking with them about vocations to consecrated life.

“It’s really cool because, personally, you think of Church figures as people you really can’t talk to,” said Alexandra. “Seeing them here interacting with all of us and explaining to us about what they do is really nice.”

“I think that it’s nice that a lot of people are open to the fact that they might be called to something in the Church. It’s really cool.”

Alexandra was joined in her appreciation by Providence Sister Theresa Clare Carr who stood in the middle of the thematic park taking in the thousands of teens who made their way through the exhibit halls, often taking time to chat with her and other religious.

“It’s been very heartwarming to see so many kids,” Sister Theresa Clare said. “When we approach them, they’re all smiles. They’re happy to be here. We’ve met so many, from Connecticut and Baltimore to New Mexico and California. If we can plant a seed now, that’s what counts.”

Young people from coast to coast experience forgiveness during NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

The happiness of Rachel Moos shone out clearly through the smile on her face as she left a conference room where dozens of priests and bishops were hearing confessions during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) held on Nov. 21-23 at the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

“We were going to go to another [session], and it was full,” said Rachel, 16, of South Vienna, Ohio. “So I decided that I wanted to go to confession. Here was God giving me the chance. And it was a relief because I hadn’t gone since my first Communion.

“I had wanted to do for quite a while. I needed to get this stuff off of my chest.”

She paused and added, “I feel really happy right now.”

The joy that was the fruit of the sacrament of reconciliation at NCYC wasn’t experienced by the teenagers alone.

Father Clement Davis, pastor of St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus, drove an hour to Indianapolis to hear confessions on Nov. 22.

“It’s great to see people in this number, and having a really close encounter with Christ,” he said. “They really are coming to grow closer in their relationship with Christ. And the sacrament helps them with that. It’s inspiring. I get goose bumps when I think about because I’m there. I’m part of that process.”

Bishop John B. Brungardt of the Diocese of Dodge City, Kan., turned up for six hours of confession during the conference.

“It’s great,” Bishop Brungardt said. “Mercy and forgiveness is a beautiful gift for the young people. It gives them great hope. All are welcome.”

Luke Hassler, a seminarian for the Evansville Diocese and a junior at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis, assisted conference participants in making their way to priests and bishops in the confession room.

The regular flow of teens preparing to confess their sins encouraged him in his vocational discernment.

“It reflects how our young Church responds to God’s mercy,” said Hassler. “It’s amazing seeing everybody come together and seeing what the young Church is like.”

The numbers of teens availing themselves to the sacrament of reconciliation during the conference was a help to Luke Santiago of Kualapuu, Hawaii.

“I felt intimidated at first,” said Luke about the idea of going to confession. “But then it made me feel more comfortable because there were kids my age [going to confession].”

Jesus, she said. “You’re coming down from this crazy high,” she said, “and you’re getting back down to the part where [you say to yourself]. This is what I have done. I need somebody to listen and forgive me and help me get back to where I was.”

Having experienced the power of confession after being away from it for a number of years, Rachel said there was more to the numbers of teens at NCYC going to confession than just a form of positive peer pressure.

“We’re all similar. We’re all in this Catholic faith. It’s so empowering,” she said. “We all have sins. And we all want to feel that we can be forgiven. Sometimes it’s hard to feel that way. And to be forgiven and know you are being forgiven is really great.”
Haley Biehnwaltes, left, Eva Hagman, Amanda Durava, Catherine Mazur and Shawn Durava, all of Niles, Ill., in the Chicago Archdiocese, sing and clap hands at the start of the Nov. 23 closing Mass.

Teenagers from the Diocese of Nashville, Tenn., sport cowboy hats during the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 21 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

One of the many Tweets sent before the opening general session at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 21 is displayed on a Jumbotron screen on Nov. 21.

National Catholic Youth Conference emcee Jesse MacEntee leads 23,000 youths in a song of praise during the opening general session of NCYC at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. The conference, which drew 23,000 youths from across the country, took place on Nov. 21-23 in the stadium and the adjacent Indiana Convention Center.

Right, members of the youth group from the Diocese of Honolulu in Hawaii pose on Nov. 21 for a photo before they took the stage at Lucas Oil Stadium for a performance.

Below, Bishop Donald F. Hanchon, an auxiliary bishop of the Detroit Archdiocese, assists teenagers with a service project in Inspiration Junction on Nov. 23 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

Above, animators lead the crowd in song during the Nov. 21 opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. The conference, which drew 23,000 youths from across the country, took place on Nov. 21-23 in the stadium and the adjacent Indiana Convention Center.

Brendon Nussar of Orlando, Fla., spins a prize wheel on Nov. 21 as Felician Sister Marie Eliana Remiszewski of Chicago looks on during the National Catholic Youth Conference at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

Joella Bitter of San Antonio, Texas, receives Communion from Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin during the Nov. 23 closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference.

Bishop Christopher J. Coyne, diocesan general, shares high fives on Nov. 23 with participants in the National Catholic Youth Conference at the end of the conference’s closing Mass.

Father Kenneth Taylor, pastor of Holy Angels Parish in Indianapolis, processes into Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis with the 237 priests who concelebrated at the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 23.

Below, Bishop Donald F. Hanchon, an auxiliary bishop of the Detroit Archdiocese, assists teenagers with a service project in Inspiration Junction on Nov. 23 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

Above, Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin receives a T-shirt signed by members of JUMMP Youth Ministry in Terre Haute. Marcia Lane-McGee, left, coordinator of JUMMP, and Karen Ridgway, also of Terre Haute, pose with the archbishop and his shirt.

Left, Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin carries a monstrance during a eucharistic procession from St. John the Evangelist Church to the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 21 in Indianapolis. The procession was part of the biennial National Catholic Youth Conference, a three-day experience of prayer, community and empowerment for Catholic teenagers and their adult chaperones.
Faith of adult volunteers grows from helping people

By Nathalie Hatoré

A peek into the exhibit halls of the Indiana Convention Center during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis on Nov. 21-23 would show different aspects of the faith.

A bishop talked about turning off electronic devices to find time for God.

A priest discussed how to combine fitness and prayer time.

A comedian explained how to use humor during difficult times.

A kick in the pants for Catholics

By John Shaugnessy

The idea triggered at the heart of 17-year-old Abby Tuttle as soon as she learned about the “courage capes.” Abby immediately joined the long line of Catholic teenagers who were waiting their turn to make one of the capes for children in the hospital.

“Cats are one of the great truths revealed one of the great truths often experienced by adult Catholics in comedy and entertainment,” McDonald explained.

She also knows how special the young people who created the “courage capes” are. “It’s so neat to see the kids come in and do this,” she said.

Kathy Laudick of St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis says one of the “courage capes” that youths at the National Catholic Youth Conference made for children at Peyton Manning Children’s Hospital in Indianapolis.

...and volunteers

By John Shaugnessy

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis on Nov. 21-23.

The conference made for children who are hospitalized at Peyton Manning Children’s Hospital in Indianapolis.

But then I thought, ‘Me having long hair was too much,” said Paige, a member of the Diocese of Owensboro, Ky. “But then I thought, ‘Me having long hair is less important than a child being happy.’”

It didn’t take long for the youths at the conference to reach the goal of creating 500 capes. Besides the capes, many of the youths who created them attached notes of encouragement for the children in the hospital.

“I have a child who had an appendectomy, and I feel God working in all of them.”

The dog has proven to be a reminder to keep the children in the hospital.

Photo by John Shaughnessy

Paige Hicks, left, of the Diocese of Owensboro, Ky., is pictured with stylist Alice Hannon getting a haircut on Nov. 21. Hicks was one of 40 youths at the National Catholic Youth Conference who signed up to have 10 inches of her hair cut off for “Locks of Love,” a program that provides wigs for underprivileged children who have lost their hair because of a medical condition.

For Jennie, being involved in the “Stop Hunger Now” program is an extension of the service work that has marked her life as a young Catholic—part of a generation that has embraced the concept of serving others.

“I love helping out in the community and for the Church in any way I can,” Jennie said. “This is a great way to help. I see it as an important part of my faith.”

Life is life. I think we tend to compartmentalize God into a way of shoving you into that

“I feel like God gave me a medical condition, and I said, ‘Why me?’” McDonald said. “But then I thought, ‘Me having long hair is less important than a child being happy.’”

Abby noted, “It’s important for kids to have the cape, because we don’t have enough God working in all of them.”

The priest at the time said, “You know how you want to be prayed for? I will pray for you.”

When asked how the cape goes to a child, they think that’s great, said Laudick, a part of the group from St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis that organized the “courage cape” effort at the conference.

“Of course, I then tell them to ‘You’re very strong and inspiring.”

Kathy Laudick couldn’t stop smiling either as she talked about the youths who lined up to make backpacks for children at a parish in Haiti.

She also knows how special the young people who created the “courage capes” are. “It’s so neat to see the kids come in and do this,” she said.

“Cats are one of the great truths revealed one of the great truths often experienced by adult Catholics in comedy and entertainment,” McDonald explained.

The idea tugged at the heart of 17-year-old Abby Tuttle as soon as she volunteered at a conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 21-23.

As she stroked a large star onto a multicolored, striped cape, Abby noted, “It’s important for kids to have one of their own faith seems to be growing more their own faith seems to be growing...”

“Life is life. I think we tend to compartmentalize God into a way of shoving you into that

“I feel like God gave me a medical condition, and I said, ‘Why me?’” McDonald said. “But then I thought, ‘Me having long hair is less important than a child being happy.’”

Abby immediately joined the long line of Catholic teenagers who were waiting their turn to make one of the capes for children in the hospital.

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Pope venerates Apostle’s relics, urges people to focus on Christ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis closed the Year of Faith by calling on people to keep Christ at the center of their lives, especially in times of trouble.

"When Jesus is at the center, light shines even on the darkest moments of our lives; he gives us hope," he said in his homily on Nov. 24, the feast of Christ the King.

The closing Mass in St. Peter’s Square also saw, for the first time, the exposition for public veneration of bones believed to be those of St. Peter. The Apostle is believed to have been martyred on a hill overlooking St. Peter’s Square, and buried in a tomb now located two levels below the main altar of St. Peter’s Basilica.

Eight bone fragments, each two to three centimeters long, were nestled in an open bronze reliquary displayed to the side of the altar.

During the ceremony, the pope—the 265th successor of Peter—held the closed reliquary for several minutes in silent prayer while choirs sang the Nicene Creed in Latin.

The bones, which were discovered during excavations of the necropolis under St. Peter’s Basilica in the 1940s, are kept in the pope’s private chapel but had never been displayed in public.

While no pope has ever declared the bones to be authentic, Pope Paul VI said in 1968 that the “relics” of St. Peter had been identified in a way which we can hold to be those of St. Peter. The Apostle is believed to have been martyred on a hill overlooking Jesus, and buried in a tomb now located two levels below the main altar of St. Peter’s Basilica.

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VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Early Christian burial sites are now easier to see, both in person and via the Internet, thanks to 21st-century technology and collaboration between Google and the Vatican.

“This is perhaps the sign of the joining of two extremes, remote antiquity and modernity,” said Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi on Nov. 19 at a news conference at the Catacombs of Priscilla in northeast Rome.

The cardinal, president of both the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, lauded recent restoration work by the archaeological commission inside the complex of early Christian tombs.

Using advanced laser techniques, restorers have uncovered vivid late fourth-century frescoes depicting Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Si...
Faith

Wait in hope during Advent for Christ’s glorious coming

By Marcellino D’Ambrosio

The word Advent literally means “coming.” If we are looking for blessings from God to come, that means that they are not here yet. And so Advent inevitably means not just coming, but waiting. Throughout the Bible, we read about people with a wish list. Abraham longed for a son, his enslaved descendants yearned for freedom. Soon after, it was their own land they wanted. Then they wanted a king to save them from their enemies. Some were so longed to return home. In the days of the Caesars, they wanted an anointed one or a messiah, who would once again sit upon David’s throne and, like David, smash their foes.

There are two things that they, and we, have in common. One is that it turns out that God wants to give us much more than we asked for. The second is that we have to wait a long time to get it.

Moses’ mission had taken him quite a distance, from the splendor of Pharaoh’s palace, to a stroll through the Red Sea, to wrestling with Israel’s stubbornness for 40 years in the desert. How sad that he never made it across the Jordan. But God gave him a moment of consolation. He brought him up to the top of Mount Nebo and showed him the Promised Land, John the Baptist had a similar mission. He proclaimed the imminent coming of the kingdom and labored tirelessly to prepare the way. Yet, next thing we know, we find him locked in a diabolical argument, awaiting execution. He sends a message to his cousin Jesus, looking for some shred of hope. “Are you the one who is to come?” (Mt 11:3).

The message sent back to him no doubt made excitement surge throughout his weary bones. The prophecy of Isaiah had been fulfilled—the blind see, cripples people walk, lepers become clean, the dead are raised, the poor hear good news. This can mean only one thing: The promised one, the Messiah, has come.

John had seen the promised one and heard of his wonderful works, he, like Moses, did not enter into the kingdom of God during his lifetime. John only caught a glimpse of the first light before sunrise. For the dawn from on high would not break upon the world until Easter morning. The birth of Jesus, his teachings and even his miracles were but a preparation for the kingdom of God, for the righteousness, peace, love and joy that could only have been made possible by the Messiah’s death, resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit. All this is so much a pure gift of God’s grace, the gift of being an adopted child of God. This baby is born not of woman, like John, but of the saving waters of baptism, is born into the kingdom of resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit.

Only have been made possible by the Messiah’s death, God, for the righteousness, peace, love and joy that could only have been made possible by the Messiah’s death, resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit. It is also good to pause a moment to remember the difference between Christ’s first coming and his second, of mortality versus immortality, of the darkness of faith versus the beatific vision, of the valley of tears versus unending joy. And this brings us to ponder on the Advent of his birth versus the advent of his ultimate coming.

While Christ’s first coming transformed the meaning of suffering, it did not banish it. His second coming, however, will. At the sight of him riding upon the clouds, “sorrow and mourning will flee” (Lk 35-10).

Yes, we who live between the two comings of Christ have been saved, but we have not yet fully taken possession of our salvation. We have tasted the first fruits, we have received the down payment, but the rest is held for us in trust. The confident anticipation of this inheritance is known as hope. This unsung hero among the theological virtues is terribly important because it makes patience possible. You can endure hardships cheerfully only when the anticipated reward makes it all worthwhile.

Hope also is important because it holds the key to joy. And that’s why the third Sunday of Advent is known as “Gaudea” or “Rejoice” Sunday. The vestments change from penitential purple to rose because the suffering of this present age is as nothing compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Moses rejected on Nebo. John rejoiced even in chains. In the season of Advent, in the midst of this valley of tears, let us rejoice in hope.

(Marcellino D’Ambrosio writes from Texas and guides pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land. He is co-founder of Crossroads Productions, an apostolate of Catholic renewal and evangelization.) †

Advent can teach us to wait patiently for the light in many areas of life

By Rhina Guidos

There’s little, if anything at all, to be found in the Bible pertaining to Advent. Though it’s hard to imagine, some believe the Catholic Church began observing this period leading up to Christmas in the fourth century. Since then, Advent has become increasingly popular as a time for Christians to reflect on the coming of Jesus, who would become the “light of the world.”

Once more, Advent is a time to wait patiently for the light in many areas of life.

For instance, consider the challenges we face on a daily basis. Sometimes we feel as though we’re in the dark, but Advent reminds us that we have the light of Christ. And while it may not be easy to see, the light always exists. It may not be visible, but it is there, just outside our reach. It’s a metaphor for the light of faith, which can bring comfort and hope even in the darkest of times.

When we’re children, it seems as if that waiting period will take forever. When you’re older, and depending on your Christmas customs and practices, that wait seems endless if you’re anticipating gifts. It can seem endless, too, to a mother or a father waiting for a child who lives far away, and who visits only during Christmas.

But there’s something really beautiful about the wait, about the anticipation, and we shouldn’t let it go to waste. Perhaps we’re waiting, neither for presents, nor for the “magic” of some of us find in the Christmas season, but for a moment of darkness or loneliness to pass, one that only the Lord can lift us out of.

Maybe we’re waiting for the advent of the day when we’re able to defeat an addiction, with help from God, or when we’re able to get a better job, holding on solely to God during our moments of tribulation. We know the day will come when the pain will be over, if we wait with the Lord for the storm to pass.

“They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on eagles’ wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint,” says Isaiah 40:31.

Advent can teach us to wait for the light, in whatever form it comes.
Living Well/Maureen Pratt

’Tis the season to calm down and let go of life’s stresses

Peace on earth. Good will toward men. The criterion of Christmas is forgiveness, peace, and a time for renewal of appreciation of our faith.

Emmanual Walk/Debra Tomaselli

A gift from our God who knows every child’s need

Shivering, I glanced outside: Grey skies added a chill to the December air. We, living in Florida, weren’t used to this. We don’t own a coat, or a blanket. We have no heat in the building. It is difficult to take off stress and put on cheer at any time of year, let alone during the jangling Christmas season.

Are you already looking past December and into a new year when it might seem that troubles will only get worse? It is to difficult to take off stress and put on cheer at any time of year, let alone during the jangling Christmas season.

Many people have spoken with, myself included, have had extremely difficult lives this year, peppered with loss, financial worry and health concerns. It might even be difficult to Hibernate through the next several weeks, only emerging when the new year is underway...

We then sing a verse from “O Come, Let’s take the opportunity to breathe deeply, enjoy the world with childlike eyes and renew our faith, energy and focus so that no matter what the next year brings, we will meet it with courage and strength.

(Maureen Pratt writes for Catholic News Service.)

Faith and Family/Sean Gallagher

A faith-filled Advent helps us broaden our hopes for Christmas

I’ve found that the older my five sons get, the more specific their Christmas wish lists become. “When can I get a new computer?” they’ll ask me when Michael, 11, and Raphael, 8, were younger. Now, if I’m a little more happy with just about anything that they receive.

I can even remember Raphael saying that if he got a cool Lego set, he’d be happy getting clothes for Christmas one year—quite a contrast from my reaction when I received similar Christmas gifts when I was his age.

Now it’s a little different. Michael definitely has certain Lego sets in mind that he’d like to see under the tree on Christmas morning. And I’ve found that he’s more willing to help him figure out what specific Lego set he should ask for.

He wants to pause and smile before I try to temper his hopes and broaden their horizons. I took pretty much the same approach to my Christmas wish list when I was at age.

Nonetheless, it’s not the only way I hope my advice might help others focus on what I consider the most important aspects of this holiday season. We then sing a verse from “O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

I’ve had one of our boys open up a door on a homemade Advent calendar. Behind each door is either a drawing of a saint whose feast is that day, an Advent or Christmas symbol or the various “O Antiphons” that are prayed in Evening Prayer. I’d call it a Christmas movie scene.

It used to be when I was a little girl, we’d count down to Christmas for this countercultural perspective on this holy day. It’s one which I am convinced is a countermeasure to Christmas will help broaden the hopes of others.

In fact, it’s never too early to lay the foundation for the Christmas will help broaden the hopes of others.

The same approach to my Christmas wish list might be useful.

The Christmas decorations that start filling our house that day are meant to be an expression of that. Hopefully, over time, this faith-filled approach to the weeks leading up to Christmas, together with the experiences of our sons for the upcoming celebration of Christmas, might be useful.

Given the growing secularized and commercialized approach to Christmas, it’s never too early to lay the foundation for this counter-cultural perspective on this holy day. This one which I am convinced will lead to a celebration of Christmas filled with a deeper and lasting happiness than a Lego set could ever provide.

Debra Tomaselli writes from Altamonte Springs, Florida. She can be reached at dtomaselli@cfl.rr.com •
Sunday, December 1, 2013

• Isaiah 2:1-5
• Romans 13:11-14
• Matthew 24:37-44

With this weekend, the Church begins its new liturgical year. In so doing, it also begins to use the A Cycle of readings at Sunday Masses.

This weekend’s first reading is from the first section of the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah is one of the most important prophetic books in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is unusually eloquent and profound. It also is one of the longest books in the Old Testament, although it is actually a collection of three distinct works.

As often is the case with other prophets, Isaiah at times warned the people that if they did not return to heartfelt religious fidelity their doom was on the way. This is certainly a theme of this first section of Isaiah.

No prophet, however, including Isaiah, spoke warnings without expressing a most hopeful and faith-filled thought that God, the Almighty and merciful, would protect the people in the end. After all, such was the promise of the Covenant: God had pledged to safeguard and secure the people, despite the stubbornness of the people and their fascination with sin, in spite of the catastrophe they brought upon themselves by sinning.

This weekend reading, the first Scriptural proclamation for Advent 2013, is a testament of this confidence and faith. God will judge the good and the bad. Such is the vindication when Jesus would come again in glory.

Reflection

Advent, begun with the liturgies of this weekend, calls us to prepare for Christmas. Preparation is much, much more than addressing Christmas cards and decorating Christmas trees. It means working studiously to make the coming of Jesus into earthly life, commensurated on Christmas, a personal event because we admit the our Lord into our loving hearts.

So, especially in Advent, the Church calls us to be good Christians and to rid ourselves of anything standing in the way. It calls us to set priorities. Regardless of Christmas 2013, Jesus will come again to earthly existence in a most glorious, victorious and final way. At that moment, where will each of us be? We must prepare ourselves for our Lord properly, beginning now. We must refine ourselves as honest disciples of the king born in Bethlehem. We must shape our lives accordingly.†

Longing for Emmanuel

By Sister Susan Marie Lindstrom, O.S.B.

Still my soul, O God of Advent. Attune my heart’s ear to the ancient songs of promise, of possibility. A world overflowing with plowshares.

With Spirit-breath, fan the embers of my soul into a fire that cannot be contained, a heat that might penetrate even the stone-cold heart, an energy that sustains the journey.

Kindle within me a light that will permeate my inner darkness, igniting anew a passion for Kingdom-living.

Benedictine Sister Susan Marie Lindstrom is a member of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove. She teaches theology at Bishop Chardock College in Indianapolis. A woman lights a candle in the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

Question Corner

Fr. Kenneth Doyle

While valuing poverty, bishops choose meeting sites with practicality in mind

I nscribe that the Catholic bishops of the United States are holding their annual meeting at the Marriott Hotel in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. This strikes me as an expensive site for a group who are constantly asking Catholics for contributions to the poor. Don’t they know that most of the faithful could not afford to stay at such a place for several days?

It strikes me that there are many Catholic properties around the country—seminaries, abbey or convents—which could accommodate them for much less money, and would serve as a better example.

Why don’t the bishops take a page from St. Francis of Assisi trees. They started acting like the original Apostles whom they claim to represent? (Jamestown, Ky.)

A fter his election in March of 2013, Pope Francis has continually called Christians to examine themselves against Christ’s own witness to poverty. On the feast of St. Francis, the pope hosted a lunch for the poor in Assisi. That same day, he addressed townsmen in strong words, saying that “the Church, all of us, should divest ourselves of worldliness; we should be a monk or a beggar, we should be a murderer because it kills souls, kills people, kills the Church.”

Such a message is especially true from a man who has chosen to live in a modest two-room apartment in a Vatican guest house for visitors, and to eat his meals at a common table.

Prompted by your question, I looked into the U.S. bishops’ choice of the Baltimore Marriott for their annual meeting. What I found is that they are indeed sensitive to the Gospel’s call for simplicity.

In fact, some years ago their annual meeting was moved from Washington, D.C.—where the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is headquartered—to Baltimore precisely because hotel rooms in Baltimore were rented for about two-thirds of what they had been paying in D.C.

Another reason for the change was that flights were generally cheaper into Baltimore-Washington International Airport than into Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

Realistically, the options for such a large meeting are limited. It requires a facility that can host 600 attendees, be easily accessible from all parts of the nation and provide 60,000 square feet of space for meetings, religious services, news conferences, etc.

Sometimes what is ideal needs to be sifted through what is practical and possible. Your question, though, serves as a valuable reminder: Optics are important, and Christians need habitually to view things through the lens of the poor.

How should I respond to a young couple, who were raised as Catholics, who do not plan to baptize their infant children? They intend to wait until the children are old enough to decide on a religion for themselves. (Baltimore, Md.)

I would ask the couple whether they follow the same standard in other areas of child rearing. Since they’re not sure whether their son will grow up to like math, do they decline to teach him arithmetic when he is little? The role of parents is to determine what opportunities they have benefited from, what virtues and values have helped them, what moral framework can offer guidance through life—and then to pass on the best of what they have learned to their children.

What Catholic parents say by having their infants baptized is this: We believe, both from our faith and from our experience, that the sacraments and Catholic teaching offer a clear channel to God, and we want our children to have that blessing.

(Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 40 Hopewell St., Albany, N.Y. 12208.)†

Readers may submit prose or poetry for faith column

The Criterion invites readers to submit original prose or poetry relating to faith or experiences of prayer for possible publication in the “My Journey to God” column.

Seasonal reflections also are appreciated. Please include name, address, parish and telephone number with submissions.

Send material for consideration to “My Journey to God,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46206 or e-mail to criterion@archindy.org.

First Sunday of Advent

Msgr. Owen E. Campion

Sunday Readings

Monday, December 2

Isaiah 4:2-6
Psalm 122:1-9
Matthew 8:5-11

Tuesday, December 3

St. Francis Xavier, priest
Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13

Wednesday, December 4

St. John Damascene, priest and doctor of the Church
Isaiah 26:1-6a
Psalm 23:1-6
Matthew 15:29-37

Thursday, December 5

Isaiah 26:1-6
Psalm 118:1-6, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a
Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Daily Readings

Friday, December 6

St. Nicholas, bishop
Isaiah 29:17-24
Psalm 27:1-4, 13-14
Matthew 9:27-31

Saturday, December 7

St. Ambrose, bishop and doctor of the Church
Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26
Psalm 147:1-6
Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8

Sunday, December 8

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17
Romans 15:4-8
Matthew 3:1-12

Jesus came and nailed the door of the inn on the front door of our home. It was a busy time for my family, the first day of December. Christmas was coming and I was a little worried about being able to entertain our guests. I had no idea what to do, so I turned to the internet and found a recipe for gingerbread cookies. I made them and they were a hit! I then turned to the internet again for ideas on decorating the tree. I found some great ideas and decided to make my own ornaments. I spent the whole afternoon decorating our Christmas tree. It was so much fun! When all was said and done, I realized that I had done something different with our Christmas tree. It was a simple change, but it made all the difference in the world. I was able to enjoy our Christmas tree and spend quality time with my family. It was the best Christmas ever!
Pope's embrace was heavenly, says man with disfiguring disease


VATICAN CITY (CNS)—For someone who has frequently been humbled and humiliated because of a disease that has severely disfigured his entire body, receiving the pope’s loving embrace was like being in paradise.

Riva Benich, who is afflicted with neurofibromatosis, said his brief encounter with Pope Francis on Nov. 6 at a general audience in St. Peter’s Square “seemed like forever.”

Images of the pope kissing and embracing a man with hereditary tumors, his head lined by his identity and background weren’t known until two Italian news outlets found and interviewed him.

“My heart was bursting,” he told Corriere della Sera on Nov. 18. When the pope hugged him tight, “I felt like I was in paradise.”

Riva, 53, lives in a small village near Vicenza in northern Italy with his younger sister Moreno Riva, who has the same genetic disorder, and their aunt, Caterina Lonto, who cares for them. The siblings’ mother later also suffered from the disease, which is typically hereditary.

Riva told the Italian magazine Panorama that when he met the pope, the thing that struck him most was that the pope didn’t hesitate at all. “I’m not contagious, but [the pope] didn’t know that. But he did it, period. He caressed my whole face and while he was doing it, I felt only love,” he said.

“First, I kissed his hand, then he kissed me and stroked me with his other hand,” Riva explained.

“Then he pulled me toward me, hugging me tight and kissing my face. My head was against his chest, and his arms were wrapped around me. He held me so tightly, cuddling me. And even if he didn’t get to talk, I tried to speak, to say something, but I wasn’t able to: I was too choked up. I lasted just a little more than a minute, but for me, it seemed like forever,” he told Panorama.

The pope’s embrace was frequently reported in numerous, often painful benign tumors. Riva said they constantly itch. His smile and his expression are so soft and beautiful. And his smile [is bright and wide].”

Riva’s story will be used in campaigns to increase awareness of the disease, which is typically hereditary.

If you are a victim of sexual misconduct by a person ministering on behalf of the Church, or if you know of anyone who has been a victim of such misconduct, please contact the archdiocesan victim assistance coordinator, who can be reached by calling 317-236-1548 or 800-382-9363, ext. 1548 chill@archindy.org.
Advent penance services are scheduled at archdiocesan parishes

Parishes throughout the archdiocese have scheduled communal penance services for Advent. The following is a list of services that have been reported to The Criterion.

**Batesville Deanery**
- Dec. 1, 1:30 p.m. for Immaculate Concepcion, Millhurst; St. John, Osgood; and St. Maurice, Napoleon, at St. Maurice, Napoleon
- Dec. 2, 6:30 p.m. at St. Lawrence, Lawrenceburg
- Dec. 3, 7:30 p.m. for St. Nicholas, Ripley County; St. Anthony of Padua, Morris; and St. Louis, Batesville, at St. Louis, Batesville
- Dec. 4, 7:30 p.m. for St. Vincent de Paul, Shelby County and St. Joseph, Shelbyville at St. Joseph, Shelbyville
- Dec. 5, 4:30 p.m. and 6:30-7:30 p.m. at St. Peter, Franklin County
- Dec. 5, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Greensburg
- Dec. 6, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. at All Saints, Yorkville
- Dec. 18, 7 p.m. for St. Maurice, Decatur County; and St. John the Evangelist, Enosburg, at St. John the Evangelist, Enosburg
- Dec. 19, 6:30 p.m. at St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Bright

**Bloomington Deanery**
- Dec. 2, 6:30 p.m. for St. Charles Borromeo, Bloomington
- Dec. 9, 7 p.m. at St. Martin of Tours, Martinsville
- Dec. 10, 7 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford
- Dec. 10, 7 p.m. at St. Agnes, Nashville
- Dec. 18, 6:30 p.m. at St. Jude, Spencer
- Dec. 19, 6:30 p.m. at St. John the Apostle, Bloomington

**Connersville Deanery**
- Dec. 4, 7:30 p.m. at St. Gabriel, Connersville
- Dec. 5, 7 p.m. at St. Bridget, Liberty
- Dec. 10, 7 p.m. at St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Cambridge City
- Dec. 12, 6:30 p.m. at St. Mary, Rushville
- Dec. 17, 6 p.m., following 5:15 p.m. Mass for Richmond Catholic Community at St. Mary, Richmond
- Dec. 18, 7 p.m. for St. Rose of Lima, Richmond Heights and St. Anne, New Castle at St. Anne, New Castle

**Indianapolis East Deanery**
- Dec. 3, 7 p.m. for Holy Cross and St. Philip Neri, Floyd County
- Dec. 5, 7 p.m. at Holy Spirit
- Dec. 5, 7 p.m. at St. Michael, Greenwood
- Dec. 10, 6:30 p.m. at St. Rita
- Dec. 11, 7 p.m. at St. Thomas the Apostle, Fortville
- Dec. 16, 7 p.m. for Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Bernadette and St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) at St. Bernadette
- Dec. 17, 7 p.m. at St. Mary SS Peter and Paul Cathedral: Confessions will be heard in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel from 4:30-5:30 p.m. each Saturday during Advent. On the Sunday mornings of Advent, confessions will be heard from 10:30-10:45 a.m. Confessions are also heard from noon to 1 p.m. each Friday

**Indianapolis North Deanery**
- Dec. 3, 7 p.m. at St. Lawrence
- Dec. 17, 6:30 p.m. at St. Lawrence
- Dec. 17, 7 p.m. at St. Mary SS Peter and Paul Cathedral: Confessions will be heard in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel from 4:30-5:30 p.m. each Saturday during Advent. On the Sunday mornings of Advent, confessions will be heard from 10:30-10:45 a.m. Confessions are also heard from noon to 1 p.m. each Friday

**Indianapolis South Deanery**
- Dec. 3, 6:30 p.m. at St. Ann
- Dec. 4, 7 p.m. at St. Roch
- Dec. 10, 7 p.m. at St. Jude
- Dec. 15, 6:30 p.m. at St. Mary, New Albany
- Dec. 16, 6:30 p.m. at Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- Dec. 17, 7 p.m. at St. Mark the Evangelist
- Dec. 18, 6:30 p.m. at St. Barnabas
- Dec. 23, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of the Greenwood, Greenwood County

**Indianapolis West Deanery**
- Dec. 1, 7:30 p.m. at Queen of Peace, Danville
- Dec. 11, 7 p.m. at St. Michael the Archangel
- Dec. 11, 7 p.m. at St. Susana, Plainfield
- Dec. 12, 7 p.m. at St. Malachi, Brownsburg
- Dec. 14, 9-11 a.m. for St. Anthony and Holy Trinity at St. Anthony
- Dec. 16, 7 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel
- Dec. 16, 7 p.m. at St. Thomas More, Mooresville
- Dec. 17, 7 p.m. at St. Monica

**New Albany Deanery**
- Dec. 3, 7 p.m. for Sacred Heart, Jeffersonville, and St. Augustine, Jeffersonville, at St. Augustine, Jeffersonville
- Dec. 4, 7 p.m. at St. Joseph, Corydon
- Dec. 4, 8:45 p.m. at St. Mary, New Albany
- Dec. 10, 7 p.m. at St. Mary-of-the-Knobs, Floyd County
- Dec. 10, 7 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua, Clarksville
- Dec. 11, 7 p.m. at St. Rita
- Dec. 17, 7 p.m. at St. Thomas the Apostle, Fortville
- Dec. 18, 6 p.m. for Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Bernadette and St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) at St. Bernadette
- Dec. 17, 7 p.m. at St. Mary SS Peter and Paul Cathedral: Confessions will be heard in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel from 4:30-5:30 p.m. each Saturday during Advent. On the Sunday mornings of Advent, confessions will be heard from 10:30-10:45 a.m. Confessions are also heard from noon to 1 p.m. each Friday

**Seymour Deanery**
- Dec. 5, 7 p.m. for Most Sorrowful Mother of God, St. Joseph of Peace, Madison, at Prince of Peace, Madison
- Dec. 11, 7 p.m. for Our Lady of Providence, Brownstown, and St. Ambrose, Seymour, at St. Ambrose, Seymour
- Dec. 15, 2 p.m. for Holy Trinity, Edinburgh, and St. Rose of Lima, Franklin, at Holy Trinity, Edinburgh
- Dec. 15, 4 p.m. for American Martyrs, Scottsburg, and St. Patrick, Salem at St. Patrick, Salem
- Dec. 19, 7 p.m. at St. Bartholomew, Columbus
- Dec. 21, 7 p.m. for St. Ann, Jennings County; St. Mary, Napoleon; and St. Joseph, Jennings County at St. Joseph, Jennings County
- Dec. 4, 7 p.m., Sacred Heart, Clinton
- Dec. 10, 1:30 p.m. at St. Margaret Mary, Terre Haute
- Dec. 10, 6:30 p.m. at Annunciation, Brazil
- Dec. 10, 7 p.m. at St. Benedict, Terre Haute
- Dec. 11, 7 p.m. at St. Paul the Apostle, Greencastle

**Terre Haute Deanery**
- Dec. 11, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Navillenot
- Dec. 12, 7 p.m. at St. Michael, Bradford
- Dec. 12, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Lanesville
- Dec. 15, 3 p.m. at Holy Family, New Albany
- Dec. 18, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, New Albany
- Dec. 18, 7 p.m. at St. Michael, Charlestown
- Dec. 19, 6:30 p.m. for St. Paul, Sellersburg and St. Joseph, Clark County at St. Paul, Sellersburg
- Dec. 22, 4:30 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Stargate

Father Dennis Nokele hears a confession at Christ the King Church in Indroquet, N.Y., on March 29.

**Archdiocese of Indianapolis**

Advent services are available on archdiocesan Web site

During the season of Advent, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis will have a special Web page at www.archindy.org/advent

The page contains various Advent resources, including links to the daily readings, past reflections, profiles of parishes, and links to other Advent websites.

**Vacation Rental**
- BEACHFRONT CONDO, Madera Beach, FL, 32808, 50 ft wide balcony over looking the Gulf of Mexico. Meet Insps. owner. See photos, maps. Call (813) 506-8516.

**For Sale**

**Two side by side outside cemeteries, fourth level, Patios A & B Our Lady of Peace Mausoleum. 20% off going price. $5,000 ea. 800-514-2618 or email tanya@ftbcreatables.com.

**Double Cryt in Calvary Cemetery, Indianapolis South side. Beautiful location in Patid 1, Tier B, Number 132. Priced to sell at $6,000. Compare at $8,000 to $9,000. Please call 225-278-1096 for further details.**

**Scecina Memorial High School**
- Director of Enrollment Management
- Scecina Memorial High School, a ministry of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, is seeking a full-time Director of Enrollment Management.
- The Director leads, directs, and collaboratively develops and facilitates the implementation of a student enrollment plan that results in annually enrolling the optimal number of students as indicated by the school's strategic plan.
- To accomplish these objectives, the Director works collaboratively with the Directors of Communications and other in the advancement and marketing of the school, ensuring cohesive messaging in the recruitment, enrollment, and retention of students.
- The Director of Enrollment Management supervises a part-time assistant and serves as a staff liaison to various committees and task forces at the school.
- The Director reports to the Vice President of Advancement. High School or college recruiting experience is desirable. Applicant should be a professional and practicing Catholic. A college degree is required. See the full position description on www.scecina.org/employment.
- Application deadline is December 13, 2013. Email a cover letter and resume to Bob Golobish, Vice President of Advancement, bgolobish@scecina.org.
Describe NCYC in one word: Youths respond

Dear NCYC participants: Thank you for a weekend I will never forget

By Briana Stewart

Two years ago was the first time I had ever heard of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC). It was being hosted here in Indianapolis, and everywhere I went I heard clips of conversation about the three-day celebration. “NCYC is so much fun!” “I am so excited for NCYC this year!” “NCYC changes your life.” It didn’t understand then how teenagers—normal, social, sometimes irresponsible teenagers—could be so excited about their faith.

I didn’t understand the crazy hats and funky costumes that many of the participants wore. I didn’t understand how 23,000 teens would want to come together from all across the nation to celebrate Catholicism. Now, I understand.

After attending the 2013 National Catholic Youth Conference, I have been enlightened. I arrived Thursday afternoon at St. John the Evangelist Church for the opening Mass for youths from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. I had been looking forward to this event since I was told that I would be attending NCYC as an intern for The Criterion. The church was gorgeous with high-arched ceilings. Twenty or so priests sat near the front and concelebrated the Mass, all in white. And the large statues placed around the church enthralled me. But the sight and the singing were just so beautiful that tears streamed down my face.

After the procession, the mood in the halls lightened, and kids were getting ready for the opening session down at Lucas Oil Stadium. I was also excited as I walked into a sea of flashing lights, squid hats, and chattering teens inside the stadium. The beginning of the session was filled with musical acts and dancing from the teens, and plenty of screaming! I was getting so excited. It was amazing.

Kids were tweeting all kinds of stuff so they could show up on the Jumbotron screens, but their tweets were so refreshing and clean. Finally, the party really started, and the emcees, Jesse Mambiss, came out to get the 23,000 people in attendance even more hyped up—if that was even possible at this point!

The most memorable part of the opening session was when he asked us three questions and we responded. Loudly.

“Who’s the Church?”
“Us!”
“Where’s the Church?”
“Right here and everywhere!”
“How will others know that?”
“All are welcome!”

The echo from all of our voices was incredible to hear.

Complete silence came afterward, letting the sound hang in the air and letting me absorb what I had just heard. It was truly awesome to hear the strength in the voices of these teens representing their Church. I now know what wonder sounds like.

In fact, if I didn’t get the chance to attend NCYC, I wouldn’t have been strengthened in my decision to do this.

It may have been a different world, but a world I would like to visit more often.

The last event I attended was Jason and Crystalina Evert’s seminar, “Love or Lust?” on Friday. It was empowering, helpful and humorous.

I was so inspired afterward that I made a promise to myself to stay pure until I’m joined in holy matrimony with my husband. I never felt so confident and excited for the future than when I put that purity ring on my left hand. If I didn’t get the chance to attend NCYC, I wouldn’t have been strengthened in my decision to do this.

The rest of my weekend was a blur of seminars and crowds, but I loved it all the same. I felt like I was in a different world. I mean, everywhere I turned, I saw boys talking about the new crucifix they just bought, and all kinds of teenscrowding a booth trying to get a “VIRGINITY ROCKS” T-shirt. These teenagers and all the people attending the conference really changed my life and reinforced my belief in Catholicism. So thank you.

Thank you, all you 23,000 brothers and sisters, for the future than when I put that purity ring on my left hand. If I didn’t get the chance to attend NCYC, I wouldn’t have been strengthened in my decision to do this.

In fact, if I didn’t get the chance to be “Signed. Sealed. Delivered.” with all these other teens, I would still be under the impression that being proud of my faith is embarrassing and really not very fun. These teenagers and all the people attending the conference really changed my life and reinforced my belief in Catholicism.

Thank you for giving me two days I will never forget.

(Briana Stewart, an intern for The Criterion, is a senior at Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School in Indianapolis.)