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Seminarians and deacons process in for the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 23. (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)

Below, teens show their joy during the opening evening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 21. (Photo courtesy of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry)

NATIONAL CATHOLIC YOUTH CONFERENCE
INCYC
NOVEMBER 21-23, 2019 INDIANAPOLIS, IN





Youths from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, worship in song during a session at the National Catholic Youth Conference at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 22. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

NCYC teens offer promise for the present, future of the Church

“Viva Cristo Rey! Long live Christ the King!”

Those words from Archbishop Charles C. Thompson’s homily during the closing Mass for the biennial National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 23 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis punctuated a three-day gathering of faith for 20,000 teenagers, chaperones, clergy, religious, speakers and volunteers. The liturgy celebrating the Solemnity of Jesus Christ as King of the Universe ended the pilgrimage of faith.

And the fact that a 2012 film, *For Greater Glory*, recalled the brutal

martyrdom of 14-year-old Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio of Mexico during the *Cristero* movement where many were killed for being Catholic, as Archbishop Thompson noted, opened the eyes of teens to learn of someone their age who literally died for his faith.

See related editorial, page 4B.

Though the young people who attended NCYC will, God willing, not suffer the same as now-St. Jose Luis (canonized by Pope Francis in 2016), the teens were encouraged to have the courage to live out their lives of faith in all they say and do.

In today’s world, we know that is no easy task.

Their charge as they returned home was to harness the energy and excitement that resulted from the gathering, which offers so much promise for the present and the future of the Church. This year’s theme, “Blessed, Broken, Given” (“*Bendito, Partido, Entregado*” in Spanish) encouraged teens to use God’s gifts, not be afraid of life’s challenges, know they are never alone, and live out their vocation as missionary disciples.

We hope the stories and photos featured on pages 1A-12A in this week’s special keepsake issue of *The Criterion* paint a portrait of a young Church that is serving as a beacon of light in a troubled world.

The regular Nov. 29 issue is included as the center 12 pages of this keepsake edition. Although they are in the center, the pages are designed to be pulled out.

For more photos from the conference, visit www.CriterionOnline.com.

The regular section is labeled page 1B to 12B. Our regular features are included there: Archbishop Charles C. Thompson’s column, “Faith Alive!,” Calendar of Events, Opinion, Obituaries and other local news. We hope you enjoy the young people’s stories, their enthusiasm and their passion for our shared faith.

—Mike Krokos, editor



Teenagers show their joy dancing in a conga line during the opening evening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 21. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

‘I bless you with all my heart,’ pope tells youth in message to NCYC

INDIANAPOLIS (CNS)—Here is the text of Pope Francis’ videotaped message to the 20,000 youths and chaperones attending the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis on Nov. 21-23. It was the pope’s first recorded message to the biennial conference.



Pope Francis

Released by the Vatican in Spanish while the pope was in Thailand, the video was played with English subtitles for the youths during NCYC’s opening session:

“Dear young people of NCYC, “I send you an affectionate greeting and my prayers at this moment of encounter that you are living. May it

be an opportunity to deepen your faith and communion. May it light your missionary hearts with the courage and strength to live in and with the Lord always as a Church sent forth.

“Today, as in the beginning, we need to go out to meet each person, as it is our mission to do so, especially with those most separated and those who are suffering most. We must meet the existential peripheries of our world.

“You know from your everyday life that many are alone, that many do not know Jesus. Go, go and take the world with you. Go and fill your surroundings, even the digital ones. Not of convictions. Not to convince others. Not to proselytize. But to bear witness of the tenderness and mercy of Jesus.

“I bless you with all my heart. [Blesses viewers with the sign of the cross.] And don’t forget to pray for me. Thank you.” †

Youths share how theme of 'Blessed, Broken, Given' reflects their lives and their relationships with God

By John Shaughnessy

For 15-year-old Tabitha Njoroge, being together with 20,000 Catholic youths from across the country is a revelation, especially considering how much her life has changed in three years.



Tabitha Njoroge

Back then, Tabitha, her parents and her three sisters had left their homeland in Kenya to come to the United States.

"Back there, we were struggling to have a meal," Tabitha recalls.

It's partly why the theme of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 21-23—"Blessed, Broken, Given"—resonates so much with her.

"I'm blessed with my family. I really couldn't be myself without them. They help me a lot in my life," said Tabitha, a member of Holy Angels Parish in her new home, Indianapolis. "And 'given'—I was given a chance to come here to the United States to have a new life. It's a huge opportunity."

She paused before adding, "It's not like I'm broken, but leaving my family members at home—like my cousins—it's kind of lonely sometimes."

Tabitha's insights about her life show the dual nature of the mindset of the youths who participate in the National Catholic Youth Conference.

For three days, the 20,000 teenagers form a joyful, energetic and unifying representation of how much their Catholic faith means to them, of how much they have to offer the Church.

At the same time, all of them come with their own stories of how the theme of the conference—"Blessed, Broken, Given"—personally reflects their own lives and their ever-developing relationship with God.

Consider the story of 16-year-old McKayla Ewing.

"In early October, my grandpa had two hemorrhaging strokes," says McKayla,



McKayla Ewing

a member of the youth group from the Diocese of Saint Cloud, Minn. "After the second one, he couldn't communicate. He's still in the hospital.

"He's a deacon, and he's always showed us how to live our faith every day.

Everyone is praying for him. To see how God is working through him—through the power of prayer—I feel so blessed by that. He's still struggling, but he's still fighting, too."



Bryce Kuo

Fifteen-year-old Bryce Kuo chose "Broken."

"That's because I want to be better at sharing God with other people," said Bryce, part of the youth group from the Diocese of Albany, N.Y. "There are a lot of people outside the

Church who aren't connected to God, and they could be if they had someone who could influence them.

"I'm blessed to have a connection with God and be here. This will help me be closer to God, and then I can help other people."



Alejandra Aguilar

Eighteen-year-old Alejandra Aguilar sees all three themes flowing through her life.

"I'm very thankful for everything I've been given," said Alejandra, a member of St. Patrick Parish in Indianapolis. "I thank God for the

health of my family and my friends. I just hope I can give everything I can to others



Youths from the Diocese of Joliet, Ill., exude joy during the opening evening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 21 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

for all the things he has blessed me with.

"When I think about 'broken,' I think of all the battles he puts in front of you, but he knows you'll be able to conquer anything that comes your way with his help."

She's relying on her faith and God as she gears up for the latest challenge in her life—a challenge that she knows is also a blessing.

"I'll be the first one in my family to go to college. It's a whole new world for me. A lot of my friends have older siblings and parents who have gone through it. I have older siblings, but none of them have gone through this. My parents are from Mexico City. For me, it's all very new.

"I want to give back to the community with the degree I get. I hope to be an immigration lawyer and help people through the immigration process."

For 17-year-old Angel Rizo, there's the knowledge of just how blessed he is.

"So many of us take the things we have for granted," says Angel, part of the youth group from the Diocese of Nashville, Tenn. "We usually get things, but we never think about what God gives



Angel Rizo

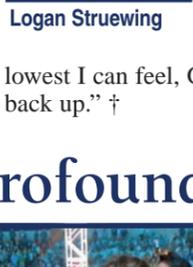
us and how we need to give back. I try to do that by going to adoration, praying for others and doing community service."

Logan Struewing focused on "Broken" as the theme that resonated most with him.

"For me and a lot of people, we all have ways we are broken," said Logan, 17, a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis. "None of us is perfect.

God knows we are broken, but he still believes in us, and he still wants us to be the best we can be.

"That gives me a lot of hope. Even when I'm feeling the lowest I can feel, God is there to pick me back up." †



Logan Struewing

Teens say youth conference impacted their lives in profound ways

By Mike Krokos

Megan Davis, Elizabeth Eberhard and Allison Dible were fired up after the opening evening session of the biennial National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 21 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Forty-eight hours later at the end of the three-day pilgrimage of faith, the teenagers from the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, admitted that their excitement had reached another level.

"It's been amazing!" said Allison, a high school senior, after the closing Mass on Nov. 23 in Lucas Oil Stadium. "It's just so incredible to see so many young people, all in one space, praising God. It's just really inspiring."

"It took my breath away. I can't begin to explain how much love there is [here]—and such beautiful community," noted



Caden Sova, left, and Reece Donahue, both of the Diocese of Helena, Mont., offered to do back flips in exchange for prayer in the thematic village during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 23.

Elizabeth, a junior, of her fellow teens.

"Now that it's all over, I want three more days—at least," added fellow junior Megan. "I want more. I am super excited to go home and keep my faith up and help it continue to grow. It's going to be an adventure."

For the teenagers, who are members of St. John Neumann Parish in Sunbury, Ohio, the weekend included opening their hearts to God's word and taking time to listen to the messages shared by speakers.

It was the second time Elizabeth was attending NCYC, and she was eager to share the experience with new people.

Both Megan and Allison were "excited" about seeing so many young people together living out their Catholic faith.

"I hope they go home changed,"

Elizabeth added.

She was not alone in that sentiment.

"The best weekend of my life"

Karle Kramer arrived at NCYC not sure what was in store for her.

She left with a sense of how to better live out her faith.

"I think this is the best weekend of my life," said the sophomore from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. "I've met so many people, and I've gone to so many sessions about forgiveness. It really changed my perspective on forgiving people, not holding things in my heart, but opening myself up to [others'] perspective."

Bren Peters, a high school senior from the Diocese of Salina, Kansas, who attended NCYC two years ago, said she too wanted to use the opportunity to "grow in my faith."

So did Matthew Uhlenkamp, a junior from the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

"I came two years ago, and it was just as amazing," he said.

"You learn so much and you meet amazing people."

Area code 406 and a Bible verse

Caden Sova and Reece Donahue literally "flipped out" at this year's NCYC.

The high school seniors from the Diocese of Helena, Mont., attended the youth gathering in 2017, but this year decided that their time in the air would literally continue inside the thematic village at the youth gathering.

They both sported signs around their neck that read: "Wanna see a flip?" If a passerby said "yes," they would do a back flip for them.

But there was also a catch: They asked each person to stop what they were doing and set their alarms to pray at 4:06 p.m. later that day.

"406 is the area code for the entire state of Montana," Caden and Reece explained, "and there's a Bible verse [Phil 4:6] about praying and giving thanks



Megan Davis, left, Allison Dible and Elizabeth Eberhard, all from the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, put their hands on a Bible during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 21.

(Photos by Mike Krokos)

at all times. Hopefully, we're going to have phone alarms going off all over Indianapolis."

Both teenagers were moved during adoration, seeing everyone go down to the floor on their knees in worship.

Reece admitted he was looking forward to the closing Mass on Nov. 23 as well.

"It's just so beautiful seeing 20,000-plus youths going down and receiving the Eucharist all at one time. It's the best!" he said. †





Soulful symphony of young Catholic joy soars at NCYC

By John Shaughnessy

The opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference began with a blast of music, but not from the expected source of For King & Country, the high-energy, power-rock Christian band from Australia.

Instead, the first musical strains came from thousands of teenagers outside Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on the night of Nov. 21, as they waited in a damp drizzle for the security-checkpoint entrances on one side of the stadium to open.

The singing began with a growing serenade of “Happy Birthday” for two people in the crowd, followed by several uninhibited choruses of the lyrics, “We love Jesus deep down in my heart!”

And so the soulful symphony of young Catholic joy that always soars when 20,000 youths come together at NCYC was in full swing once again.

High notes had already been sounded earlier in the day in the conference’s thematic village in the Indiana Convention Center, a multi-sensory scene of music, games and activities for the teens from 145 dioceses across the United States and also from Australia, Canada and England.

Elle Scarborough, Morgan and Lauren Stanislav, and Abby, Ava and Kate Hughes from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, drew smiles and rave reviews in the karaoke area, especially when they ended their performance with an exuberant “Woo, woo!”

At 17, Hannah Renslow of the Diocese of Saint Cloud, Minn., struck a softer note as she stood with several friends and said, “If you had told me two years ago that I’d be here, I wouldn’t have believed you. I feel the friends I’ve been given have led me into the faith life I have today. Now, my faith is almost over the roof. I just want to keep it going.”

And 17-year-old Angel Rizo of the Diocese of Nashville provided a sacred chord when he shared the difference that eucharistic adoration has made in his life, “I feel blessed when I’m sitting down and talking to God, and he’s there to help me.”

‘I’m really shocked by this’

That blending of spirituality and high spirits continued into the evening when the stadium doors finally opened and the 20,000 youths came together for the first time.

Almost immediately, the teens flowed to the floor of the stadium, forming an

ever-growing conga line as they anticipated For King & Country to take the stage. Adding his own moves to the music being piped through the stadium, 16-year-old Brendan Fix of the Archdiocese of Detroit used his phone to capture the scene on video for posterity.

“I’m really shocked by this,” he said. “They always tell you there are going to be a lot of people here, but I never imagined seeing this many Catholics in one place. This gives me hope for the world that there are still so many people who care about their faith all over the country.”

Up in the stadium seats, adults Laura Zapanta and Christine Colcombe also joined in the festivities—after riding on a bus for nearly seven hours from Greensburg, a Pennsylvania community near Pittsburgh.

They were among the chaperones for the 150 youths from Greensburg who filled four buses for the trip to Indianapolis. Getting into the spirit of the evening, Zapanta and Colcombe wore glow-in-the-dark tubes of green, blue and pink in their hair. Their smiles also glowed as the two friends watched the youths on the stadium floor.

“It’s just amazing to see this many young people excited and happy,” said Zapanta.

Colcombe nodded and added, “It’s energizing and encouraging to see so many young people involved in the Catholic Church.”

Soon, For King & Country took the stage, performing a 45-minute, high-energy, power-rock set of Christian music marked by strobe lights, a burst of confetti and singer Luke Smallbone leaving the stage and going into one section of the seats, high-fiving his way through the stunned, delighted, amped crowd.

A message from the pope and a soul-stirring scene

Another surprise came from Pope Francis—a video message from him displayed on the stadium’s huge overhead screens, marking the first time that a pope has shared his wishes with the youths at NCYC. Among his brief remarks, the pope said about the youths and the conference, “May it be an opportunity to deepen your faith and communion. May it light your missionary hearts with the courage and strength to live in, and with, the Lord—always as a Church sent forth.”

The pope’s message set the stage for the praise-and-worship part of the



Youths from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, have a good time together performing karaoke in the thematic village in the Indiana Convention Center at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 21. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

evening—and one soul-stirring scene that left the crowd in reverent silence.

In that moment, youths from across the country ringed the stadium floor holding lit candles. At the same time, a procession—with a crucifix held high at the forefront—led a Bible to the stage for a reading from St. Luke’s Gospel, the one about Jesus’ encounter with two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

From the stage, Cleveland Bishop Nelson J. Perez reflected on the reading.

As he spoke at one point, all the lights in the stadium were on the stage, leaving the seating sections in a shroud of darkness. Bishop Perez asked everyone there to take out their cell phones and turn on its flashlight. The rest of the stadium suddenly became like a night sky pierced by thousands of points of light.

“Everybody look around at all these lights,” he said. “Remember what Jesus said: You are the light of the world. Do not, do not, do not let anybody put your light under a bushel basket. Do not let anybody extinguish your light. Do not let anybody rob you of the gift and the treasure of your faith and your dignity and your love.”

‘He restores our hope’

The theme of that gospel also became a focal point for Mary Quirk as she took the stage alone to talk with her fellow teenagers, knowing the challenges they often face.

“When we walk our hardest paths in life, God is still with us,” said Mary, a youth from

the Archdiocese of Louisville, Ky. “On the road to Emmaus, the two disciples were battling with mourning, with disappointment, with fear. And still, they encountered Jesus. And he spoke God’s word to them directly, and they had their hope restored.

“Similarly, we walk long roads, hard roads, roads where we feel broken, we feel lost, we feel nervous, we feel guilty, we feel that maybe we can’t go on. But we do. Because it’s in these times that God comes to us. He speaks his word, and he restores our hope.”

As the opening session of NCYC neared its end, the house band led the crowd in the repeated singing of the musical verse, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

The impact of music even continued for many of the youths as they left the stadium to head to their hotels in a cold rain.

On one street near the stadium, a group of youths walked and sang, “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart!”

On another corner in front of the stadium, a street musician blew his trumpet to the tune of “When the Saints Come Marching In,” leading the passing youths to clap and sing along.

The soulful symphony of Catholic youths sharing their joy for their faith echoed into the night and continued throughout the conference, sounding a hopeful note for the future.

(Natalie Hoefler contributed to this story.) †

Apostolic nuncio exhorts young people at NCYC to know that Christ is alive

By Sean Gallagher

Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, told the 20,000 young people attending the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 22 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis that Pope Francis had shared with him his desire to be in Indianapolis with them.

The only problem was, the pope was scheduled to visit Thailand and Japan during the biennial youth conference.



Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, speaks on Nov. 22 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis to the 20,000 people attending the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

“So, he said to me, ‘Go to Indianapolis and speak in my name,’” Archbishop Pierre recalled.

The nuncio then shared with his listeners a message for them from the pope given to him by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State.

“The Holy Father asks young people to discern—that’s a very important word—prayerfully—another important word,” Archbishop Pierre said. “When you pray, you ask the Lord what he wants for you today, how the Lord is calling you to a way of life marked by generous self-giving and faithful discipleship so that you may serve the Church and those most in need with joy and love.”

After sharing this message, Archbishop Pierre reflected on Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation released earlier this year, “*Christus Vivit*” (“Christ is Alive”), on youth and vocational discernment.

During his remarks, he interacted often with his listeners, asking them questions, making jokes, often to much cheering.

Describing his young listeners as “the now of God,” Archbishop Pierre exhorted them to be missionaries.

“You are the most

important part of the Church,” he said to cheers. “You are the missionaries of the Church, missionaries to your friends, missionaries to your families, missionaries to the old people, missionaries to the priests. You know, the priests, they need to have you on their side, and also the bishops.”

Archbishop Pierre reflected on a quote from St. Francis de Sales, a French saint who died in 1622. “Be who you are and be that well to give honor to the Master Craftsman whose handiwork you are.”

“You are all beautiful people,” Archbishop Pierre said. “You know, you are not beautiful because of you, but because God made you beautiful. This is the difference. So, we are proud to be who we are, because God made us who we are. And we are faithful to the will of God, to honor the Craftsman whose handiwork you are.”

He later spoke about the three primary truths of the faith that Pope Francis said in his exhortation that young people should remember for themselves and proclaim to others through their lives: God love you; God is your Savior; God is alive.

“God loves you,” Archbishop Pierre said, later quoting the exhortation. “He loves you even if, at times, you sin and disappoint him or others. Pope Francis asks you to ‘trust that the memory of God is not a hard disk that saves and archives all your data.’ No. This is not the mindset of God. His memory is a heart filled with tender compassion, one that finds joy in

deleting every trace of evil” (#115).

In sharing with his listeners the importance of knowing God as our Savior, Archbishop Pierre said that the pope wants them to have their “eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of the Crucified One. He reconciles and saves.”

“So spend time watching him, contemplating him,” Archbishop Pierre said. “Your prayer should be just looking at the cross, because from the cross comes love. And we all need to be loved and saved.”

Finally, the nuncio turned to the truth that Christ is alive.

“This is the essence of Christian faith,” Archbishop Pierre said. “Death does not have the last word. Jesus is risen. He is alive. He is alive in your life—in your life.”

In his parting words, he complimented those attending NCYC and had a message for the Catholics of central and southern Indiana.

“My young friends, I’m impressed because you are here, because the Church is here,” Archbishop Pierre said. “And the Church is the body of Christ. It is the sacrament of his presence in this place.”

“I would like to say to the archbishop of Indianapolis [Charles C. Thompson] that we are blessed today. So also are you a blessing for the Church in this archdiocese.

“So, something is happening here. You can feel it in the air. Christ is here. He is alive in you. May he live always in you. And may you be blessed, broken and given to our world so that it may be more merciful.” †

Shouts of ‘Viva Cristo Rey!’ mark NCYC closing Mass

By Natalie Hoefler

A spirit of joy permeated Lucas Oil Stadium as the call-and-response rang out. But it was not the typical call heard in the stadium home of the Indianapolis Colts. Nor was it led by any ordinary fan.

“Viva Cristo Rey!” shouted Archbishop Charles C. Thompson.

“Viva!” cried 20,000 Catholic youths, chaperons, volunteers, youth ministers and seminarians, priests and bishops.

It was the call of a shepherd during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 23 in Indianapolis. And it was the response of the faithful—as well as several hundred priests and six bishops concelebrating the Mass on the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, the feast ending the 2019 liturgical year.

In his homily, Archbishop Thompson explained that “Viva Christo Rey,” meaning “long live Christ the King,” became the cry of the *Cristero* movement fighting for religious freedom in Mexico in the 1920s when the Mexican government severely persecuted the Catholic Church in the country.

During the war, the archbishop explained that Jose Luis Sanchez del

Rio, “refused to denounce Jesus Christ as King, even to the point of death. Just before being shot, he is said to have shouted out ‘Viva Cristo Rey!’”

Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio was just 14 years old.

“[He] was canonized a saint by Pope Francis in 2016,” Archbishop Thompson told the youths. “Yes, he was one of you.”

The leader of the Church in central and southern Indiana expounded on the topic of king to the youths on this special feast day.

“The idea of a king tends to conjure up notions of power, royalty, prestige, wealth, crowns, thrones, castles, servants and privilege,” he said.

But “no such notions” are associated with Christ, King of the Universe, he noted.

“Our Scripture readings, particularly Luke’s Gospel account of the crucifixion, depicts one who is declared a king in ridicule, persecution and death,” Archbishop Thompson explained. “He is taunted, made to suffer and condemned as a criminal. Made to wear a crown of thorns. Thrust upon a cross as his throne. Bloodied, bruised, beaten and stripped of every thread of human decency.”

And yet we worship him today as our king and Savior, the archbishop said. “Christ and his young Church are indeed alive!” he exclaimed, noting that at NCYC “grace has flowed abundantly in various ways, and hopefully we will all leave here richer for the time spent in relation to God and one another.”

He encouraged the youths to “remain Christ-centered ... and trust in the grace of the Holy Spirit that has signed, sealed and claimed you as a beloved child of God. No power in the world can take that from you.

“You have been called to holiness and mission, claiming your place in the Church,



Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend in Indiana gives Communion to an NCYC participant at the Nov. 23 closing Mass. (Photo by Mike Krokos)



Youths from around the country hold hands for the Our Father during NCYC’s closing Mass in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 23. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson serves as the principal celebrant for the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 23.

(Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

claiming your place in the Kingdom of God. ...

“Until next NCYC or we meet in Paradise, may each of us exude the joy of the Gospel proclaiming, ‘Viva Cristo Rey! Viva Cristo Rey! Viva Cristo Rey!’”

Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Father Agustino Torres and Katie Prejean McGrady, emcees for this year’s NCYC, introduced the emcees for NCYC 2021 before the final blessing at Mass.

Raucous cheers rang out as they called out the names of Society of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity Sister Miriam James Heidland and Brian Greenfield as the two ran up the ramp to the altar.

Father Agustino and McGrady prayed over the next two emcees. Then author and Catholic radio co-host Sister Miriam announced the theme for NCYC 2021: “Ablaze.”

“That means the Holy Spirit is going to come into your life, transform your life [and] set you on fire so you can preach Christ to the ends of the world!” she cried.

Campus minister, author and national speaker Brian Greenfield added that the 2021 theme comes from chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles, “when the Holy Spirit came upon the upper room and blessed and empowered the Apostles. ...

“We’ve got two years to get ready for this, two years for what the Holy Spirit wants to do. So what does that mean?”

“It means this: read Acts, chapter two,” he said, following on a call throughout NCYC 2019 for youths to read the Scripture daily. “Prepare your hearts. ... Pray every day with all your hearts. Pray for one another, pray for us, pray for the Church.”

Archbishop Thompson also called for the youths to pray for their bishops, and also for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis as it prepares for the next biennial conference.

“Dear young people, brothers and sisters in Christ, your witness of being blessed, broken and given is essential to the Church, the mission of the Lord,” he said. “Now you can applaud yourselves.”



Society of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity Sister Miriam James Heidland shares some remarks with the 20,000 youths, chaperones and youth ministers in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the conference’s closing Mass on Nov. 23. Near the end of the Mass, she and Brian Greenfield were announced as the emcees for NCYC 2021. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

The shouting that ensued lasted several minutes. Archbishop Thompson slowly turned his head, taking in the mass of young people cheering and clapping in the stadium. A joyful grin spread across his face and shined through his eyes. The grin turned into a laugh, making the 20,000 youths cheer louder.

“You’ve been great, but it’s past my bedtime,” he finally said, still smiling. “We look forward to seeing you at NCYC in 2021, back home again here in Indiana.”

With that he said the final blessing, sending the youths out on their call “to holiness and mission.” †

Powerful moments during conference lead teens to closer bond with Christ

By John Shaughnessy

Two powerful moments stand out to Paul Sifuentes as he recalls the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis.



Paul Sifuentes

The first one occurred on the evening of Nov. 22 when the 20,000 youths from across the country once again came together in Lucas Oil Stadium, this time for eucharistic adoration.

“They had rushed the stage earlier to get closer to bands,

but this time they rushed the stage to get closer to the Lord in the Eucharist,” said Sifuentes, the director of youth ministry for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. “It was powerful seeing them try to get closer to Christ.”

The second special moment for

Sifuentes happened on the closing night of the conference on Nov. 23, as Mass was celebrated for the youths from 145 dioceses across the United States and also from Australia, Canada and England.

“Leading up to the conference, we had talked about the highlight of the week needing to be the Mass, and the climax of the Mass needing to be the receiving of the Eucharist. And it was.

“It was beautiful because everyone has a different experience of NCYC, and everyone is on their own pilgrimage, but we all come together at the end, and we all receive Jesus Christ. He’s the one who unites us. He is who empowers us. And he is who sends us forth. And all those youths are going to receive Christ again when they go home.”

Sifuentes hopes the beauty and power of those encounters with Christ stay with the 20,000 youths into the future. He especially hopes that connection continues to shape the lives of the 1,456 youths from the archdiocese who participated in NCYC.

“My hope for them is that they had

a powerful experience, an enriching pilgrimage, and that they see their life as a larger pilgrimage that they’re always journeying. There may not be the crazy hats and the crazy experiences of NCYC, but there are opportunities to encounter Christ and draw closer to Christ” in their families, parishes and communities.

He also sees the youths’ experiences at NCYC as an opportunity for their parishes to make a special effort to learn more about the faith-filled moments their youthful members had during the three-day conference.

“These youths who had these encounters with Christ at NCYC need to come back to their parishes and share their powerful moments,” Sifuentes noted. “Adults should ask them, ‘What were the powerful moments? Where did you see Christ?’”

Sifuentes also expressed his appreciation for the more than 900 volunteers who worked to help create a safe environment for the youths and the adult chaperones who accompanied them.

“I am personally thankful for each of them. Their involvement allowed our youth to encounter Christ. And I think those volunteers would say they had a powerful experience themselves.”

He hopes the number of volunteers increases even more in the years ahead when NCYC is scheduled to return to Indianapolis in 2021, 2023 and 2025.

“The more people we can have at NCYC having a powerful experience, the better it is for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church in central and southern Indiana.”

Sifuentes says that’s the ultimate goal for the archdiocese in serving as the host for the most recent NCYC and the ones in the future.

“It says we’re committed to youth, that we place a priority on helping teenagers encounter Jesus Christ. We’re a welcoming community, and we’ll work hard and roll up our sleeves for people to join us here.” †



Blessed • Broken • Given



Above, young Catholics from around the country encircle the floor of Lucas Oil Stadium holding candles during the opening session of NCYC on Nov. 21. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Above, Congregation of Mary Queen Sister Faustina Le of the Springfield-Cape Girardeau Diocese in Missouri and Sara Brown of the Archdiocese of Atlanta share a joyful moment playing a game before a session on Nov. 22 during NCYC. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Above, a spotlight shines through the smoke of burning incense while Father Josh Johnson of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, La., celebrates Benediction on Nov. 22 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during NCYC. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Left, wearing big foam cowboy hats representing their roots in Texas, youths from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston compete in a game of Jenga in the thematic park of NCYC in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

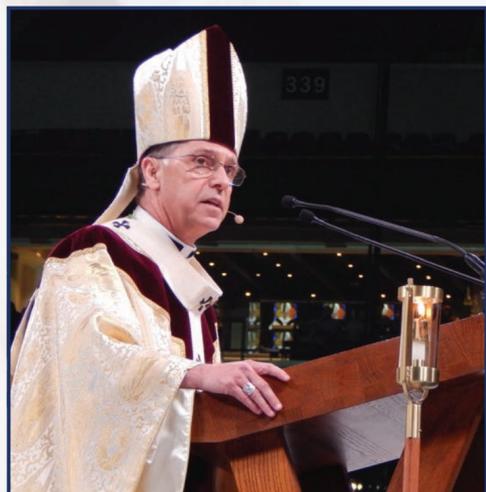


Above, youths and chaperones from St. Rita Parish in Indianapolis pose for a group photo in the thematic park at NCYC on Nov. 21. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

NCYC 2019



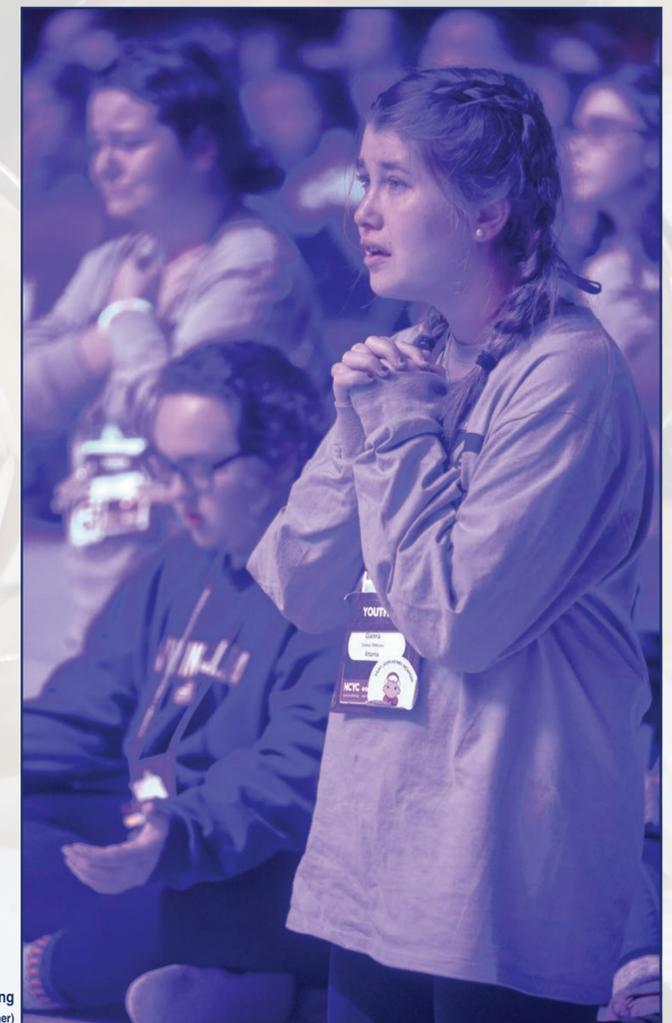
Above, confetti floats down on the crowd and the Christian rock band For King & Country during the opening night of NCYC at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 21. (Photo courtesy of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry)



Left, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson shares his homily during the closing Mass of NCYC at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 23. (Photo by Mike Krokos)



Above, the youths who participated in NCYC's Top Talent show line up for a photo after the contest. Miley Azbill of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati holding a plaque in the center, was the winner. (Photo by Mike Krokos)



Right, Gianna DiMuzio of the Archdiocese of Atlanta cries while kneeling in prayer during eucharistic adoration on Nov. 22 in Lucas Oil Stadium during NCYC. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Hundreds of priests share God's mercy at NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) drew 20,000 youths from across the country to Indianapolis to be inspired by a wide variety of speakers, to be energized by lively, faith-filled music and to share in fun fellowship with smiling, happy Catholic peers far from their homes.

All of this often happened in the conference's large and loud general sessions in Lucas Oil Stadium where all conference participants gathered several times from Nov. 21-23.

But some of NCYC's most moving moments were more intimate—moments shared among youths, priests and God in the sacrament of penance.

A large room in the Indiana Convention Center was dedicated to the sacrament. It had chairs where youths could sit facing a priest or have a screen separating them. For 15 hours during the conference, hundreds of priests were able to share God's mercy with a steady stream of NCYC participants who stood in line for the sacrament.

It was also celebrated during the Friday evening general session in Lucas Oil Stadium where priests heard confessions in the arena's concourses and on its floor as youths stood in long lines for the sacrament.

Father Timothy Wyciskalla, administrator of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis, said the sacrament of penance "is one of the greatest things they offer at NCYC."

"This is one of the highlights of the whole thing," he said after hearing confessions for two hours. "You normally don't see this. Thousands of kids and hundreds of priests all doing that together.

"It's quiet and they experience the sacrament of confession, some of them for the first time in a very long time. It's an intimate, private moment with them and God."

For Allie Hale, a 17-year-old from



Father Carlton Beever speaks on Nov. 22 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis with a National Catholic Youth Conference participant during a celebration of the sacrament of penance. Father Beever is pastor of St. Mary Parish in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Westphalia, Mo., in the Jefferson City, Mo., Diocese, experiencing the sacrament of penance at NCYC was moving.

"It had been a while," she said as she walked out of the confession room, her voice filled with emotion. "It always makes me so happy. It's a feeling I don't get anywhere else. It's so powerful. Every time I've gone, even when I was little, I just remember that feeling—and I wanted that back."

Celebrating the sacrament of penance at NCYC was also moving for the priests who sat for hours in the confession room.

"It's one of the main reasons I come," said Father Jeremy Thies, a priest of the Saint Cloud, Minn., Diocese. He has

attended NCYC three times as a priest.

"It fills me with joy in my priesthood," he said. "I've seen so many kids come that maybe haven't gone to confession in a while, or just really want to unload some powerful and painful woundedness and sinfulness.

"It fills me with hope, because these are young people who have personal encounters with Christ. That's what it's all about—a personal encounter with Christ."

Assisting in the confession room were several volunteers who directed penitents to priests ready to hear their confession. Many were archdiocesan seminarians.

"I can't imagine how the Lord feels to have so many people coming so

much closer to him in this sacrament," said archdiocesan seminarian Benjamin Popson, a senior at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis.

"I would imagine that it would be overwhelming for a priest in a good way, hearing so many confessions in a day. Confession is one of the more tender aspects of the priesthood."

Popson also appreciated seeing the sheer numbers of priests in the confession room.

"There were so many different priests, from across the country, from across cultures, wearing anything from jeans to a cassock and surplice," he said. "But each priest is a tender model of Christ." †

Vocations at NCYC: Joyful priests, religious encourage youths to discern

By Sean Gallagher

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) held on Nov. 21-23 in Indianapolis was one of the first events that Father Michael Keucher participated in as the new archdiocesan vocations director.

Manning a booth for the National Conference of Diocesan Vocations Directors outside a room in the Indiana Convention Center where hundreds of priests heard thousands of confessions during the three days, Father Keucher said NCYC is great for encouraging young people to begin considering God's call in their lives.

"There's a beautiful Catholic culture here that encourages these kids, who clearly have such a beautiful faith, to think about what God's dream might be for their lives, what his plan is for them," said Father Keucher. "You can see that the faith is alive in their hearts. So, it's neat to

see their hunger to discern God's will."

In the conference's thematic park in another part of the convention center, members of several religious communities from across the country spent time with NCYC participants, answering their questions, sharing rosaries and holy cards with them and encouraging them to pray about their vocation.

"It really is amazing," said Mother Christina Murray, superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker in Walton, Ky., about the conference. "It shows how big the Church is and how young the Church is. There are kids out there who are on fire with their faith. But I think they don't get much credit sometimes.

"When I was growing up, I didn't know that religious life was an option. They have to know that it's an option, it's out there and that we're happy with it. We need to plant those seeds and let them think about it."

Not far from the booth where Mother Christina helped teens have photos taken of them behind life-size cutouts of nuns and priests, Holy Cross Brother Jimmy Henke interacted with youths attending the conference.

He attended NCYC in 2011 as a student at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis and a member of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood. This year, he was glad to return as a

Holy Cross brother in the second year of temporary vows.

"Planting seeds is exactly what it is," said Brother Jimmy. "The students here are just beginning to think about vocational questions. I might be the first person who has ever asked them, 'Have you ever thought about being a priest or brother?'"

"Sometimes, I talk about Holy Cross. But a lot of it is just inviting them to begin that discernment question."

Franciscan Sister Kathleen Branham, vocations director for the Franciscan Sisters of Oldenburg, had many similar conversations at a booth for her community in the thematic park.

"It opens a door for these young people so they can think about religious life," she said. "When you ask some of these young people if they've thought about religious life, a lot said they didn't until they came here."

Zander Jez, a teen from Houston attending his second NCYC, said the teens appreciated the presence of so many seminarians, priests and religious at the conference.

"It helps me to know that our Catholic faith is alive in so many different ways," Zander said. "There isn't just one way of being a Catholic. You can help in many different aspects through the Franciscans or the Basilians or being a sister.

"And when you hear about discernment, you think it's about becoming a priest or a sister. But it doesn't necessarily mean that. It could mean being married and having kids."

Archdiocesan seminarians have volunteered at NCYC while the conference has been held in Indianapolis. Some assist in the confession room. Others facilitate breakout sessions or just help direct the sometimes massive pedestrian traffic at the conference.

Archdiocesan seminarian James Hentz, a freshman at Bishop Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis, was excited to volunteer at NCYC. Two years ago, he attended it as a junior at Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School in Indianapolis.

"I remember talking with the seminarians at NCYC then," Hentz said. "Now I'm in the position where I saw them at."

He volunteered in the confession room and was impressed by the pastoral care given by the many priests ministering there during the conference.

"It's one of the greatest things that I've seen in years," said Hentz, a member of St. Michael Parish in Greenfield. "One person is balling their eyes out. The next person is ecstatic.

"You see them at the highest and lowest points in their lives. Seeing people how they come in compared to how they leave—they walk lighter. I can't imagine how the priests are feeling, seeing such a radical transformation."

Father Jerry Byrd, pastor of St. Mary Parish in North Vernon and St. Joseph and St. Ann parishes, both in Jennings County, volunteered at NCYC as a seminarian. Now he's happy to serve at it as a priest.

"You come to this and see all the young people interested in the faith, wanting to live it out and to figure out how to do that—it inspires me as a pastor and wakes me up a little bit," said Father Byrd. "If they're seeing priests and religious that are happy, that love what they're doing, that witness alone is going to be enough to inspire young people.

"That witness is really important. If we want to bolster vocations, that's how we have to do it." †

(For more information about vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit www.HearGodsCall.com.) †



Franciscan Sister Janette Pruit, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Oldenburg, speaks on Nov. 22 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference to Celina Feldhake, left, and Amanda Merkes, both of Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

By **Natalie Hoefler**

Katie Prejean McGrady acknowledged a truth about the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) and similar events.



Katie Prejean McGrady

"All of us hit these walls when we leave these big events," said the national Catholic speaker and youth minister. "We don't know how exactly to take what we've heard, take what we've felt and articulate it in a way that is engaging, that is dynamic and

that actually moves somebody to want to know and love Jesus."

NCYC planners recognized this phenomenon, too. Addressing a packed hall in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 23 during NCYC, Prejean McGrady recalled an NCYC committee meeting she attended some time ago.

"The thought was, what if we went deeper with the young people who were ready to go deeper?" she said.

"A lot of NCYC is introductory. But NCYC is such an on-ramp for so many people who want to go deeper in faith."

Prejean McGrady said the committee asked themselves, "What does it look like when you take a couple thousand of you, throw you in a room and actually equip you to go and be vibrant, visible witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?"

And so NCYC's new "Deep Dive" series of sessions was created.

Below are practical tips offered by leading Catholic presenters about how young people—and anyone—can live their faith more intentionally through prayer, Scripture and asking "How can I help?"

'Prayer, love and TACOS'

Franciscans of the Renewal Father Agustino Torres mentioned the "out of sight, out of mind" tendency after NCYC.

Afterward, he said, "You're like, 'Woo, yeah!'"

"Then two weeks later things get back to normal. Sometimes you go home changed, but things at home haven't changed. ... You go back home to the same mess.

"My solution is prayer, love—and TACOS," he said, laughter filling the room as a slide appeared spelling out the acronym: "Telling Another Christ Overcomes Sadness."

Prayer is a must to keeping personal faith alive, said Father Agustino.

"We must pray, because if we're going to dive deeper, we can't give what we don't have," he said.

And Mass is the highest form of prayer and worship, he told the youths—but only for those who fully participate.

"If you go to Mass without putting anything into it, how can you expect to get anything out of it?" Father Agustino challenged. "I don't care if what the priest says in the homily is boring—Jesus is coming down in the Eucharist! He is being made present. Every single Mass is a miracle."

His next practical tip was on love, which he defined as when "we don't think first of ourselves but begin to think more of the person right in front of us."

And that includes God.

"How many of you, the first thing you do when you wake up is check your [phone]?" Father Agustino asked. "Don't think first of who contacted me—think first of contacting God. Just make the sign of the cross and say, 'Lord, help me to love like you today.' Then you can check your phone."

For his last piece of practical advice, the Latino priest admitted his "love for tacos" was so great, he found a way to incorporate them as a practical tip for living the faith by turning the word into an acronym: Tell Another Christ Overcomes Sadness.

"The best way for you to live what you receive" at NCYC, he advised, "is for you to go up to other people, especially if they're down, and share a word of encouragement—'Can I pray with you? Here's a Bible verse that's helped me.'"

"You never know how you sharing this message that Christ overcomes sadness can change a life."

Reading Scripture 'is a non-negotiable'

Author and national speaker Mark Hart didn't mess around in his Deep Dive session on practical tips to live the faith.



Mark Hart

"If you actually want to live—not just to be, but to live—as a Catholic, you are going to have to get to know this book—this is a non-negotiable," he said, holding up

the Bible.

His first suggestion was to read the upcoming Sunday readings in advance.

"The Catholic Church actually believes—this is so ridiculous—that in the 167 hours that you're not in Sunday Mass, that you would set aside some time to read the readings for Mass," Hart said in mock indignation.

Acknowledging people's busy lives, he suggested reading each of the Sunday readings—including the Psalm response—on separate days of the week rather than all in one sitting. He also noted the availability of several free phone apps that offer the Sunday readings and reflections.

Hart's second practical tip for reading Scripture is *not* to read the Bible in order from cover to cover.

"Start with the Gospel of Mark," he suggested. "It's the shortest, easiest, most action-packed Gospel. And it has stories you're accustomed to hearing."

He also recommended reading a few verses at a time rather than the entire book or even a chapter, and to use the "four R" *lectio divina* ("holy reading") approach to reading Scripture: *read* the passage, *reflect* on a word or phrase that got your attention, *respond* to God in prayer about the word or phrase, and *rest* in God, listening for his response.

If the Gospel of Mark, at 16 chapters, is too intimidating, said Hart, "go to the book of James." With only five chapters

it's one of the shortest books in the Bible, "and it's basically how to put up with really annoying people," he added.

He recommended downloading free Bible apps that use either the Revised Standard Version (RSV) or New American Bible (NAB), both approved Catholic versions of the Bible.

Hart noted that many people complain saying, "God's not speaking to me."

"How do you know for sure?" he questioned. "Are you putting yourself in a position where God can actually speak to you? Even if you only have five minutes, you can still go to Proverbs or Sirach or Psalms and read just one or two lines.

"When you give God the gift of your time, he is going to bless you."

'Uniquely suited to help the Church'

In the final Deep Dive session, Prejean McGrady identified the young people present as belonging to "Generation Z," those born in 1996 and after.

"I've studied your generation a lot by reading a lot about you and by spending a lot of time with you," said Prejean McGrady. "There are three things about Gen Z ... that I think make you uniquely suited to help the Church."

The first trait is that "you believe you can change the world," she said. Prejean McGrady backed up her statement citing a poll of 3,000 Gen Z members in which 64 percent answered yes, they did believe they could make a difference in the world.

Second, said Prejean McGrady, is that this generation "longs for presence. ... You crave quality time." So when it comes to helping others, she said, "you are uniquely suited to give that quality time to people, to look up from the phone, to stare into the face of another."

Finally, she said, "You like to tell your story," a trait essential to evangelization. "When you've met Jesus Christ, you can't help but give testimony to how he's changed your life—and if your life wasn't changed, then it wasn't Jesus that you met."

These traits enable the young Church to imitate Christ, "to walk into the chaos and the mess and the noise and say, 'How can I help?' There are four practical ways you can do that," Prejean McGrady said.

First is to study the faith. "Buy books. Read the catechism. Put Scripture in your life," she suggested. "You need to know what we believe and why we believe it, ... especially in the relativistic culture we live in where everybody has a question and wants to



At a Deep Dive session on Nov. 22, Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Father Agustino Torres uses a TACOS acronym to remind NCYC youths to "tell another Christ overcomes sadness." (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

disprove you."

The second step is to pray. Prejean McGrady likened this essential act to "charging your phone. ... You have to take personal quality time with the one who is just enraptured by you and just wants to see your face."

Next she told the youths to "get out of your comfort zone." This generation may like to tell their story, but talking to others about Christ and faith can be uncomfortable at first, Prejean McGrady noted.

"It takes a little while to get there, but there does come a time when talking with people about Jesus does become comfortable. You have to ask God to take those uncomfortable moments and make them comfortable for you."

And evangelizing doesn't have to mean talking, she added.

"Wear a cross. Put a Catholic sticker on your water bottle or a Catholic background on the back of your phone," she suggested. "Maybe grab a few friends and pray the rosary in the lunch room. Is it countercultural? ... Yeah. But get over yourself. Jesus died on a cross—you can say a rosary in front of other people."

Prejean McGrady's last practical tip was to "be generous."

"Generosity is the way we're called to see the people in front of us, to ask in every moment, 'How can I love them like Jesus loves them?' and 'How does that bring me closer to Jesus?'"

Prejean McGrady closed with words of encouragement to those who chose to take the Deep Dive sessions.

"You are the generation that will revive and renew our Church," she said. "You will do it through your witness, through your joy, through your stories, through your study and through your generous spirit." †

'Cooking priest' shares special recipe for teenagers to get to heaven

By **John Shaughnessy**

Known as "the cooking priest," Voluntas Dei Father Leo Patalinghug



Fr. Leo Patalinghug

has a reputation for creating meals that have been described as heavenly.

During the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 22, he provided a different kind of recipe—"Five Steps to Become a Teenage Saint"—to help youths get to heaven.

Yet before he offered those steps

during one of the many workshop sessions at the conference, Father Leo stressed two points.

The first point he shared was, "Being a saint is our calling in life."

His second point began with a question for the youths: "Do you want to get to heaven? Then you'd better be a saint."

He then stressed that everyone can become a saint if they follow these five steps:

Reach out to God. "The first step in becoming a saint is realizing that you are not a saint and you need help. How are you going to be a saint if you're not trying to reach out to God? Try!"

"Maybe you can try by reaching out to a sinner or someone who is poor. Or

how about this—reach out and call up your priest and say, 'You know what, I'm struggling. Help me.' Reach out."

Call out for God: "You got to say, 'God save me.'" God is going to give you the greatest gift you can ever imagine—the gift of himself. At Christmas, God comes out of heaven and into this ugly, messy world" for everyone.

Be sanctified: "Let God come into your life and cut sin away. You do not have that power, but God does.

"We have a sacrament to help us to become saints. You want to find saints? Look for them in the confessional. For it is there that they tell the truth, and the truth sets them free."

Be bound to God: "God can interpret

the groans of our hearts. God understands us. God can give life to us all."

Be a bridge to God for others: Become "a bridge, not a barrier" for other people in their relationships with God.

Summing up, Father Leo said, "That's what you can do. It's that easy, but also that difficult. Let's be honest. It's not as easy as saying, 'God save me,' and it comes so quickly.

"It requires us to be willing to practice our faith *and* to be faithful in practicing our faith. It requires us to be consistent, and to make sure you surround yourself with all of the right people. It's a total stretching." †



Monk creates images to help youths encounter Christ

By Sean Gallagher

Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis might be described as a cathedral of football since tens of thousands of Indianapolis Colts fans faithfully fill it for the National Football League team's home games.

But the organizers of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) sought to make the massive stadium as much like an actual cathedral as they could for the 20,000 Catholic youths from across the country who attended the biennial event on Nov. 21-23.

Instead of cheering touchdowns, they wanted the youths to enter deeply into prayer and give praise and worship to God.

To that end, the organizers commissioned nationally-known liturgical artist Benedictine Brother Martin Erspamer, a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, to create five stained glass-like images of the story from the Gospel of St. Luke of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:23-35).

Brother Martin spoke with *The Criterion* about his work in the days leading up to NCYC. In a way, he compared his art to the youths who journeyed from their homes across the country to attend the conference.

"I hope they move them to pray and enter into the mystery of the Lord revealing himself," Brother Martin said. "These things tend to have for me a life of their own."

"They're like my children, in sense, in that I work on them and I agonize over them. And, at a certain point, you have to cut them loose. Then, after they're loose, they're on their own."

The images, originally 28 inches tall and 10 inches wide, were created with

transparent ink on paper. In the stadium, they were projected onto panels hung far above the stage that were 28 feet tall and 10 feet wide. They were also on panels 8 feet tall and 3 feet wide that were brought adjacent to the stage itself during different sessions of the conference.

The images of the disciples on the road to Emmaus were chosen in particular because the participants were led during the conference in prayerfully meditating on that Gospel passage.

Paul Sifuentes, archdiocesan director of youth ministry and an NCYC organizer, is convinced that beauty is an attractive way to invite young people to enter into the faith and explore it within their hearts more deeply.

"I think they need to know that faith and beauty are companions on the journey," Sifuentes said. "They don't just intersect for a moment. Our faith should produce beauty."

He reflected that sacred art is an effective means to help youths not so much learn about Christ, but to meet him.

"So often in our Church recently, we have often concentrated on how we can best tell someone about Christ," Sifuentes said. "And we absolutely need to tell people about Christ and be able to tell a story."

"But we also need to know of the ways that we can say, 'This is the person who encountered me in incredible ways. Let me help you encounter him as well.'"

The form of prayer used in the conference in connection to the images was *lectio divina* ("holy reading"), an ancient spiritual practice fostered for more than 1,000 years in monastic communities like Saint Meinrad Archabbey, in which people slowly read scriptural texts and approach them prayerfully from different perspectives.



Franciscan Friar of the Renewal Father Agostino Torres and a group of youths lead National Catholic Youth Conference participants in a period of *lectio divina* ("holy reading") prayer on Nov. 22 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. An image depicting part of the story from the Gospel of St. Luke about the disciples on the road to Emmaus created by Benedictine Brother Martin Erspamer sits adjacent to the main stage during the prayer session. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

The contemporary images created by Brother Martin are in many ways modeled after the modes of artistic expression used in medieval stained-glass windows.

Brother Martin said that Saint Meinrad is a place where ancient traditions of faith, including art, *lectio divina* and Gregorian chant, are alive and form the faith of the monks and many who visit the monastic community.

"Certainly all of those traditions are alive here," Brother Martin said. "I consider what I do and what we do as being connected to the ancient traditions of the Church. In a sense

there's one foot that is stabilized by the past but then the other foot is moving into the future."

Sifuentes said that bringing together Scripture, a form of prayer used for more than 1,000 years and art rooted in the age-old traditions of the Church shows that these traditions are alive today and can speak to contemporary Catholic youths.

"The reason that they are alive is that they produce encounters with the living God," he said. "Art, beauty, *lectio divina*—I think these are ways where we get out of the way and let them encounter God himself." †

Saint Meinrad's youth liturgy program shares ancient traditions at NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

Two years ago at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey helped lead the youths that filled Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis in praying Night Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours in the ancient practice of Gregorian chant.

This year, youths themselves chanted at various points in the conference's general sessions in a small schola led by Benedictine Brother John Mark Falkenhain of Saint Meinrad.

Many were former participants of One Bread One Cup, Saint Meinrad's summer youth liturgical leadership program.

Chant was used at different times during the conference to help its participants enter into an ancient form of prayer called *lectio divina* ("holy reading") that involves slowly reading a scriptural text and approaching it in prayer from different perspectives.

Tammy Becht, director of youth and young adult formation at Saint Meinrad, was excited that the gifts of One Bread One Cup, which involves about 350-400 youths per year, was shared with 20,000

youths at NCYC.

In an interview with *The Criterion* before the conference, she expressed her hope that NCYC participants would be as open to the Church's ancient liturgical and spiritual traditions as those who come to Saint Meinrad for One Bread One Cup.

"We've found that young people are just completely enamored with them and respond really well to the monastic community," she said.

Lilly Secrest is a two-time One Bread One Cup participant. She is a member of SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish in Greenwood and a senior at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis.

At NCYC's opening session, Lilly, two other youths and a deacon chanted the story from the Gospel of St. Luke of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). The youths that filled Lucas Oil Stadium in that and subsequent sessions were led to meditate on the passage through *lectio divina*.

In the days leading up to the conference, Lilly spoke about how chant and liturgy have become important for her through One Bread One Cup.

"When I first heard about chant, I thought it was going to be so boring," she said. "And that wasn't the case at all. I can't wait to show so many people that this is cool and can help you in your prayer life."

"After One Bread One Cup when I'm at Mass, I am so mesmerized and pay so much attention to what is going on because I see the beauty of the sacrament that's happening. I didn't recognize and appreciate it before."

Becht said that Lilly is not alone. Many One Bread One Cup participants have been drawn closer to the Church simply through its worship.



Benedictine Brother John Mark Falkenhain, a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, leads youths in chanting the "Salve Regina" ("Hail Holy Queen") on Nov. 22 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

"The liturgy is right there under our noses," she said. "That's the vehicle we should use and concentrate on to bring young people back to Christ and to keep them in the Church. We have everything we need. We just have to do it well."

Brother John Mark was impressed by how well the youths in the schola picked up on the chant for the conference. They came together from across the country at Saint Meinrad for a practice in the summer and earlier this fall. Even though they had only sung together twice, they sang the chant well at the conference.

"They're trying to show the kids that this is part of our tradition and belongs in all our worship," Brother John Mark said. "It's alive."

Josh Russell, a 16-year-old member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany and a junior at Our Lady of

Providence High School in Clarksville, was a member of the schola.

Chanting in front of 20,000 Catholic youths from across the country was impressive for the former One Bread One Cup participant.

"It was fantastic," Josh said after a general session on Nov. 22. "I've never gotten that kind of opportunity before. It really opened my eyes to how big the Church really is. It's really worth it to stay in the Church and to work to keep these people close to the Church."

For him, chant doesn't seem like an old form of music but instead shows "how long-running the sacraments have been and how well Christ has lived through the Church. I think it's evidence enough that Christ has been in the Church because things like chant can survive for so many years." †



Lilly Secrest, a member of SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish in Greenwood, chants part of the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus from the Gospel of St. Luke on Nov. 21 at Lucas Oil Stadium during the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

Special needs services send message, ‘all are welcome’

By Natalie Hoefler

Under the streets of Indianapolis, a youth on crutches rides a golf cart through a tunnel from the Indiana Convention Center to Lucas Oil Stadium for the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).



Erin Jeffries

At that same Mass, a deaf youth laughs at a humorous comment made during the homily, thanks to a volunteer interpreting the words using American Sign Language (ASL). Later, several teens and adults with allergy issues receive Communion in

special low-gluten hosts.

These scenes portray just a few of the ways in which the riches of NCYC are made available to all, including those with special needs.

“If you say all are welcome, people with special needs assume, ‘Oh, that means me, too.’ But that’s not always the case,” says local NCYC special needs coordinator Erin Jeffries, who serves as the archdiocesan coordinator of ministry to those with special needs.

That’s why, when signing up for NCYC, attendees can identify special needs they’ll require assistance with during the three-day event.

“It could be issues with hearing, vision, mobility, sensory issues, a need for low-gluten hosts—the needs vary from

conference to conference,” says Jeffries.

For instance, 150 participants expressed a need for ASL interpreters at the 2015 conference. This year there were none.

But just in case, two ASL interpreters were present to sign in front of a section of Lucas Oil Stadium reserved for the hearing impaired during the conference’s four general sessions and closing Mass celebrated there.

Despite no registrants indicating a need, a young woman sat in the section at the opening session on Nov. 21.

“She was hard of hearing, but for some reason didn’t see the section for special needs when she registered,” Jeffries explained. One of the ASL interpreters volunteered to sign for the teen at the breakout sessions she wanted to attend the next day.

“We didn’t have any requests, but it’s a good thing we’re here—that’s why we’re here,” Jeffries said.

She noted that for this conference, “A big part of what I’m doing is accessibility issues. I connect people with local resources to rent wheelchairs and such, and there are some on site, too. We do what we can to help them get around.”

Jeffries arranged another just-in-case service, a quiet room for those with sensory issues.

“We put out paper, decks of playing cards, bean bags, a binder with steps on how to calm down—anything that might help someone who need time away from the noise,” she explained.

And for the first time this year, NCYC included ADA (American Disabilities Act) Needs informational kiosks. *The Criterion* stopped by one of the ADA booths on the second day of NCYC for a status checkup.



Joyce Ellinger uses American Sign Language to interpret for the hearing impaired during the National Catholic Youth Conference closing Mass at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 23. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

“We’ve rented out all our wheelchairs and scooters,” said Jeffries. “And last night the elevator [was damaged], so we were busy redirecting people this morning.”

While she serves as a local liaison, the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry which organizes the event offers special needs services as well, such as assisted listening devices, large-print and Braille program guides and gluten-free hosts.

The special needs services at NCYC are all about welcome, says Jeffries.

“Sometimes you need that explicit invitation, to say, ‘All are welcome, and here, we have these things available to meet your needs.’” †



A person with special dietary needs receives a low-gluten host during the National Catholic Youth Conference closing Mass at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 23. Several stations offered the special hosts.



At left, youths, chaperones and youth ministers from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis fill St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis for a Mass to open the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 21. Archbishop Charles C. Thompson was the principal celebrant. At right, the archbishop then led a eucharistic procession from St. John to the Indiana Convention Center. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)



Archdiocesan youths put their best foot forward at NCYC with saintly socks

By John Shaughnessy

Teens from Wisconsin proudly proclaimed their “cheese-head” status with a triangle of cheddar on their heads.

Youths from Maryland donned crab hats while their counterparts from Los Angeles roamed the conference halls wearing halos. And teens from Florida were decked out in hats displaying sharks and dolphins.

It was all part of the distinctive, fun and crazy headgear that’s always on display during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis—a three-day celebration of faith that brought

together 20,000 youths from across the country on Nov. 21-23.

This year, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis wanted to take local pride to another level—creating a head-to-toe look for the 1,456 youths from central and southern Indiana who participated in the conference.

The most unusual part of the ensemble was a pair of socks that pay tribute to St. Theodora Guérin, the first saint in the history of Indiana. The front part of the sock shows an image of the foundress of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods while the back features the coat of arms of the archdiocese, and the sole shares her motto, “Trust in Providence.”

“It’s a good opportunity to do some catechesis on who St. Theodora is—and help them identify with our archdiocese as the local Church,” said Mary Kate Shanahan, assistant director of youth ministry for the archdiocese.

“We want to let people know she’s part of our archdiocese, part of our story. St. Theodora’s story also fits well with the theme of NCYC—‘Blessed, Broken, Given.’ She’s blessed—she’s a saint. She certainly struggled a lot. And she has given a whole lot to our state and our community through the Sisters of Providence and their outreach.”

The archdiocese’s swag package also included a “trucker” hat in colors of blue and white, with the image of a cow’s head in the middle of “NCYC” and “2019” on the front of the cap. Then there was a grey sweatshirt with the deaneries of the



Grace Swinefurth, left, Alyssa Struewing and Joan Njoroge show off part of the ensemble that youths from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis were given to sport during the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photos by John Shaughnessy)

archdiocese outlined on the back. The final part of the package was a collection of stickers with the cow logo that—like the hat—are designed for trading with youths from other states.

“During the conference, they use the trade items as a way for them to engage and meet other people from all over,” Shanahan said. “It’s fun.”

The swag brought rave reviews from youths in the archdiocese’s contingent.

“I’m so excited about the socks,” said Alyssa Struewing, 16, a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis.

“They’re personalized to the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. It’s just so cool that they’re just for us.”

Joan Njoroge liked everything in the package.

“They’re beautiful and appealing,” said Joan, 18, a member of Holy Angels Parish in Indianapolis. “And I like the label of NCYC. It shows you are part of our religion. It also shows togetherness because we all have them.” †



Socks that pay tribute to St. Theodora Guérin, the first saint in the history of Indiana, were among the gifts that young people from central and southern Indiana were given to wear during the National Catholic Youth Conference.



Does NCYC have a lasting impact? Yes—I saw it

By Natalie Hoefler

I admit it. I have wondered about the lasting impact the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) has on teens.



Natalie Hoefler

I do recognize the value of the conference. The experience offers youths and adults alike exposure to thought-provoking workshops and inspiring speakers.

It's eye-opening and encouraging for those at the age when

fitting in is of paramount importance to see 20,000 of their peers unabashedly excited about their faith. And absolutely no one can deny the merit of placing these young people in the real presence of our Lord in eucharistic adoration, Mass and confession.

I acknowledge all of this, truly I do.

But what I've questioned is what happens after NCYC. Do the young people put into action—let alone simply remember—the lessons they learned there? Do they step out into the world changed, ready to live their faith more intentionally?

I have no doubt many-a-youth minister and parent reading these words are already mentally forming letters to the editor to disprove my doubts.

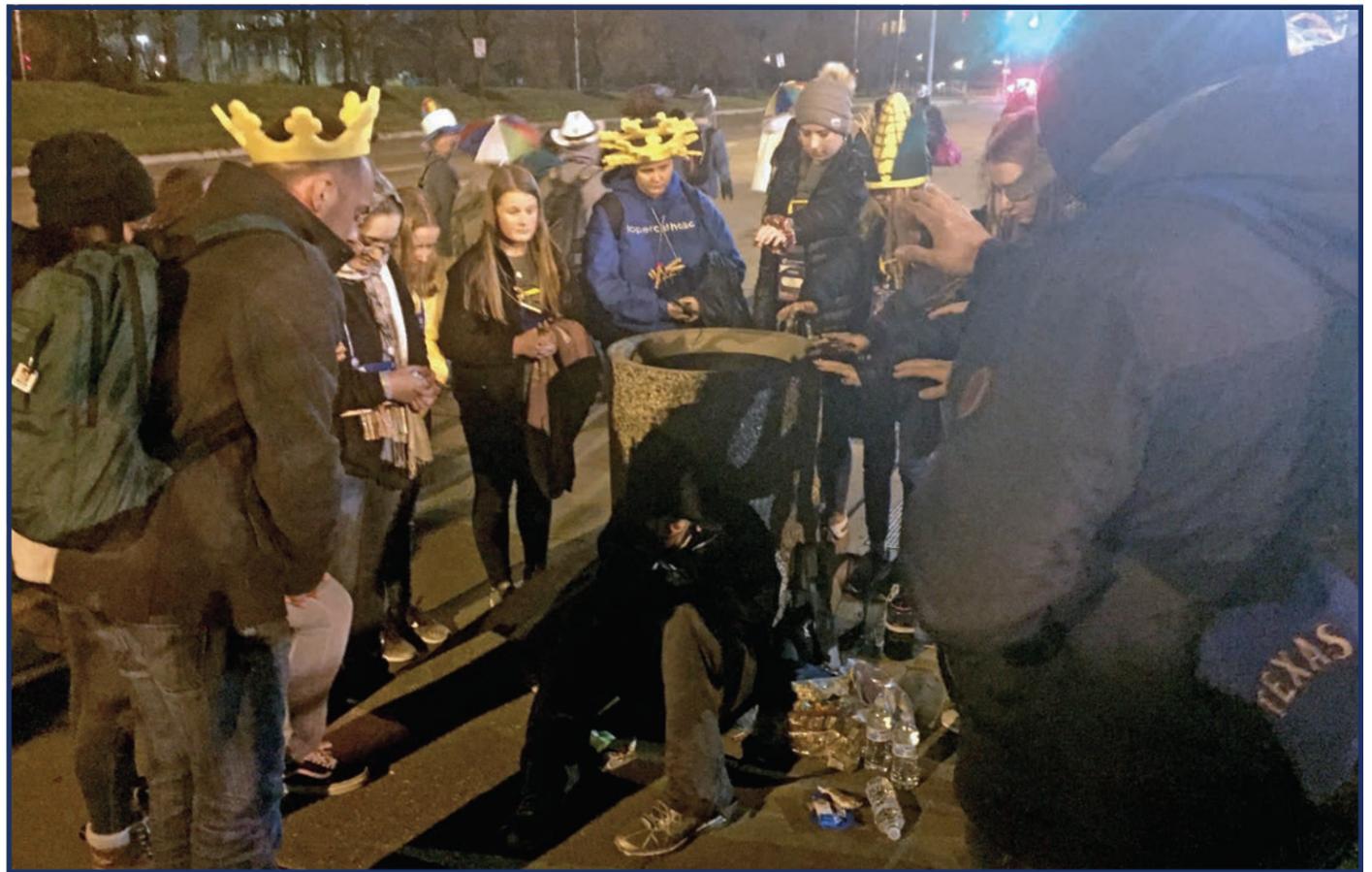
There is no need. My doubts were dispelled as I walked back to my car after the closing Mass on Nov. 23.

It was about 10:30 p.m., cold and dark. Streams of teens sang and chatted their way up West Street in downtown Indianapolis toward comfy rooms in the ritzy hotels that surround the Indiana Convention Center.

I noticed two teens off to the side of the sidewalk. One wore a foam cornucopia hat, the other a chasuble and bishop's miter that looked like they were purchased at a Walmart after-Halloween costume sale.

The two were bending over near a trash can. I stepped over to make sure they were OK.

That's when I noticed a man sitting on the cold concrete, huddled against the



After the closing Mass for the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 23 in Indianapolis, young people on the way to their hotel stopped to offer water and snacks to a homeless man. They then prayed over him, led by the young man on the far left. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

trash can. The youths were unzipping their backpacks and handing him snacks.

More teens noticed, and they too stopped to shower the man with bags of chips, bottles of water and packages of cookies and crackers.

Then another group stopped and gathered around. I'm not sure if it was a teen or a chaperone, but a young-looking man wearing a yellow foam crown stepped up and asked, "Sir, is it all right if we pray with you?"

The man said yes and bowed his head. Some youths did the same, others held out their hands in blessing, and the young man with the crown prayed aloud for the homeless man's protection, his safety, his ability to find shelter, and his knowledge of God's love for him.

The foam-crowned man then knelt down and shook the other man's hand, gave him a pat on the arm and continued up the sidewalk along West Street. The youths offered the seated man a chorus of "good-nights" and "God-bless-you's" then followed the man wearing the crown.

After the pray-ers moved on, I noticed that many other groups of goofy-hat-wearing NCYC attendees continued to stream by, singing and chatting, oblivious to the man by the trash can.

OK, so maybe not all who participate in NCYC walk away changed. But some do, and I was utterly humbled by the unhesitating generosity and charity I witnessed by the youths and young adults who ministered to the man by the trash can.

"All are children of God," they were

told at NCYC.

"You're called to step out of your comfort zone."

"Go and be the hands and feet of Christ."

"Tell another Christ overcomes sadness."

Late on a cold night in Indianapolis, these young people put each of these NCYC lessons into action.

Does NCYC make a lasting impact on those who attend?

On some it does. And that lived impact makes Christ more present in them, and thus more present to others.

Like the homeless man.

And me.

(Natalie Hoefler is a reporter for The Criterion.) †

Teenagers embrace volunteer opportunities during NCYC

By Mike Krokos

Like many other teenagers, A.J. Terry made sure the time she spent in the thematic park during the National



Fr. Thomas Clegg

Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis was also about helping others.

A.J., a high school freshman who lives in the Diocese of Springfield, Mass., spent several minutes helping put together meals for Pack

Away Hunger, an Indianapolis-based organization that provides nutritious dehydrated meals to local food pantries

throughout Indiana. They also work with international populations.

The meal consists of rice and soy, dehydrated vegetables and a powerful vitamin nutrient pack that goes into it, said Allison Avin, Pack Away Hunger's director of communications. The meals are sealed and have a long shelf life.

"It's so great to see everybody serving. It's a really hands-on way for them to impact someone's life," noted Avin, adding that the teenagers were to pack close to 44,000 meals over the three days of the conference.

A.J. was happy to do her part.

"I really like to help people. I'm really blessed to not have to worry about things like that," she said. "The ability to help people who do have to worry about things like that is really nice."

Avin was impressed by the teens' commitment to helping others.

"They all are just really eager to serve," she said, "and it's so nice to see young people getting engaged with service to others and having a heart for God and being able to really put that into action."

Olivia Reyna also took time to assist the least fortunate.

"Right now, I'm making a shirt for children in Haiti," said the 10th grader from the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, inside the thematic park, which was located in a large exhibition hall in the Indiana Convention Center in



Teenagers from the Diocese of Springfield, Mass., put together meals on Nov. 23 during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis for Pack Away Hunger, an Indianapolis-based organization that provides nutritious dehydrated meals to local food pantries throughout Indiana. They also work with international populations. (Photos by Mike Krokos)

Indianapolis.

The outreach, known as Hands Across Haiti, is a ministry of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. It provides decorated T-shirts, school supplies, tote bags and backpacks to its sister parish in Haiti.

Father Thomas Clegg, pastor of St. John Paul II Parish, said his parish started the outreach six years ago, and they were happy to see NCYC participants step up and help with their initiative.

"It's so neat to see people grab hold

of an idea and say, 'This is something I can do,'" said Father Clegg. "Not everybody may be able to travel to Haiti, not everybody may be able to travel to Mexico or Latin America, but anybody can come in and decorate a shirt that we're going to send down there."

"The neat part for us is that when we go down to visit [Haiti], we see them wearing these shirts and carrying these backpacks in our schools." †



Olivia Reyna, a 10th grader from the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, decorates a T-shirt on Nov. 23 for a child in Haiti during the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 23 in Indianapolis.