



World Youth Day 2023
reflections & photos

first WYD experience

The long walks under the scorching heat, the long lines to get the pilgrim meals, and being surrounded by hundreds of thousands of youth that share the same faith were just a few of the many things that I expected. Fortunately, we were well-prepared physically, mentally, and spiritually for such situations thanks to the guidance of the older members in the group and especially those who have experienced WYD for the 2nd time around. - **Yvon S.**



I was inspired to see so many youth from all over the world who are still so in tune with their faith despite all the things that are going on in the world. - **Kaedreena T.**



For the first few days, I was having a hard time concentrating and connecting myself to why I was at WYD. All I could think about was my injured ankle and leaving my two young children/family behind. It wasn't until the Opening Mass where I started to connect to World Youth Day's theme, "Mary arose and went with haste". I began to think - if Mary can have faith and trust in the process, I can be apart from my family for 10 days and start my journey. - **Leslie T.**



With this being my first World Youth Day, I chose to go into the experience without any expectations or anticipations. In doing so, I was able to keep an open mind, capture and cherish the experiences we shared as a group, and spend time relating them to our faith. - **Eric D.**

second WYD experience

Going to WYD this time around was all the more meaningful because the 14 of us were already so tight-knit. Many of us have served the parish together in different ministries and are bonded by our devotion to our faith and our church community. This added so much more depth to our daily faith sessions! I learned a lot about my friends and in the process I was able to reflect on how much I have grown spiritually and mentally since WYD Panama 4 years ago. I was excited to use my experience as a second-timer to guide some of our younger attendees.

- **Erika M.**



WYD 2023 was quite an eventful experience, just like WYD 2019! I feel like I was more mentally, emotionally, and physically prepared than my first time. Although the Pope's homilies felt shorter than the previous WYD, his messages really resonated with me and were very meaningful.

- **Christine C.**



My 1st WYD had a large focus on working on my own spiritual growth by attending the various gatherings and events. This time, it felt like I had more of an observer role; a lot of the spiritual growth I felt came from watching and appreciating the community I was there with, as well as all the younger people who made the pilgrimage to Lisbon. - **Christian U.**



My 1st WYD guided me to be prepared for this 2nd one. I anticipated what was going to happen but there were also things that one can't really expect. That is something I will always remember about WYD - whatever surprises that come along the way become lessons learned. - **Gilbert C.**

I am grateful for the experience gained from attending WYD 2019 as it helped me prepare the young adults for WYD 2023. Coming to WYD 2023 as a group leader allowed me to view the whole 10 days from a different perspective. While I did gain personal spiritual growth from WYD, it was even more rewarding to be immersed in and journey with such a wonderful group of talented, selfless, and caring young adults. I learned so much from the group and am so proud of everyone for their infectious positive energy, for overcoming personal and/or communal challenges that arose, and for representing the parish community in an inspiring way. - **Nikki M.**

highlights

(1) The Opening Mass - I cannot express enough how much joy and happiness I felt when I first saw the hundreds of thousands of people gathered for World Youth Day. Seeing the cheering, smiling, and laughing, and seeing everyone's flags dancing with the wind; it was like I unlocked a feeling I never knew I had. It felt very serene, and if I could experience that feeling again, I would do it over and over again.

(2) Seeing Pope Francis - he is one magnificent human being. His smile was contagious, his presence felt peaceful, and his speeches were lovely. I still am processing the fact that I was in the same vicinity as the Pope. - **Elia V.**



Travelling and experiencing WYD with the St. Gabriel's young adult community, and being part of such meaningful events was a highlight for me. I enjoyed sharing my faith in God with so many different people from different countries. Seeing flags waving at every event was something so beautiful and breathtaking to watch. - **Christine C.**

The Sunday morning final mass was the highlight to me - to go with haste and to not be afraid. This really drove the idea of me following my vocation in life. Pope Francis' words made me feel even more secure and sure that God is with me, by being His instrument and allowing myself to do what God appointed me to do on Earth (spreading love, kindness, and peace by using the talents and gifts that He provided me with). - **Adrian V.**

A highlight for me was that I was able to see Pope Francis and most importantly, that I saw so many youth praising God. - **Kaedreena T.**

A stand out highlight for me was our 8- hour pilgrimage to the place of the overnight vigil. It was definitely a physical, emotional, and spiritual challenge for myself and so many others. We walked in almost 40 degree heat — carrying 20-30 lb backpacks filled with sleeping gear and food — along with a crowd of hundreds of thousands going in the same direction. Whenever I felt tired and anxious on our walk, I often found strength in the energy of some of our younger group members who were so excited to experience the Saturday vigil with the Pope. Their motivation was contagious! - **Erika M.**



One obstacle was definitely the pilgrim walk even though it was expected to be a difficult journey. The pilgrim walk was a task that one needed to be physically and mentally prepared for. Not everyone is going to operate at the same capacity as others, and therefore, teamwork became a vital component of the experience. It was essential for us to support and watch out for one another, as our progress relied on our collective unity. - **Gilbert C.**





highlights

Witnessing a massive gathering of individuals unite for this extraordinary occasion was truly awe-inspiring and surreal. It was remarkable to witness the incredible number of people who have come together to celebrate WYD. The people you meet might communicate differently but you find a way to understand each other when you realize the values that you share. After an extended period of events being postponed due to safety concerns, it is heartwarming to see a vibrant community of individuals come together once again.

- **Gilbert C.**



I think the biggest take away from this trip for me was being able to self-reflect on my life and journey with my religion so far. I think this trip made me realize how lucky I am to be a part of a community so full of love and support. Religion is more than just praise and worship, it's more than just church, but its about how people can come together and genuinely connect and make relationships with others.

We find ourselves constantly trying to make sense of our lives, but sometimes we need to take a step back and go through life with haste. In order to find fulfilment it is not in making sense of your life, but that fulfilment and happiness is when you make a gift out of yourself to God and to others. - **Janna S.**

Meeting new people and the connection that our group built from living together for a week were two highlights from this experience. - **Manolo G.**

I really enjoyed having conversations and trading Canadian goods with other youth from across the globe. Especially for someone like myself that tends to be more introverted, I'm glad I pushed myself to step out of my comfort zone to meet and make connections with others, which ultimately made this a very meaningful and fulfilling experience. - **Yvon S.**



To me, the highlight was sharing and listening to the others at our prayer gatherings. It was beautiful seeing the others grow every day, as well as hear how far they've come in their spiritual journey. - **Christian U.**

My highlight of World Youth Day was reuniting with the rest of the group after Leslie and I had gone to the evening vigil site early. While it was nothing compared to an eight hour walk, we spent the day making sure everyone would have room for the night, so I was equally as grateful when they finally arrived as the space was beginning to fill. Seeing faces I recognized in the crowds of hundreds of thousands is a memory I won't soon forget. - **Eric D.**

My highlight was being able to see and hear Pope Francis' homilies which really resonated with me, as well as building a stronger connection with the youth of our parish. "I got you" was a common phrase that was said among the group that has stuck with me until this day. Being the "Mother" of the group, it was really nice seeing all the young adults supporting each other and myself during this experience. You could really look to the person beside you and see Jesus. - **Leslie T.**

takeaways from Pope Francis

"Each one of you matter. Each one of us are unique and original. You are not a number you are a face. There is room for all of us".

"Even if you're happy or unhappy there is always a place for us (all all all). He does not close the door but welcomes us".

"These reminded me of the dark times in my life and how I sometimes distance myself from my relationship with God when I'm angry or in a bad mental state. I then search for questions and pray knowing God is still there to welcome and accept me with love and blessings. - **Christine C.**

Pope Francis often reminded the pilgrims that Jesus knows the heart of each and every one of us and for that, we should never be afraid. This resonated with me because navigating adulthood can sometimes feel very isolating. As adults we have a lot more responsibilities, we are made more aware of the injustices happening in the world around us, and naturally it becomes easy to worry about what the future holds for us and our loved ones. Pope Francis' message brought me a lot of comfort as someone who has felt isolated before. I was able to come back from WYD with a renewed faith and for that I am so thankful. - **Erika M.**

Pope Francis spoke about making connections in real life and the whole social media crisis. I think it is more important today to be able to make these genuine connections in real life and to have real life compassion towards one another. Like Pope Francis said: the loyalty, the connections, and the love are things that cannot be copied/mimicked through a screen. We need to do our best to make these connections and live the way that humans are intended to live - within a loving community that accepts everybody and not in a simulated world behind a screen. - **Adrian V.**

Pope Francis' speeches & homilies at this WYD reminded me of the late Fr. Paul Cusack's homilies - short and simple, but so impactful. At the Welcome Ceremony, Pope Francis first greeted us by saying that God has called each one of us by name. The Pope's repetition of "by name" was a moving reminder that we are God's chosen people. Just as how Mary was called by name at the Annunciation, God always calls on us to live our lives as disciples of Christ and make a positive and meaningful impact on others. - **Nikki M.**

One of the lines that he emphasized was how we should not be afraid. It's so easy to be to sit back and be comfortable, which is a mental struggle as a young person. Every day is a gift from God, so it's important that we accept it gracefully.

- **Christian U.**

One message that will always stick with me is "the only time you should ever be looking down on someone is when you're helping them up". I think this extends further into the idea of humility and how we should also be choosing to help others for their own good and wellbeing over our own self-satisfaction.

- **Eric D.**



"In the Church there is room for everyone, and when there is not, Please make sure that there is, even for those who make mistakes, For those who fall, for those who are going through difficulties." This relates to the theme of our church, "We Belong, We Believe, We Become". Everyone is welcome in our church and we are understanding when people have to take time away to reflect, but our church doors are always open for us to return." - **Leslie T.**

A line that particularly stuck out to me at the Closing Mass was when Pope Francis said "I wish I could look at each of you, and tell you to not be afraid." One thing that Pope Francis spoke on was to go out and create genuine relationships with people, and to not be afraid of where your faith journey takes you. As someone who struggles with prioritizing work, to the point where life feels like its just passing by, this was an important thing for me to hear. I needed to step back and realize that although making a living is important, it's important to also nourish the things that give me purpose, such as faith, friendships, and the hobbies that give me joy. - **Janna S.**

to our parishioners

Thank you for the continuous support you have given us. It was a pilgrimage to remember. Thank you for supporting our fundraisers. We are so grateful to have such a great and caring church community. There aren't, and never will be, enough words to express our gratitude towards all of you. - **Elia V.**

Simply do not be afraid, make haste and go just like Mary did. It is never too late to begin. - **Christian U.**



Witnessing how much our small group helped each other mentally, physically, and spiritually over these 10 days was a huge testament to the kind of community we have at St. Gabriel's. WYD was a great reminder of the role St. Gabriel's has played in nurturing us to always serve one another. Thank you, St. Gabriel's Community, for shaping who we are today. - **Nikki M.**

If you have the opportunity to watch a replay of the WYD online, I strongly encourage you to do so. There are numerous captivating events to witness. WYD spans over a couple of days, with a fresh event taking place each day. You might assume it's a typical mass or ceremony, but it's far from ordinary. Some events are truly one-of-a-kind, like the Stations of the Cross, where interpretive dancers perform and individuals share their inspiring stories through interviews. - **Gilbert C.**

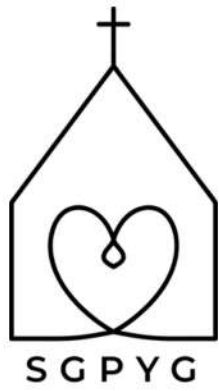
I am beyond grateful for the opportunity that we were provided with and the prayers that we were blessed with in order to have such an incredible experience. Our journey/pilgrimage sure did contain trials and tribulations for each and every one of us. As well, I'm sure that within the group, we each had our own existing unique spiritual battles coming into the trip that WYD helped us conquer - or armed us to fight with to say the least. Despite that, I felt as if the parishioners and our church community took the time to provide us a helping hand so that we had a better chance at winning our fight and in turn, help someone else who may need our helping hand. I think that that is really beautiful and that is what life is all about. Thank you for all of your support, kindness, prayers, and generosity. - **Adrian V.**

Jesus is real and WYD is a worthwhile, once in a lifetime experience to strengthen your relationship with God, as well as with others all around the world. - **Kaedreena T.**

Thank you for giving the youth group the opportunity to travel together to Portugal. Thank you to my fellow pilgrims for the support and the love - the trip meant a lot and will hold a special place in my heart forever. - **Manolo G.**



I don't think there are enough words to express my gratitude towards our parishioners who continue to show their support for the young adults in our church community. This pilgrimage would not have been possible without your support - be it financially, physically, or spiritually. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to experience this once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage and for all your prayers throughout our journey. - **Yvon S.**



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