



The

Criterion

Serving the Church in Central and Southern Indiana Since 1960

NCYC

Called • Llamados

NOVEMBER 16-18, 2017 • INDIANAPOLIS

CriterionOnline.com

November 24, 2017

Vol. LVIII, No. 8 75¢

Called!

'Young Church' responds with resounding joy!



Above, National Catholic Youth Conference participants do a line dance after the closing Mass at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

Right, Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson offers Communion to a National Catholic Youth Conference participant during the closing Mass at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18.

For full coverage of the 2017 National Catholic Youth Conference, see inside this special keepsake issue of *The Criterion*.






Youths and adult chaperones of the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Society in the U.S.A. process into Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16 for the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)

Want proof ‘that the young Church is alive’? NCYC offers it

It’s not very often that you get more than 20,000 teenagers on a unique journey of faith in downtown Indianapolis. If we’re being honest, we know it doesn’t happen a lot around the world.

But the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) is not about statistics or comparing young people from America, Europe or anywhere else on the globe: it is a pilgrimage of faith for its participants.

And what planners from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, local organizers and representatives of the city of Indianapolis have learned during the past several years is that the “Crossroads of America”—specifically the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium—is a great place to host a three-day retreat

for young people eager to meet like-minded teenagers hoping to grow in their lives of faith. Not surprisingly, many of the young people make new, lifelong friends and have fun in the process, too.

NCYC has been a staple of our downtown landscape every two years since 2011, and the current plan is to continue hosting it here into the foreseeable future.

Scott Williams, the director of youth ministry for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, has witnessed firsthand the joy and excitement this biennial gathering leads to for thousands of teenagers.

“Young people are flooding into a single place to experience community in their Catholic faith,” he said in a recent interview.

“It reminds me that the young Church is alive, and young people are excited to participate in the faith community and to share in that faith with others.”

That faith, and the energy and excitement that result from it, offers so much promise for the present and the future of the Church. This year’s theme, “Called” (“*Llamados*”), encouraged teens to slow down and listen to where God wants to lead them 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. 24 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. 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 and Obituaries and other local news.

As Williams said, “NCYC is a place to prayerfully celebrate the community as a young Church.”

In this special issue, we celebrate our Catholic youths from across the country and their desire to draw closer to God. We hope you enjoy their stories, their enthusiasm and their passion for our shared faith.

—Mike Krokos, editor

Archdiocese and Indianapolis rise again to welcome 20,000 Catholic youths



Scott Williams, archdiocesan director of youth ministry, prepares on Nov. 17 to take part in another NCYC session in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

By John Shaughnessy

For the fourth straight time, the archdiocese and the city of Indianapolis hosted the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 16-18, welcoming 20,000 teenagers from across the country who hoped to deepen their faith and their relationship with God.

So how has the archdiocese and the city continued to be the host for this defining Catholic experience for young people?

Starting with the fact that the biennial gathering has usually been blessed with the commitment of nearly 1,000 volunteers from across the archdiocese and extensive planning from the archdiocesan staff that coordinates the local elements of the event.

“There is something about our archdiocese and the volunteer base that we have,” says Scott Williams, the director of youth ministry for the archdiocese who also leads the local steering committee for NCYC.

“We deploy over 1,000 volunteers, and people love it. Our vocations office,

our liturgy office and our youth ministry office have all worked on this seamlessly for the past several years. And we’ve had the same people in leadership roles, for the most part, implementing the key areas that we develop. It’s not something we just do; it’s something that we’re really passionate about.”

Geography and “the flow” of the city’s downtown area also make Indianapolis a desirable destination for the conference, according to Williams.

He notes that 75 percent of the country can travel to Indianapolis by bus within a day—a reality that helps cut down the travel costs of large groups of youths attending NCYC.

Downtown Indianapolis is also “one of the most walkable cities in the world,” he notes, and that attribute is enhanced by the largeness and the closeness of two first-class facilities that are the hubs for the conference—the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium.

The stadium served as the gathering space for all the conference participants during general sessions and the closing

Mass.

The convention center was the conference’s meeting place for workshop sessions, reconciliation, eucharistic adoration and a huge “Thematic Village” where the youths enjoyed music, games, comedy shows and opportunities for service projects.

Add all the ingredients together, and it made for another memorable, faith-filled weekend for the more than 20,000 youths, including about 1,600 teenagers from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

“Serving the young Church is something that we as an archdiocese are committed to,” Williams says. “It’s something that Archbishop Emeritus [Daniel M.] Buechlein initially championed. The first time Indianapolis hosted NCYC was in 2001. It came back in ‘11, and then for ‘13 and ‘15, and this year.”

“The conference is truly remarkable. We talk in youth ministry that we don’t always see the fruits of our labor. And we are planting a lot of seeds this week. But we also see some incredible fruit that grows in these three high-intensity days.” †

Catholic youths seek God and meaning in their lives

By John Shaughnessy

One of the most poignant realities of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) is that many of the 20,000 youths who participate are searching for something deeper in their lives: a connection with other teenagers who share their faith, a bond with adults they trust and respect, and a closer relationship with God.

Their search for faith, connection and meaning came through in the conversations that *The Criterion* had with a number of youths at the conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 16-18.

Several of the youths' stories are shared here. Read on to learn what their Catholic faith means to them during this defining stage of their lives.

'My faith allows me to think I can make a difference'



Payton Dethy saw the pain that was crushing her friend and knew she had to do something.

"I recently had a family friend die who was in high school," recalls Payton, 17, a member of St. John

Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. "His sister was having a tough time with it and fell away from the faith. I talked to her and had teachers from my youth class talk to her—to let her know we were there for her.

"She goes to church regularly now. It's

helped her have the faith she needs—that there's something greater in store than the event that happened."

Payton's efforts to reach out to a friend in need of support and faith flow from her own experiences of needing support for her faith—a support she's found in attending the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis with about 20,000 Catholic youths in 2015 and 2017.

During the 2015 conference, she was in her first year of high school at a place that was different from the Catholic background in which she grew up.

"There are maybe three families in the whole school who are Catholic," she

says. "Going to NCYC let me reach out to people who had that background in a strong Catholic community. A lot of them are from Indianapolis. I talk to them on the phone and text them about things that are happening, things I'm going through. Having people I can have these deep conversations about my faith makes a big difference in my faith."

And sometimes, it helps her to use her faith to make a difference, including to a friend devastated by a tragic loss.

"My faith is something I can fall back on, something I can rely on, a community I can count on when I am having a hard time," she says. "My faith allows me to think I can make a difference in helping other people."



'I hope God gives me the power to persevere'

In one moment, Gabriella Campuzano radiates joy as she poses for a photo with her fellow youth group members from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles—all of them wearing fluffy, white halos representing the "City of Angels."

In the next moment, the smile of the 17-year-old high school senior gives way to a nervous look as she talks about her

future—and her desire to attend college in New York City.

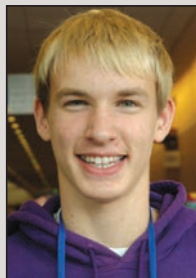
"When I came to NCYC in 2015, it was a life-altering experience," she says. "I want to have that same spiritual connection that I felt two years ago because I'm looking to start the next chapter of my life, to go off to college.

"I'm hoping that throughout these

conferences of the Church, it will shape all my views and attitudes going into college—because I know it will be a confusing and challenging time.

"I'm nervous. I hope God gives me the power to persevere through the tough times. And I hope he helps me understand he has a plan for me, because I want to follow his plan."

'There are always people in my church who support me'



Wil Zinkan still remembers it as one of the hardest moments of his young life.

At the time, he was in the middle of his seventh-grade year when his

parents told him their family was moving to a new city.

"That was hard for me," Wil says. "I loved where I lived and the friends I had."

As difficult as that time was, the welcome he received at his new Catholic school—St. Charles Borromeo in Bloomington—made a huge difference.

So did his Catholic faith.

"Prayer and coming to church helped me get through that move," recalls Wil, who is now 16. "It was great when I came to St. Charles. Everyone was open and welcoming. Now, no matter what I'm going through, I know I have a support system. There are always people in my church who support me."

Wil had the same feeling as he stood in the midst of the thousands of teenagers congregating inside the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis for the second day of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 17.

"Looking around here and seeing all these people and knowing we share the same faith and values is really cool." †



'I can't get to where God wants me to be without him'

For 15-year-old Mynais Collins, his first experience at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis started with a desire to meet other Catholic teenagers from across the country—and to make trades for some of the crazy hats that have become a staple part of the three-day celebration that connects 20,000 youths from across the country.

Still, there was an even deeper connection that Mynais hoped to make during the conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 16-18.

"I want to get closer to the Lord because I haven't been having a great relationship with him," said the member of St. Rita Parish in Indianapolis.

"I want to have a stronger bond with him because I believe that throughout my

life, God will lead me to success."

The conference was a start for him in that direction.

"I can't get to where God wants me to be without him."

'I've had to stand my ground to keep my Catholic values'



For Emma Land, there was a time when living her Catholic faith was just a natural part of life. She grew up in a Catholic family, and attended a Catholic school for her first eight years of education. Then the changes

and challenges came when she became a student at a public high school.

"I didn't see the Catholic faith every day in my life. It was a shock to me," says Emma, a 16-year-old sophomore. "I found it a struggle to stick to my faith."

Yet change has come again as the member of St. Patrick Parish in Terre Haute has become more involved in the youth group for the Terre Haute Deanery.

"Going to youth group and retreats really helps me realize there are a bunch of other people in the same situation. There have been times when my friends in high school don't share the same values I do, and I've had to stand my ground to keep my Catholic values. It's kept me grounded, and I'm thankful for that."

Coming to the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) marked

another step for Emma in her journey of faith.

"I'm still trying to figure out what God wants me to do with my life. It's awesome coming here to NCYC to see 20,000 young people living their faith. You think you're alone, but you're really not. It's great to see so many people supporting you in your Catholic journey. That means a lot to me."

'I wouldn't be the same person I am without my Church and my faith'



At 17, Sam Bleisch kept attracting smiles and laughs during the first two days of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC)—a natural reaction considering that he spent that time wearing a cow costume that extended from his head to his feet.

"Our parish always has one person in the cow costume at NCYC," said Sam, a member of Our Lady of Grace Parish in Noblesville, Ind., in the

Lafayette Diocese. "It gets passed down from someone who wore it at the last conference. The past cow watched at NCYC last time to see who was fun and outgoing."

Sam milked the suit for all it was worth, but it couldn't disguise the feelings of joy and love that he has for his Catholic faith.

"It's a great experience when you get to learn about your faith while having

fun. And the chance to meet other Catholics from across the country is amazing.

"The Catholic faith has really been great to me. The people I've met through my Church and the bonds I've formed have been life-changing. I wouldn't be the same person I am without my Church and my faith."



'Have fun, enjoy, keep Christ at the center' of NCYC, Archbishop Thompson tells youths

By Natalie Hoefler

The call and response echoed back and forth: "NC!" "YC!"

It's a chant familiar during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), but not one typically heard within the confines of a church.

But it's how Father Patrick Beidelman, executive director of the archdiocesan Office of Worship and Evangelization, helped the more than 1,100 youths from across central and southern Indiana kick off the opening of NCYC after Mass at St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis.

"We're going to get really loud and really rowdy!" he told the congregation. "But then we're going to get very quiet and very prayerful as we take the eucharistic presence of Christ into the streets of Indianapolis."

And so after the calling of the chant—the right side of the church calling out "NC!" followed by the left side responding with "YC!"—the 1,100 youths, chaperones and parents then reverently knelt as the Blessed Sacrament was placed in a monstrance and incensed before being processed across the street to the Indiana Convention Center.

The chanting and procession were the culmination of a special Mass for archdiocesan NCYC participants celebrated at St. John on Nov. 16. The Mass was concelebrated by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and 17 priests of the archdiocese in the afternoon prior to the first general session of NCYC.

In his homily, Archbishop Thompson told the youths that the NCYC experience "is about keeping God at the center."

"We seek to be motivated by God's Spirit," he said. "When we fall away from God, that's when we get chaos."

He then spoke of wisdom, referring to the day's first reading from the Book of Wisdom.

"Wisdom comes on God's time," the archbishop said. "That's why we have to be people of prayer."

He noted that true wisdom does not follow the wisdom of the world.

"Remember who we follow—one who was humiliated, rejected, killed, despised. That's our leader. To the world's wisdom, that makes no sense. But to true wisdom, that's where happiness is to be found—by embracing the sufferings of Jesus."

Archbishop Thompson outlined six ways to embrace true wisdom: by employing faith, trust, hope, confidence, love and a Christian attitude.

"This weekend, let us allow the truth of God to permeate our hearts as we witness those six ways. ... [Then] we can achieve what Pope Francis calls for: to continue to cultivate a culture of encounter, of accompaniment.

"Have fun, enjoy, but keep Christ at the center and take the wisdom of a Christ centered life back to your homes, your churches, your schools. Christ has called us here because he believes in us to bring about the Kingdom of God."

The opening Mass set the right tone for the conference, said Stephen Darda, a youth from St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis.

"It was good to start NCYC with the Mass because it brings everyone together," Stephen said. "We'll end with it, too, so it's great to start and end it with everyone coming together."

And as for the chanting? "You never yell in a church like that, so it was cool," he said with a grin. †



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, left, prays the eucharistic prayer during a Mass for archdiocesan participants at the National Catholic Youth Conference at St. John the Evangelist Church on Nov. 16. He was assisted by 17 priests of the archdiocese. Shown in this photo are kneeling, Father Patrick Beidelman, left, executive director of the archdiocesan Office of Worship and Evangelization, Fathers Joseph Rautenberg, Douglas Hunter, Jonathan Meyer, Kyle Rodden and Eric Augenstein. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)



As dusk falls, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson carries a monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament from St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis across the street to the Indiana Convention Center during the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 16.

Youths experience God's mercy in sacrament of penance at NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

The opportunities seemed endless.

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) held on Nov. 16-18 in Indianapolis offered 20,000 youths from across the country a host of speakers to be inspired by, games to play, musical artists to hear, service projects to take part in and booths of exhibitors to visit.

Among this broad array of opportunities, though, many youths made it a priority to experience God's mercy in the sacrament of penance.



Bishop William F. Medley of Owensboro, Ky., speaks on Nov. 17 with a National Catholic Youth Conference participant during the sacrament of penance celebrated in a large conference room in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. Dozens of priests and bishops heard confession for hours during the conference. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Youths filling Lucas Oil Stadium and the halls and conference rooms of the Indiana Convention Center could be seen wearing colorful stickers that read, "I'm forgiven," which they received after leaving the large room in which dozens of priests and bishops heard confession for several hours during the conference.

"This is important for me, because I felt that a lot of my sins were weighing me down and keeping me away from God," said Fatima Agredano, a Catholic youth from Elgin, S.C., in the Diocese of Charleston, S.C. "Having the sacrament of penance helped relieve that. Having so many priests there for us helps me realize that I'm not the only one and makes me feel more welcome."

Fatima comes from a state where Catholics are a distinct minority, making up only about 3 percent of its population. She said coming to NCYC in Indianapolis two years ago was a starting point for embracing her faith through her own choice.

"That's where it all started," she said. "So I just wanted to come back, relive that and grow in faith more. My Catholic faith is the center of my life. I at least try my hardest to keep it that way. It's really important to me and has been for a while now."

Cole Kreinbring experienced the sacrament of penance at NCYC for only the second time since he and his family were received into the full communion of the Church earlier this year in his hometown of Davenport, Iowa.

"It was a big deal for me to kind of cleanse myself," said Cole as he left the room where the sacrament of penance was celebrated.

Coming to NCYC as a newcomer to the Church, Cole experienced the conference as a great boost to his faith.

"It is truly incredible," he said. "I can't really explain the experience. It's amazing to feel like you're part of something much, much bigger than yourself, especially at such a young age. I never had that before, so it's really mind-blowing to me. I feel like it's going to improve my relationship with God very dramatically."

Coming out of the room a little later was Bishop Joseph G. Hanefeldt of Grand Island, Neb. He was attending NCYC for the first time, and was impressed by the number

of youths who were attending and taking the opportunity to experience God's mercy in the sacrament of penance.

"How beautiful this is and how powerful God is to not just forgive the past sins of the youths and all those who



Bishop Joseph G. Hanefeldt

come, but also in how much grace is being poured out for their days to come," he said. "It's exciting. There's so much good out there. In the news, we always hear about the bad and tragic. I wish the average person at home could see how there is so much good in the young people here and see how kids who really want to live their faith."

Karen Romero is a high school senior in Perry, Iowa, attending her first NCYC. She chose to go to confession in part to prepare herself for the closing Mass of the conference celebrated on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium.

"It's really important for me to go in with a clean soul," Karen said. "As teenagers, it's so hard. We're surrounded by sin. We love God and we show that love by having clean souls."

"All these people share the same faith that I have. It makes me want to go to confession even more, because I know that I'm not alone in this. I've gone through some struggles in my life and the only thing that has kept me going in a good, positive attitude is God."

Caelan Murphy from Ithaca, N.Y., was attending her first NCYC. She said celebrating the sacrament of penance would help her focus more on the good she was receiving at the conference.

"It will definitely make it easier to remember the highlights of the trip and the things that really spoke to me, because I'm not worrying about all the other stuff that's been weighing me down," she said. "I can then go back and share that with everyone else in my parish and town."

"I have more time to think about that and do something about that instead of worrying about stuff that I brought with me here. I'll leave it here, and go back and talk about what I learned." †

Youths urged to remember they're 'called by name'

By Natalie Hoefler

The sound of more than 20,000 teens screaming and singing along with the raucous music of Christian hip-hop band TobyMac was loud.

The sound of the same number of youths in silent prayer was deafening.

These external and internal forms of praise formed bookends to the opening general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 16 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

After two hours of music, entertainment—including cultural dancing by the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement—and an entrance procession of banners from each diocese present, the participants were greeted by Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson.

Although each person came “from many dioceses, many states ... and with many titles,” he said, “we are first and foremost, children of God. And that God who knows us desires to be known by us. ... God wanted us to know him ... through a personal relationship with a human being, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“We are beloved children of God, called by name, claimed by Christ,” he continued, referring to the conference theme of “Called.” “We begin this NCYC weekend by embracing that reality of who we are.”

Chris Stefanick, an internationally acclaimed author, speaker and founder of Real Life Catholic, used humor and life

experience to speak about the reality of who we are and of God’s love for each person.

He spoke of the “love story” upon which the Catholic faith is founded.

“When you remove the love story, what are you left with?” he asked. “Rules that we have to follow. Rituals that we’re not sure why we keep them alive but they take a lot of time. Doctrines that have nothing to do with your life. That’s how the world has come to see Catholicism. ... The world has forgotten the love story, and so often we’ve forgotten the love story.”

That story, he said, “begins very simply with the words ‘[I] believe in one God.’”

So many youths today chose not to believe, he said, including an atheist who once told him that belief that God created the universe “is as stupid as a kid coming down on Christmas morning and, seeing presents under the tree, thinks, ‘There are presents, therefore there must be a Santa.’”

“You say there’s no God?” Stefanick asked. “That’s like a flea not believing in the dog. That’s like a kid coming down on Christmas morning and seeing presents under the tree and saying, ‘Oh look! Presents! They must have exploded themselves here!’ ... Just so, the universe did not put itself here, and the more we learn about the universe, the more it shouts to us about the existence of God.”

And because God’s love created us, he said, no other form of love will satisfy.

“We feel so small in this world,” he told the crowd that came from as far away as Hawaii and Alaska. “We feel so insignificant in this universe.

“I think God looks down from heaven and says, ‘You are huge next to all this.’ As big as a mountain is, can it know someone? As big as an ocean is, can it make a choice? As big as a galaxy is, can it choose to love? No, but you can. ... You’re a huge deal!”

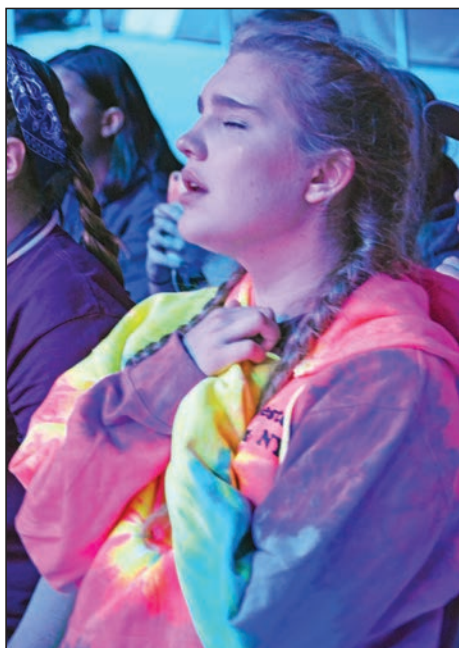
But because of human rejection of God, Stefanick continued, sin and brokenness entered the world. To applause and shouts of “Amen!” he modified the words of John 3:16 to note that therefore, “‘God so loved you that he gave his only Son.’ Whoa. ...”

This love story—which continues in the sacraments, Stefanick noted—“doesn’t just show you who God is. It shows you who you are.”

“‘Who am I?’ ‘I’m precious.’ ‘What am I worth?’ ‘I’m worth dying for,’” he said in a solo dialogue. “... Sin is not



The young crowd delights in the music of Christian hip-hop band TobyMac on the opening night of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 16. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)



A tear traces the cheek of Isabelle Hunzek of the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., during prayer time at the end of the first general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16.



Internationally acclaimed speaker and author Chris Stefanick addresses the more than 20,000 participants of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16.



Participants from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles process into Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16 for the opening general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference.

your name—Jesus gives you your name. And what is your name? ‘Beloved.’ I don’t matter because of who I am—I matter because of whose I am. I’m not somebody, I’m somebody’s. I’m precious and I’m worth dying for. This is the best news ever.”

He encouraged the crowd to use their will to “say ‘yes’ to the love that created space and time and perpetually invites us to himself.”

Father Joseph Espallat II, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, who was one of the evening’s emcees, led the more than 20,000 present through a period of silent prayer to close. He suggested using the word “pray” as an acronym to guide their prayer—“P” for praising God, “R” for repenting of sins, “A” for asking God for needs rather than wants, and “Y” for yielding to his will.

It was this prayer time more than any of the evening’s other events that most affected Abby White of the Diocese of Covington, Ky.

“I thought it was really powerful,” she said of the quiet time. “I like saying that you’re sorry to God. It’s been awhile

since I’ve been to confession, and I really want to go to confession this weekend. I felt like that [prayer time] empowered me to want to go.”

While Abby has attended NCYC before, Garrett Randel of Seneca, Kan., was exuberant with the joy of one experiencing the event for the first time.

“I thought it was really cool,” he said of the opening session. “The speaker was really inspiring. I thought it was one of the best experiences I’ve had in my Catholic faith.”

Caitlin Dusenbury of the Diocese of Lansing, Mich., couldn’t agree more. The NCYC first-timer’s eyes lit up and a smile brightened her face when she spoke of her experience that evening.

“I really like it so far,” she said. “It’s impacted me a lot. I”

“The highlight for me was Chris speaking. It’s not who you are, but whose you are—that quote stuck with me.”

(A video to accompany NCYC coverage can be found at <https://youtu.be/YOPMzpz8MIOY>.) †

Diverse workshops lead Catholic youths to consider their lives of faith

Compiled by John Shaughnessy

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis offered two days of faith-related workshops for the 20,000 youths from across the country to attend. Here is a selection of some of the 100 workshops and the descriptions from the conference guidebook.

Church Isn’t Boring, You Are!

“As a teen, Paul Kim went to church for two reasons: girls and donuts. Through a miraculous intervention, God revealed to him that the Catholic faith offered more than he could ever hope.”

When God Wrecks Your Romance

“Discover how God wants to work everything for good in our lives, even relationships that are broken, and how sometimes the best blessings come through the worst heartache.”

Love Yourself

“The biggest lie today, which underlies so many bad decisions, sins and dysfunctions is that we’re only lovable IF...The Gospel shows us we’re lovable BECAUSE.”

An Attitude of Gratitude: Exploring the Spiritual Practice of Being Grateful

“It’s easy to get caught up with having the newest and best material things: phones, shoes, cars and the like. Sadly, many times these things don’t satisfy our desires. They hold us only until the next newest and best things are available. Let’s take a look at the spiritual practice of gratitude. It’s a simple yet profound practice that can change our world and our relationship with God.”

PB&J: Patience, Balance and Joy

“At every Mass, we are being fed in body, mind and spirit. We are being fed PB&J: Patience, Balance and Joy. We know we need and hunger for more PB&J

in our lives. If we allow God to feed us, we are supposed to become what we eat.”

Real Love is For Real

“God is love! Our confusion and/or obsession with the sexual part of who we are, and its perceived power over us, has made it difficult to find or to believe in real love. We will be better at loving God, ourselves and others when we grow in the virtue of chastity. Then we can find the love, peace and joy God desires for us. Come discover the truth: sex without love is empty and not the sacred, awesome gift God designed for us.” †

Called! Scenes from 2017 NCYC



Above, priests, including many from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, process into the closing Mass for the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. Archdiocesan priests include Fathers Eric Augenstein, left, Matthew Tucci, third from left, and Douglas Hunter, far right. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Above, artist Eric Santos works on his caricature of Emily Warnimond of the Diocese of Toledo, Ohio, in NCYC's Thematic Village in the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 18. (Photo by Mike Krokos)



Left, Osyon Jones of the Orlando, Fla., Diocese receives Communion during the NCYC closing Mass on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium. (Courtesy of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, www.nfcym.org)



Above, archdiocesan transitional Deacon Jeffrey Dufresne, left, seminarian Eamonn Daily, Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez, Father Patrick Beidelman, transitional Deacon David Farrell of Louisville, Ky., and seminarian Michael Praksam take in the view of the congregation of more than 20,000 people at the beginning of the NCYC closing Mass in Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 18. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Above, youths from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis help prepare pre-packaged meals to be sent to Burkina Faso in West Africa as part of Catholic Relief Services' 'Helping Hands' project during NCYC in the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 18. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Above, youths, youth ministers and chaperones pray the rosary aloud together during NCYC in the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 17. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Above, youths from the Archdiocese of Atlanta kneel in prayer on Nov. 17 during eucharistic adoration in Lucas Oil Stadium. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



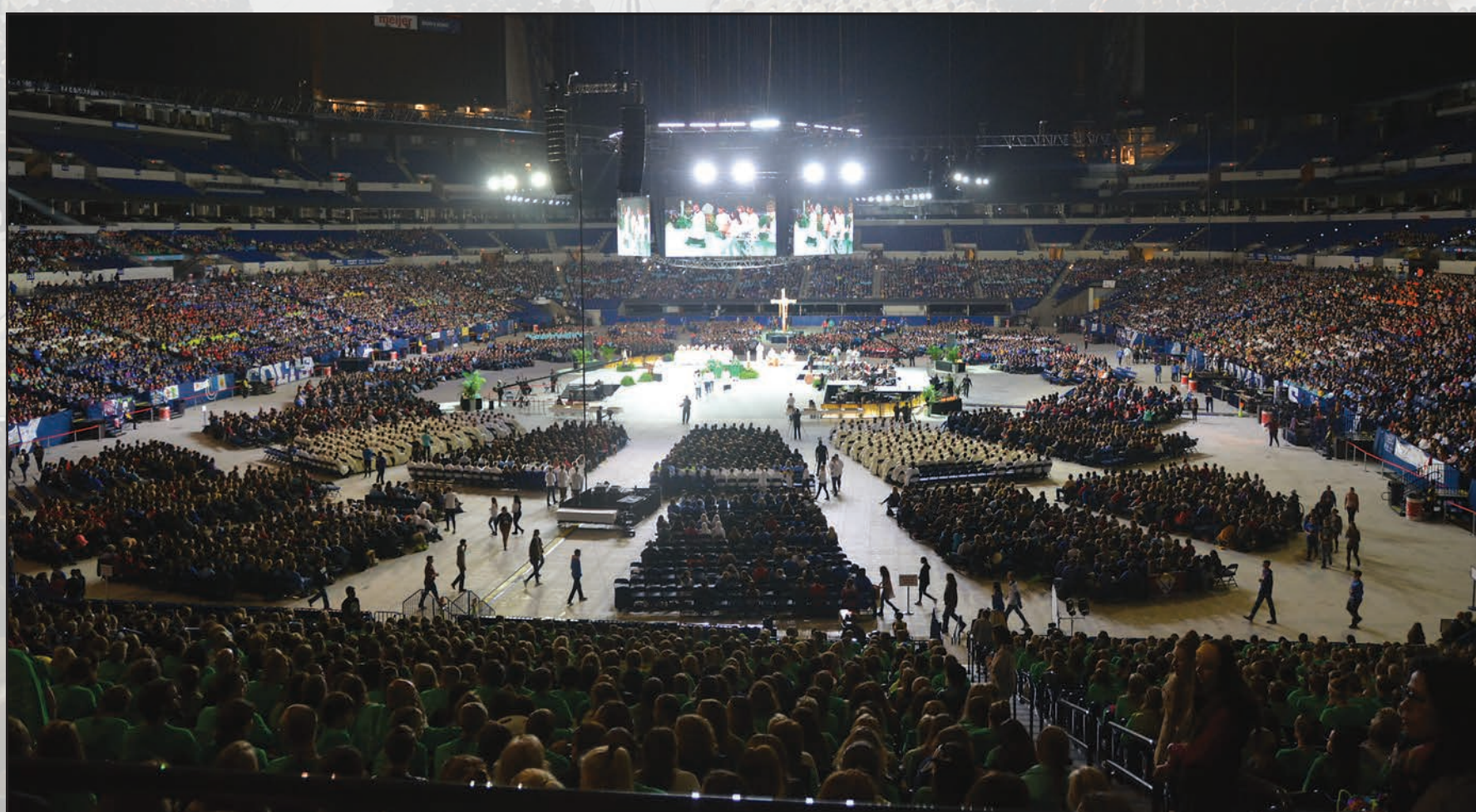
Above, Liv Phillips of St. Rita Parish in Indianapolis sings during NCYC's Top Talent Finale on Nov. 18 in the Indiana Convention Center. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

Left, Catholic singer and musician Matt Maher shakes the outstretched hands of youths during an NCYC general session on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Courtesy of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, www.nfcym.org)



Left, members of the youth group from St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington share their smiles in the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 17. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Right, more than 20,000 NCYC participants fill the lower levels of Lucas Oil Stadium during the closing Mass on Nov. 18. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Above, youths from the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., participate in a line dance during the opening session of NCYC at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Thousands enter into silence in eucharistic adoration at NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

Early on the evening of Nov. 17, Lucas Oil Stadium throbbed with the music of popular Catholic music artist Matt Maher while youths rushed to get near the stage on the center of the stadium's floor.

Further out on the floor, multi-colored lights flashed back and forth while youths danced in long conga lines, giving high fives and free hugs to perfect strangers in a joyous expression of faith.

Later that evening, though, the cavernous stadium quietly echoed with the centuries-old Gregorian chant sung by Benedictine monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad and participants in its One Bread One Cup youth liturgical leadership program.

Then the stadium was enveloped in a deep, prayer-filled silence as more than 20,000 youths and adults adored the Blessed Sacrament exposed in a monstrance on an altar on the stage.

Father Joseph Esparillat II, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York who served as an emcee of the conference's general sessions, blessed the thousands present with the Blessed Sacrament in solemn benediction.

The monks and One Bread One Cup youths also led the conference participants in praying Compline, also known as Night Prayer, from the Liturgy of the Hours, much as such liturgies occur in the monks' Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln.

The liturgy concluded as the monks and youths processed to a statue of Our Lady of Fatima where they and all in the stadium chanted "Salve Regina" ("Hail Holy Queen"), an ancient antiphon that praises the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"It was mesmerizing," said Andrew Yock, an NCYC participant from the Archdiocese of Chicago, of the silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. "I broke down in tears during adoration. It was unbelievable. Having the silence, that atmosphere of peace and tranquility just made it really feel like God was present."

Benedictine Brother John Mark Falkenhain spoke afterward about leading 20,000 youths into silent prayer and a quiet chanting of psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours.

"Because this sort of prayer is so ancient, it speaks to everybody immediately," he said. "Not that there's anything wrong with the noise and sound, but the silence is the perfect complement,

and when we pray the word of God and then leave room for silence, then it resounds within us and we realize how much the word has become a part of us."



Br. John Mark Falkenhain, O.S.B.

Other youths in Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 17 were drawn into the atmosphere of prayer created by the monks and One Bread One Cup youths.

"You don't see men cry much, but myself, I teared up," said Kyle Zimmerman of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, who said the time of adoration was his favorite NCYC moment.

"You see 25,000 people all quiet. You could hear a pin drop. It's just amazing to see that, and then you feel something. You feel the spirit of Christ."

Beth Wimsatt, a member of St. Mary-of-the-Knobs Parish in Floyd County, also valued the silent prayer.

"You can really get a feel for what the whole Catholic faith is about in the silence," she said. "God truly speaks to us in the silence as we're sitting there listening to him."

Tammy Becht, a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany, has seen many youths enter more deeply into the Church's rich liturgical tradition in her ministry as director of One Bread One Cup.

"It's such a gift to be able to do what I do, to minister to the young Church in a way that brings the love of God through the liturgy, through the prayer of the Church, to the young people," she said. "They need stability and love silence when it's offered to them. And they respond to it. That was so powerful tonight."

Since it was started in 1995, more than 4,600 youths from more than 40 dioceses have participated in One Bread One Cup. Witnessing 20,000 youths enter into quiet, prayerful liturgy in one night was powerful for Becht.

"I have a cold chill all over myself right now," Becht said moments after the evening session ended. "When I think about [20,000] people in this stadium, with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, and not a sound came from any place—it was complete silence."

"I kept waiting for that still, small voice to whisper in my ear. And it was like, 'Tammy, this is what I want. This is what I desire. I desire the hearts of the young people, the



Monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad and youth participants in its One Bread One Cup youth liturgical leadership program gather around a statue of Our Lady of Fatima to chant the "Salve Regina" ("Hail Holy Queen") Marian antiphon at the end of a liturgy on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference.



Father Joseph Esparillat II blesses thousands in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 17 in solemn Benediction during a general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference held in Indianapolis on Nov. 16-18. Kneeling in prayer on the stage during the liturgy are monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad and youth participants in its One Bread One Cup youth liturgical leadership program. They joined more than 20,000 other conference participants in prayer.

(Photos by Sean Gallagher)



National Catholic Youth Conference participants kneel in prayer during eucharistic adoration in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 17.

hearts of everyone who calls themselves my follower."

One of the youths who has given his heart to the Lord that helped lead the liturgy in Lucas Oil Stadium was Nolan Snyder, a member of St. Boniface Parish in Fulda, a few miles from Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

A high school senior and four-time One Bread One Cup participant, Nolan gave a reflection in the stadium about eucharistic adoration, something that he had difficulty appreciating until he had a special experience in the summer of 2016 at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis. In that moment, he was given a powerful awareness of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

"This is our God reaching out to us, speaking to us," Nolan said. "This is the same God that sacrificed himself at the Last Supper, the same God that offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross, the same God that is present at Mass when the presider holds up the body and blood and says, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.'"

He then invited all present in the stadium to enter into the silent prayer that was about to begin.

"Tonight, as we celebrate adoration, we are called to listen," Nolan said. "Keep in mind, though, that this isn't just silence. Even in the silence, God's voice speaks to us. Let us pray that tonight we hear God's call and reach out to his extended hand."

That prayer was answered for Noah Tyler, 17, an NCYC participant from Lake Charles, La., who said that the time of adoration was "the climax" of the conference for him.

"It's where you can fully open your heart to God, to be fully present with him," said Noah. "It's just an awesome feeling to see him right in front of you, so vulnerable and so raw. It's amazing."

(Criterion reporter Natalie Hoefler and freelance reporter Katie Rutter contributed to this article.) †



Morgan Thomson of the Nashville, Tenn., Diocese kneels in prayer during eucharistic adoration in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 17 during the National Catholic Youth Conference.



'This is our God reaching out to us, speaking to us. This is the same God that sacrificed himself at the Last Supper, the same God that offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross, the same God that is present at Mass when the presider holds up the body and blood and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God."'

—Nolan Snyder, a high school senior and member of St. Boniface Parish in Fulda

Youths, religious, priests encourage each other at conference

By Sean Gallagher

The theme of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 16-18 in Indianapolis was “Called.”

So it was appropriate that the more than 20,000 Catholic youths from across the country gave a bit more attention to the many priests and men and women religious who prayed with them, listened to inspiring presentations with them and had fun with them during the conference.

Maybe God was using that interaction to call the youths to give prayerful reflection to a religious vocation.

“Here we’re able to see their real personalities come out,” said Lillieyne Thompson of the Gary, Ind., Diocese. “They’re seen more as real people and not just as a holy figure. You see how they’re cool and do normal things like everyone else does.

“It helps me realize that I can follow God. You can have a fun life, be yourself without the peer pressure of high school. Seeing how cool all the priests are is so inspiring.”

The priests and religious present at NCYC also represented more dioceses and religious communities than any of the young participants could know in their homes.

“There’s a lot of not knowing what’s out there,” said Oliver Severance of the Archdiocese of Anchorage, Alaska. “Coming to a place like this, you get to realize that they’re not super far away, stuck in an abbey somewhere. It makes them more accessible. Once you get that realization, it’s easier to go from not knowing what your vocation is to starting to discern and then choose one.”

Salesian Brother Damien Ho of Orange, N.J., agreed.

“A lot of young people don’t recognize that they have a vocation or might not even want to know what it is unless they get exposed to different religious groups or missionary groups,” he said. “People here are willing to share about their vocations. The best way to get more vocations is to share about each other’s vocations.

“It’s encouraging, because, as Salesians, we work with young people. So when we see young people see that they have a potential to be better, to become saints, then that’s when our mission gets fulfilled.”

Other religious at NCYC shared

the encouragement experienced by Brother Damien.

“Young people today are so open to their faith and seem to have a passion for living it, not only in the Church, but also in service,” said Daughter of Charity Sister Jean Rhoads, who lives in Evansville, Ind., and serves as a vocations director for her order. “I am hope-filled and encouraged by that. Is this not the most exciting thing in the Church today?”

Conventual Franciscan Father John Bamman came to the conference from Mount St. Francis, where he serves as the vocations director for his order’s Our Lady of Consolation Province.

He reflected on how the encouragement he gives youths at NCYC to consider a religious vocation often happens simply through being present to them during the conference.

“You never know the effect you have,” said Father John. “I see this as planting seeds. We’re kind of throwing seeds into the wind, and see where they’ll settle. There’s a lot of soil here. For them to see a joyful friar, that’s perfect. That’s enough.”

Seminarian Liam Hosty can speak to the effect that NCYC can have on young people trying to hear God’s call in their lives.

He attended two of the conferences while a student at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis. At the time, he was thinking that God might be calling him to the priesthood, but he wasn’t sure about it.

“I told a couple of priests at NCYC that I was thinking about going to seminary,” said Hosty, a sophomore at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary and Marian University, both in Indianapolis. “I’d say to them, ‘I’m thinking about going to seminary. What do you think?’ Each time, the answer was, ‘Yes. I think you’d be a great fit.’

“It definitely ramped up my faith. It was absolutely incredible to witness 20,000 youths on fire from all across the



Conventual Franciscan Brother Joseph Martin Huang takes a photo of a National Catholic Youth Conference participant from the Covington, Ky., Diocese standing beside life-size cutouts of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thérèse of Lisieux on Nov. 16 in the conference’s Thematic Village in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. Looking on are Conventual Franciscan Fathers John Bamman, second from left, and Jijo Thomas. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)



Salesian Brother Damien Ho speaks with National Catholic Youth Conference participants from the Savannah, Ga., Diocese on Nov. 16 in the conference’s Thematic Village in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

country, seeing amazing speakers and having the sacraments available.”

As a seminarian, he participated in his third straight NCYC, but this time as a volunteer, assisting at liturgies and in the room in the Indiana Convention Center where dozens of priests and bishops

heard confession.

“It’s life-giving just seeing the young Church alive,” Hosty said. “It’s incredible. It’s really cool to be on the other side of the fence trying to help out and kind of give back what all the seminarians and priests gave to me in NCYC.” †

Sister shares heartbreaking story to lead youths to the heart of God

By John Shaughnessy

It wasn’t the story that the 20,000 Catholic youths were expecting to hear from a religious sister.

And the audience of young people inside Lucas Oil Stadium on the morning of Nov. 17 became more quiet and riveted as Sister Miriam James Heidland shared the hard, heartbreaking chapters of her life story.

She told how she was sexually assaulted when she was 11, how she began drinking alcohol on her 12th birthday, how she was raped when she was 13, and how she was an alcoholic at 21.

“I woke up one morning when I was 21, and I remembered two things,” recalled Sister Miriam, a member of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity. “Number one, I remembered what I had done the night before, and it was awful. Secondly, I remember something that was so much deeper in the area of shame.

“I remembered I had promised myself that I wasn’t going to do that anymore. At that moment, I realized I couldn’t stop, that I was sick. I crawled up in a ball on the floor of my room in college, and I just wished for death. And I didn’t know what to do.”

God did, she told the youths.

“He started sending people into my life to speak the truth to me,” she said as she walked across the stage set up in the middle of the stadium floor.

One of the people God sent to her was a priest who challenged her to change her life.

“He would say, ‘You’re called for more. What are you doing with your life? I know you want more. You have a great destiny for your life. Have you thought about saying ‘yes’ to it?’

“That man loved Christ, and he let Christ try to re-form him to the core of his being. And one of the reasons I’m here before you is because of the power of one person who said ‘yes’ to Christ. And how often do you and I think we can’t make a difference? But your ‘yes’ matters. Your life matters. When you say ‘yes,’ the world is changed.”

So has the life of Sister Miriam. “I’ve been sober for many years now, through a lot of people’s love for me and a lot of grace. So I can tell you that wherever you find yourself today, it’s not the end of the story. Jesus is already waiting for you. He’s waiting for you in the areas that are incredibly painful for you. He’s waiting for you in the areas of your deepest dreams and your deepest desires.

“I don’t know what your choice is, but I can tell you that there is nothing in your

life that disqualifies you from his love. So what do you want to choose?”

Earlier in her talk, Sister Miriam told the story of two other choices that continue to define her life.

“My biological parents were high school students, 17 years old, obviously not married,” she shared. “To this day, I’ve never seen her face, but I have a deep intuition that at one point my mother thought of aborting me, but she didn’t. And I stand here before you today because a scared 17-year-old girl said ‘yes’ to life and to the child in her womb.”

Then there was the choice of the couple who became her mother and father when they adopted her.

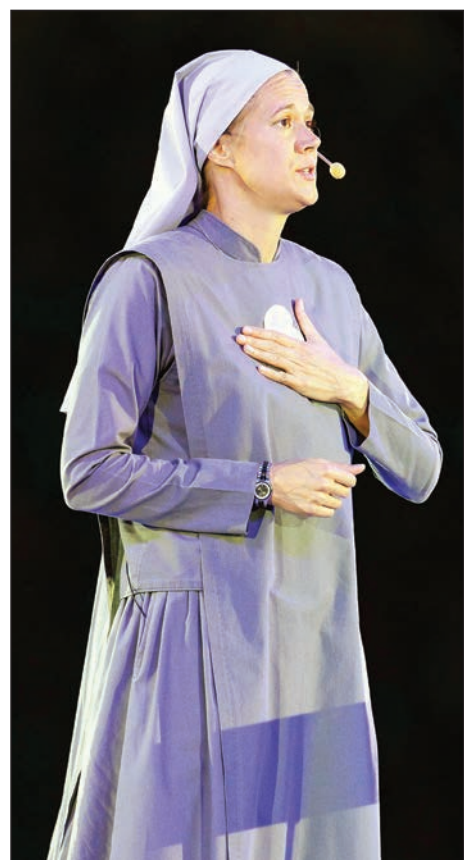
“One of the first pictures my parents have of me was at Christmas time. My mom put me under the Christmas tree and said I was the gift to the family that year.”

God also offers people a gift, she said, his gift of love.

“We don’t understand his heart for us. We don’t understand his love for us. We don’t understand the call that we have in our life, how his heart is always seeking you out, he’s always drawing near to you.

“God longs to heal you because you are made for more. He looks at you, and he just loves you. And he’s doing for you the same thing he did for me.

“God has no other ulterior motive than for you to share in his own beautiful life.” †



Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Sister Miriam James Heidland addresses NCYC participants during the Nov. 17 morning session at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

(Photo by Bob Nichols)



Service project helps ‘impact a country in Africa from Indiana’

By Natalie Hoefler

Eric Devine stood in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis carefully measuring scoops of rice for pre-packaged meals.

Someday, more than 5,300 miles away in Burkina Faso, someone will not starve because of the meals he helped prepare.

“I think it’s really cool that we can impact a country in Africa from where we are in Indiana,” said the teen of St. Christopher Parish in Indianapolis. “We’ll probably never be able to see them, but we’ll be able to know that we were able to help.”

He and other members of his parish’s youth group were among the 3,000 youths, chaperones and youth ministry leaders who prepared bagged meals for the Helping Hands program—formed of a partnership between Catholic Relief Services and Rise Against Hunger—during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis on Nov. 16-18.

By the end of NCYC, 100,000 meals were prepared to send to the West African country.

Why Burkina Faso?

“It’s very arid there, so people trying to grow food there, it makes it really difficult,” said Rachael Holmes, program manager for Helping Hands. “So we try to send relief, which is the meals that people are packaging ... and that’s going to directly impact the people in Burkina Faso.”

But the assistance doesn’t stop with sending meals.

“We’re doing long term development projects, so hopefully they’ll have a future free from hunger,” Holmes explained. “We want them to be sustainable on their own.”

The funds are used for purchasing seeds and water infrastructure for irrigating fields. Helping Hands also offers job skill training such as sewing, raising livestock and how to grind grain—“ways that they can make money on their own,” says Holmes.

An example she cites is a project the program initiated in a town in Burkina Faso.

“We got a group of 120 farmers—men and women—and taught them how to



In the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference, volunteers prepare to make pre-packed meals on Nov. 18 to be sent to Burkina Faso as part of a conference-long service project to help Catholic Relief Services’ Helping Hands program. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

plant a crop that was better during the dry season, and that was actually onions. We worked with them to bring in a water pump and piping so they could pipe the water into their land. The first crop was like four tons of onions they were able to harvest.

“From the funds that came from the U.S., all the people we were able to work with had an impact on this whole community. They’re sending all their kids to be educated, and that impacts their future.”

Participants at NCYC took to the concept of making a difference as they gathered around bag-filling and -sealing stations in 45-minute shifts, including 10 minutes of education about the project, whom it serves, why and how.

“It was a really great opportunity to help people out,” said Mary Snyder of the Diocese of Trenton, N.J. “This service project is helping other people, not just giving them food ... so it’s like the whole ‘teach a man to fish’ versus ‘give a man a fish’ thing.”

Julia Galate of the Diocese of Orlando, Fla., said she participated in a service

project recently, “and I fell in love with the idea of being able to be hands-on and do some work, not just talking about doing good. This was a great opportunity to do so.”

Jessica Watson of the Archdiocese of Washington couldn’t agree more.

“I get to do something good—I love it!” she said enthusiastically. “I really love doing something for the community, and knowing that I’m helping people outside my small community is the best feeling!”

Comments like these are rewarding to Holmes.

“We love to hear that response!” she said. “We hope they leave thinking about the people in Burkina [Faso], and the fact that they don’t have food every day.

“It’s a fun energetic thing, and it shows just how much service you can give in a little amount of time.”

(For more information on the Helping Hands project or how to conduct one in your school or parish, go to helpinghands.crs.org.) †



Moises Larregui of the Diocese of Scranton, Pa., lines up pre-packaged meals destined for Burkina Faso, prepared by volunteers during the National Catholic Youth Conference in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 18.

Bishops find a reason to believe and hope in faith, gifts of young Church

By John Shaughnessy

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson smiled as he considered the energy and the enthusiasm of 20,000 young Catholics from 125 dioceses across the country coming together to embrace their faith.

“Young people are like anyone else. They’re looking for a sense of meaning, a sense of purpose in their lives,” the

archbishop said as he stood amid the whirlwind of the Indiana Convention Center, one of the main sites of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 16-18.

“Coming here shows that young people are looking to where true happiness is, and that’s in relationship to God. It just shows that people are realizing we belong to something greater than ourselves. Young people are finding it in Christ and in this Church. It just shows a sense of hope and vibrancy for our Church for today and for tomorrow.”

The Church needs “the giftedness of young people, their energy and their wonderful insights,” the archbishop said. “They’re essential to our Church and to who we are as people of God.”

Archbishop Thompson was one of about 30 bishops who attended the conference in Indianapolis, after a busy few days of meetings with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops earlier in the week in Baltimore.

The extra effort to be in Indianapolis was more than worthwhile to Archbishop Paul D. Etienne of Anchorage, Alaska.

“I want to do all that I can to build a relationship with our youths so they know of my support for them,” said

Archbishop Etienne, a former priest of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis who also served as the bishop of Cheyenne, Wyo.

“I travel around to all of the parishes to confirm them, and I’ve been meeting with the young adults as well. I want to know what their story is, and I want to know how they relate to God, how they relate to Christ and how I can do a better job as a shepherd relating the message

of the Gospel and the Good News to them.”

Archbishop Etienne shared his comments shortly after witnessing the enthusiasm of the 20,000 youths in an early morning faith gathering at Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 17.

“It’s inspiring,” he said. “We hear how we’re losing this generation. This tells me there’s hope; we’re not.”

Hope also drew Bishop Christopher J. Coyne of the Diocese of Burlington, Vt. He noted that this was the first time that a group of youths had come from Vermont for the national conference.

“A lot of our young people are kind of adrift,” said Bishop Coyne, former auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. “So anything that can get

them active in a good way within the faith and within the Church is good. And NCYC sure can do that. You’re with so

many other young people and adult chaperones and people with beliefs, and you hear great talks and wonderful music.

“When they come to an event like this, they leave with an experience of the Church that’s much greater than their little parish. And hopefully they leave more committed to being a member of the Catholic Church and also maybe to inviting others to be part of it.”

Simple math and an opportunity for connection led to the presence of Bishop William F. Medley of Owensboro, Ky., at the conference.

“If I get 300 youths together in one place, I ought to be there as their shepherd,” Bishop Medley said on Nov. 17. “The theme this morning was about holiness and wanting to become saints. I want them to know I’m trying to speak that to them as well.”

He was also energized by what he witnessed, calling the faith gathering of 20,000 youths as “countercultural.”

“The Spirit is moving,” Bishop Medley said. “Twenty thousand is a lot of youth. They’ve chosen to be here, to see the vitality of the Church and participate in eucharistic adoration and the Mass. I still run into adults who came here two, four, six, eight years ago. I know good seeds are being planted for a bountiful harvest.” †



Mia Roberts, a member of the Archdiocesan Youth Council and St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis, introduces Archbishop Charles C. Thompson during the Nov. 17 morning session of the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Bob Nichols)



Archbishop Paul D. Etienne



Bishop William F. Medley



Bishop Christopher J. Coyne



Church's future 'in good hands,' declares Archbishop Gomez during NCYC closing Mass

By Natalie Hoefler

When Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson thanked Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez for celebrating the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 18, a cheer broke out from the Los Angeles youths in attendance.

And when he mentioned the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting in Baltimore, that archdiocese's contingent of teens shouted and clapped.



Virginia Partlow of the Diocese of Albany, N.Y., prays during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

He proceeded to receive shouts and standing ovations when he thanked the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministers, and then when he thanked the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, and then when he thanked all of the religious, deacons, priests and bishops who helped with NCYC...and then when he wished everyone safe travels.

He just shook his head and laughed. "A guy going to a Catholic wedding told me he didn't know if he should wear a dress suit or a warmup suit because Catholics stand up and sit down so much!" he joked. And that line too received a thunderous standing ovation.

It was the kind of spirited joy that only 20,000 youths could exude at the end of the three-day NCYC gathering.

Not long before the revelry, the very same youths had knelt in solemn prayer after receiving the most holy Eucharist during the convention's closing Mass in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Thirteen bishops, including Archbishop Thompson, concelebrated the Mass with its primary celebrant, Archbishop Gomez, who wove into his homily another auspicious Catholic event that happened earlier that day.

"Blessed Solanus Casey was just beatified today in Detroit ...," he said. "[God] gave him many gifts. He was a good listener, and he had a deep faith and deep heart for Jesus. He wanted above all to serve God."

But that is not why the Capuchin Franciscan was beatified, said the archbishop. Rather, he was beatified "because he tried to serve God in every moment. ... He used his gifts to help others.

"This is how God wants us to live, to make your whole life a life of giving. ...

"Try to do little things for God. Try to be a little miracle in someone's life. Give hope.

"Yes, we can strive for holiness because it is ... doing God's will in the little things of daily life."

Such was the message of the day's Gospel reading from Matthew, he said of the parable of the servants and the talents.

"The parable of the talents is a plan for life," Archbishop Gomez said. "Jesus is talking to us about our relationship with God. How are we



An NCYC participant receives Communion during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18. (Photo by Mike Krokos)



Members of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis hold hands for the Our Father during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Archbishop Jose H. Gomez waves as he processes out of the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18. (Photo by Mike Krokos)



Deacon David Farrell from the Archdiocese of Louisville, left, and Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez elevate the Eucharist during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

using the gifts God gives us? ...

"The words we hear in the Gospel from Matthew is what God wants for each of us: 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. ... Come, share your master's joy.'"

The archbishop gave specific advice to help the youths do God's will and to become holy: "The most important thing ... is to pray," he said.

"When I was your age, I made a decision ... to spend some time in prayer daily, and it has made an extra difference in my life.

"If you make time for prayer every day, you will see a difference. ... Listen to [Jesus], even for just a few minutes. ... Be consistent. Do it every day. I promise you, if you spend time in prayer every day ... you will start to see that Jesus is with you and how much he loves you." Elizabeth Murillo

of the Diocese of Dallas, who attended NCYC for the first time, experienced such a moment earlier during the conference.

"One of the things that stood out to me is that someone said to let God speak to me, and [God] said to me, 'You're not alone, you have me. You can count on me anytime you want,'" she recalled.

Several youths cited the time adoring the Blessed Sacrament as a group of 20,000 teens on Nov. 17 in the stadium as the most impactful moment of NCYC.

"I've been to adoration before many times at different retreats," said Elisha Mix of the Orlando Diocese. "But to see [20,000] youths adoring the Lord is something amazing."

Daniel Linn of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis agreed.

"I've never celebrated it that way before, with so many people being so sacred," he said.

Overall, said Daniel, NCYC was "just mind blowing. It was very powerful to see all these people come together and celebrate their faith together. The Church is a lot stronger than it seems in the world."

Based on a comment he made in his homily, it would seem that Archbishop Gomez agrees.

"You inspire us bishops," he told the 20,000 youths. "You give us hope. The future of the Church is in good hands with you." †



Chaperones, youth ministers are energized by young people's faith

By Mike Krokos and Natalie Hoefler

While the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) focuses on giving 20,000 teenagers the opportunity to deepen their relationship with God, it's a focus that youth ministers—and many adults—strive for all the time.

Knowing that commitment, *The Criterion* asked adult chaperones and youth ministers at the conference why they attended, and what they hoped the teenagers gained from their pilgrimage of faith to Indianapolis.

Jeff Scott, a chaperone from St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, attending with his son and daughter.

"It shows these guys there are other kids here celebrating their faith at the same time, and making it fun. ... There's incredible energy.

"[I hope] the kids come away understanding the message that they're trying to share—that they're called, that they're chosen, that God's in them, and that they too need to live up to that higher purpose."

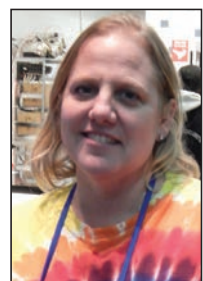
Joi Hunter, St. Charles Lwanga Parish in Detroit, in the Archdiocese of Detroit. She is a youth minister, and she first attended NCYC in Indianapolis as a chaperone in 2001.



Joi Hunter

"Now that I'm a youth minister myself and we have a pretty large youth group at our parish, I thought, 'They have to experience this.'

"I hope the kids come away with a bigger sense of the Church, that it's not just us alone in our little urban parish, that it increases their faith."



Sarah Medford

Sarah Medford, 7-12th-grade youth leader at her church, St. Pius X Parish in Moberly, Mo., in the Diocese of Jefferson City, Mo. She attended with her younger daughter.

"Two years ago, my oldest daughter and I came, and we were so inspired and moved by the whole process, that it just ignited us that we had to come back.

"It's very powerful to see this many Catholics worshipping together. It really drives home the fact that we're part of something bigger than ourselves. We come together, and we all believe the same thing, and there's so much power in that.

"I hope the kids get the sense that they are loved, that they truly are called, if nothing more than just called to be a child of God."

Daniel Gaskill, St. Francis Borgia Parish in Blair, Neb., in the Archdiocese of Omaha, Neb. He attended with his 15-year-old son.



Daniel Gaskill

"It's just incredible. It's been very moving, very emotional. I might start crying right now. Just to see the youths and the way they're absorbing these different events is something I've never witnessed at this magnitude in my entire life.

"I think our deacon, Jeff Zurek, and our priest, Father James [Netusil], said it best: 'We're coming here to absorb and learn about Jesus, and take it back home to our families and friends and our community, and that's what I hope the kids do.' From what I've seen, I think they will."

Willie St. Pierre, youth minister in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, La.

"There are so many things in their lives pulling them away from the Church, I think that anytime they can see other youths their ages and them being able to express their faith, that it gives them an opportunity to do the same thing. We can definitely see from coming to NCYC before that when we come back they're more involved in the Church, taking on more projects. ... You can see their faith starting to develop and grow as they come to NCYC."

Todd Levitas, a youth minister for the Archdiocese of Washington, at NCYC for the first time.

"Just in private conversations, some of these youths are saying they're growing in their faith—not just emotionally growing but doctrine-wise, knowledge-wise. They said they're getting a lot out of the talks, a lot about gratitude and a lot about growing in self-knowledge. That's the best." †

(To see photo galleries from NCYC, go to criteriononline.com.) †



NCYC participant Nick Nachreiner of the Diocese of Winona, Minn., wears his sporty headgear in the Indiana Catholic Convention Center on Nov. 16. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

YOUTHS

continued from page 3A



'I like spending time with people who value their faith'

Nearly everywhere she turned, 16-year-old Minh-Tam Le glowed as she took in all the sights of the festive atmosphere at the Thematic Village of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

She laughed as she watched two of her friends from the Diocese of Santa Rosa, Calif., compete in a giant version of the

childhood game, Connect-Four.

She smiled as she watched other teenagers from across the country wear funny and funky hats that ranged from pizzas to cornstalks and from halos to birthday cakes complete with lit candles.

"This energizes my faith," Minh-Tam said, flashing another smile. "I get to be

around people I love, and connect with other teens of my faith. I like spending time with people who value their faith as much as I do."

They're exactly the qualities that make her Catholic faith so important to her.

"My Catholic faith means love and unity and sacrifice. It shapes my life and my values."

'I know I will have God to be there with me'



At 18, Makenna Kohner-Thesing has made it a point to try to talk to God as much as possible during her four years of high school. She especially needed to talk with him as she prepared for her final exams at the end of her junior year.

"I was extremely stressed, and didn't know where to turn," recalls the high school senior from the Diocese of Winona, Minn. "I talked to God about my worries and fears, and asked him to strengthen me during those times."

The approach worked, but Makenna has embraced a different plan in her senior year.

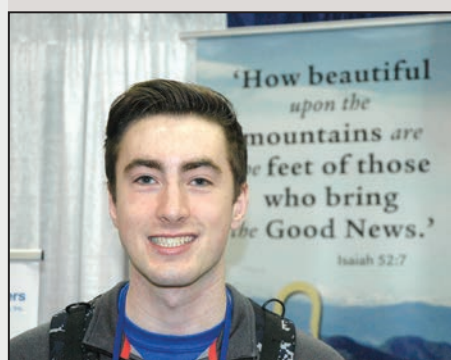
"Lately, I've been backing off from

doing the talking. I'm letting him do the talking and the guiding—to let me know what he wants. I'm just trying to continue trusting in him and allowing him to work in my life in ways I might not expect."

For Makenna, it all adds up to how significant her Catholic faith is for her: "It guides my everyday life." Still, she came to NCYC wanting to go even deeper.

"I want to expand my relationship with God, and hopefully meet people who will strengthen my faith in him. When I go away to college next year, one of the hardest things will be leaving my family, but I know I will have God to be there with me.

"It's comforting to know that through talking with God, I'll feel closer to my family even though we're miles apart."



'My parents would agree it was a big, life-changing experience for me'

Noah Streit thought it was more than cool when someone at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) noticed his youth group from the Archdiocese of Anchorage, Alaska, and dubbed the group "The Frozen Chosen."

That moment of fun and faith reminded Noah of the heart-warming and soul-stirring experience that he had two years ago at NCYC—an experience that

made him want to return to Indianapolis for the conference on Nov. 16-18.

"It was a life-changing experience for me," said Noah, who is 18. "I wasn't as huge into the Church when I came here two years ago. But after that, I started to go to church a lot more, I was part of the youth group a lot more, and I helped with service projects and Sunday school.

"It was awesome. My parents would agree it was a big, life-changing experience for me. I wanted to come back to re-energize my faith.

"I love the Catholic faith. I love church. I love God. And I like to do things like this. I definitely feel I'm a lot more into the Church and my faith." †