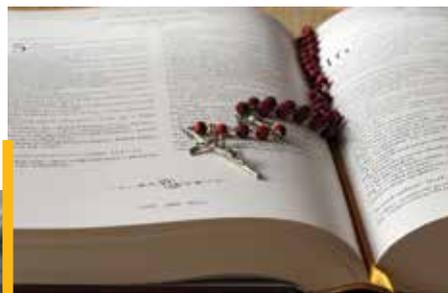


My Top 3

Lessons from World Youth Day



DEWY SACAYAN shares how the experiences and friends she made at World Youth Day enrich and encourage her faith in everyday life.

Going to World Youth Day has become a rite of passage for many young Catholics. It is a way of finding out more about our spirituality through meeting our peers from all over the world, discerning vocations and celebrating the mysteries with the Pope.

WYD with Family

To a certain extent, it has become a family tradition for me and my siblings to attend World Youth Day (WYD). Our first WYD was in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We went as pilgrims with other Aucklanders. Our quaint group of 17 allowed us to travel in one bus, and to be as flexible as possible about where we would camp the night or which festival people we would like to go to. More importantly, our little group meant that local Brazilians in Guaratingueta were able to shower us with love through opening their homes, dancing

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and feeding us good food!

Our second WYD was in Krakow, Poland. My twin sister and I went as volunteers. I was a field journalist for the international content team while Dawn, my twin sister, was based at the airport where she was in charge of welcoming bishops and pilgrims.

World Youth Day Krakow was an exhilarating experience as we were literally surrounded with inspirational saints and history. As volunteers, we were able to visit different solemn monasteries and beautiful churches whenever we wanted and needed to pray. My favourite experience was celebrating Mass and Reconciliation at the Divine Mercy centre. Practising the sacrament of Reconciliation made it even more special since it was 2016, the Year of Mercy, and we were at the heart of mercy.

These two experiences allowed us to gain new perspectives on our faith but, most importantly, we made new friends who have helped us to grow spiritually.

In terms of spiritual growth, WYD gave me three main lessons which I will have for the rest of my life.

Practising Reflection

First, I learnt the importance of reflection. Before going to WYD, I kept a journal where I diarised my journey, prayers and worries. Keeping a journal meant that I committed one or two hours to reflect back on the day and be grateful. It was also a moment where I could stop and start afresh for the next day.

We millennials often over-fill our days and end up

having “The Busy Syndrome”. We can spend hours on social media and yet it can be a mission to sit still and find peace and quiet for an hour, or even half an hour.

I definitely suffer from bad FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) so I tend to say yes to all opportunities even if it means I’m exhausted by the end of the day – which means I sleep as soon as I sit to reflect. But although I don’t want to live with regrets, I’m trying to remind myself of the flipside to FOMO: there’s no point to all these experiences if I’m not able to remember them. So I’m learning to embrace the silence and reflect.

Discerning Vocation

The second lesson I learnt is the significance of asking for your vocation from friends and the Religious. When I went to WYD in Rio de Janeiro, I was too young and naïve to think about my future as a Catholic. All I knew was to have fun and live in the moment. But we are given a purpose in life and we are called to listen and to follow God’s plans for us. Knowing my vocation is a way to give meaning to my life and to see my 9-5 job as not just work but as part of my identity or calling.

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I found WYD in Krakow a gathering of vocations. Poland has a tragic history and yet it is rising above it. In almost every corner, we found monasteries and churches devoted to saints who had found their calling as priests and religious – St John Paul II, St Maximillian Kobe and Sr Maria Faustina to name a few. Being near to inspirational people who were witnesses to God and learning about their lives was an overwhelming experience. It showed me how important discernment really is.

Discernment is a funny concept. You may not know how to discern or even what discernment is when you start out. I certainly knew nothing about it before WYD Krakow! A good friend – who trained as a seminarian and recently got married – told me something that has stuck with me: “Discerning for God is consciously choosing to love. After all, all vocations are rooted in love and in God. It is only when you feel at peace with yourself and in your situation that you realise that this may be your vocation.”

Finding my vocation was a rollercoaster ride. I prayed and accepted all opportunities to be with friends and the Religious. I joined youth groups where I met newlywed couples, asking them how they found each other through the faith. I stayed with long-married friends and learned about their family life. I built rapport with a Carmelite nun. We would have tea and I would receive counsel from her. I even lived in a secular city surrounded with non-believers to burst my bubble – that in itself was a form of discernment as it helped me choose love over anything. My

conversations with all of my friends – living with them and seeing their daily lives – gave me a good sense of my own ongoing vocation discernment. I have learned that it is not until I consciously open my life to listening to God’s plan that I will find what I am looking for.

Support of Friends

My third lesson is the importance of keeping in touch with friends for fellowship. One of my friends said that WYD is the Woodstock for Catholics. I think it is more than that – it is a community. It is a place where like-minded young people come together for one main reason – love for God.

Nowadays, making friends is easy but keeping in touch is difficult. Although social media is great for keeping in touch, it can be a bit superficial. This is why I write and send postcards! And after coming home from WYD, opening my mailbox or going to the post office has never been such fun – reading pages of handwritten letters fills my heart.

My friends reinvigorate my faith every time I face challenges or spiritual dryness. The sisterhoods I have made and the friends who I have visited in their homes during my European trip are a tremendous testament to our Church.

I feel privileged and grateful to have experienced WYD and I encourage young Catholics to attend it if they have the opportunity. I have learned so much, and it has been wonderful to see how big a part youth play in the Church. It is a rite of passage, but more importantly, it is an elating experience because of the priceless memories you will make.

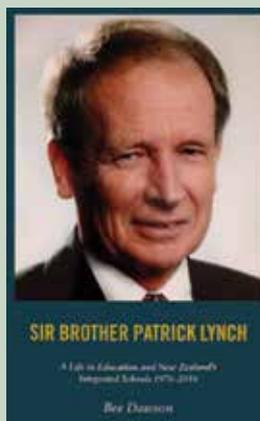
See you at WYD in Panama in 2019! 

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