
«A Mighty Wind Arose» (3)



In this third article on World Youth Day I would like to consider with you what we could do as a follow-up to this extraordinary event which occurred between July 18 and 28, 2002. We must not allow the WYD to be a flash in the pan sparked for the pleasure of its organisers, however famous they may be. We must meet the specific goal set by the Holy Father when he asked, on July 28: an encounter of the world's youth with Christ. «Why have you come from all quarters of the world?» And he answered his own question, saying: «So that we may together say to Christ: 'Lord, to whom could we go? You have the words of everlasting life.' Jesus, the intimate friend of every young person, has words of life.»

LISTEN TO THE WITNESSES

It seems to me that one of the first activities, besides reading over the Pope's official texts while in Canada, and looking at some videos of the event, would be to listen to those who were part of the preparation and execution of the WYD celebration. We are lucky to have had close to seventy-five carefully prepared people in our diocese, who welcomed and hosted the other young people of Atlantic Canada, and who then made the journey to Toronto. Very interesting comments have reached us, and I hope that each pilgrim will take time to write a bit about his or her experience, either in preparing or actually living the WYD. I remember the long road walked from the time of the first meetings in the fall of 2001, to July 28 and 29, 2002 – return trip included! I hope that each parish community will contact one of these pilgrims or publish the story of one of them.

CREATING ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

Whether it be through the above activity or any other, I believe that the final end pursued will always be youth's encounter with Christ... This is the ABC of youth ministry: listening to youth so as to better grasp their needs and desires, in order to fill them with him alone who can bring peace, joy, and complete happiness. This will call for appropriate educational approaches in order not to go too fast. There might be times when one will have to walk quite a distance with youth: let us allow ourselves to be questioned by Jesus along the road to Emmaus. Jesus recognised two very confused disciples, he approached them, questioned them on their sadness and despair, and then he instructed them at length on the Word of God, explaining to them everything that concerned him, revealing to them why he had to suffer, breaking bread with them, and warming their hearts... Just like parents who are involved in their children's religious education, thus also must everyone act who is interested in youth ministry.

VARIOUS SITUATIONS

In following up on WYD 2002 we shall quickly realise that thought must also be given to youth ministry at the local level, at a section of the town or the parish. The situations experienced by our youth are diverse, according to age, sex, the family's financial position, studies, jobs, experience, one's financial situation, etc. Some are already confronted with having to survive at an age as young as fifteen, others are isolated or else belong to gangs. Youth groups or movements have disappeared or are practically non-existent, except for scouting and the militia. Groups such as sports teams or cultural activities groups can interest a few young people who are looking for a warm, friendly atmosphere. They accept the help of adults who are open to them

and who can listen to them, but they count first and foremost on their peers. Some of them, because of having to deal with the law or correctional institutions, and others who have had to seek help from welfare or community services, are attempting to rehabilitate themselves or to do like young people their age.

A «LIVING TEST»

In the Diocese of Québec's Justice and Faith Report, we read the following regarding youth ministry: «On several occasions it has been said that youth are a 'living test' of our mission ministry, that is, in the midst of the world. This ministry must reach the youth in their own cultural sensibilities. Can youth ministry ignore the facts of unemployment and delinquency, of prostitution or suicide ? It was from the aspect of leisure time that the Church of yesterday reached out to youth. The abandonment of all these different organisations, without worthwhile alternatives, often creates a void in the Church as well as in the young people themselves. We really work hard to draw youth and others into our projects, rather than being concerned with their projects and interests. Do we really listen to their concerns ? It seems an exercise in futility to start by recruiting youths through celebrations. It is in activities that they will be more easily encountered: visits, volunteering, etc., without too much structure. We do not usually nor necessarily begin with celebrations. Celebrations will come after commitments. At first there must be concrete commitments with encouraging results. It would even be disquieting to confine youth at first meeting to things liturgical within Church structures. There are times when they shall need to be accompanied for weeks and months, with much listening, and through a common language. Appropriate parish structures will be established only after having shared in activity with the youth. Adults would often find it hard to accept the slow pace needed in working with youth.» These words could guide us in our own undertaking.

CASTING OFF

In the wake of the 2002 World Youth Day, we are offered a vast construction site: let us go to youth without fear and let us together plan a few projects. We share a common element, that of having experienced WYD 2002 together, or at least of having heard about it or having watched it on television. This is certainly a beginning for dialogue between the young and their elders. Youth ministry is characterised more and more by the bonds created between generations, and should be part and parcel of family pastoral ministry. The family, the school, the Church, and leisure time are all occasions for creating bonds, what we need is to strengthen them. John Paul II, following Paul VI, was not afraid to inaugurate something new, like the WYD; a friendly get-together, contests, hikes and the like can be very special occasions for getting together to learn about one another better. There are so many activities where youth can «add their grain of salt» and give more flavour to every activity, the liturgy included. It would be important to talk about this regularly. A beautiful mission awaits us, a mission full of youth and enthusiasm!

+ François Thibodeau ym

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (450) (21 August 2002)