



Pilgrims to World Youth Day

At this summer's World Youth Day in Poland Baker Diocese was well represented. Jacquie Hitzman of St. Mary's in Pendleton brought together a group of young people from several parishes; Father Kumar Udagandla and some untiring adults helped her keep them together as they made their way to Europe and back. Jackie's illustrated account of their journey in this issue gives a good feel for the physically demanding, emotionally taxing, spiritually uplifting adventure they had. Being thrown together in a strange land with millions of people your own age from every country under the sun who share and celebrate the same Catholic Faith with the Successor of Peter is an experience that cuts deep into memory. You bring home a much bigger vision of the Church than you left with.

Having attended World Youth Day abroad myself (Paris in 1997, Rome in 2000), I decided to participate this year closer to home—at the Steubenville Northwest Conference in Spokane. We did not number in the millions, but well over a thousand young people came from throughout the Northwest, including the Diocese of Baker. I was delighted to see participants from youth groups all over the Diocese—north, south, east, west, and central. (We never all got together at once, so nobody knows how many attended; but a lot of parish-group photos were taken.)

Gatherings in the style of World Youth Day highlight conversion, confession, and

Eucharistic Adoration. The organizers in Spokane gave me the joy of celebrating the Saturday Mass and put me to work with 25 other priests hearing confessions several hours opening night and for three shifts of two hours each the next day. We were busy the whole time. Our young penitents sought pardon searchingly, sincerely, and hopefully—that is, with a desire to change what they do or don't do that keeps them from the happiness God desires them to find. Weeks later, I am still impressed by their insight and their openness to conversion. And I'm grateful to them for going out of their way to take part in such soul-strengthening days. No less worthy of praise and thanks is the dedication of the adults who accompanied our pilgrims and looked out for them all along the way. Blessed indeed are the young recipients of such tireless generosity.

In years to come they will look back on the summer of 2016 as the time they set out on pilgrimage for Krakow or Spokane. To get there they had to cross borders. The God they met on the other side was the One they knew at home, but they came to know Him better, for World Youth Day and Steubenville Northwest have given them a taste of the Church Universal. They have seen for themselves that God's love reaches farther and wider than they had imagined. Who's to say how far He might lead them if they continue along the pilgrim way of His Church?