

World Youth Day Lisbon 2023, here comes Sydney!

By **Adam Wesselinoff** - October 17, 2022

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Join us for World Youth Day Lisbon 2023! Photo: Giovanni Portelli, The Catholic Weekly.

As school leavers and young adults contemplate Schoolies, Contiki tours or a gap year, Catholic youth are thinking further ahead: to World Youth Day Lisbon 2023, and to the life of the world to come.

But all pilgrimages have to start somewhere. For the 200 young Sydneysiders who gathered for formation and information on 12 October, that place was Canterbury League Club in Belmore.

22-year-old Matthew Frijo, a religion and history teacher at All Saints Catholic College, Liverpool, had a life-changing experience in Italy during 2016's WYD pilgrimage.

He came to discern whether to lead his students through the WYD experience or to attend as a staff pilgrim.

"It really set my faith on fire in 2016 in Italy," Mr Frijo said.

"I had this profound experience with God, really encountered him in the beauty in the Church.

"There was one moment in Florence, when I was praying, I encountered the Lord.

"That moment set me on a path, to go through a bit of a heart conversion."

He said that while God could be encountered at Mass or a parish youth group, the scale and challenge of pilgrimage was part of its appeal.

"It's an adventure. We're all made for adventure!" Mr Frijo said.



Young Catholics hear from WYD veterans Kathy Campbell and Selina Hasham. Photo: Giovanni Portelli, The Catholic Weekly.

24-year-old Neil from St Mary Mackillop's Rockdale attended World Youth Day Sydney at age 10, while still in primary school, with his family.

He was an altar server in school but as an adult has practiced his faith less intensely. He wants to attend WYD Lisbon to travel and rekindle his love for God.

"I'm a big fan of Europe. Hopefully I can experience Europe as well as getting closer to my faith," he said.

"Seeing people my age as well, connecting with everybody, making some new friends."



Sydney Auxiliary Bishop Richard Umbers with Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers. Photo: Giovanni Portelli, The Catholic Weekly

Attendees received high-octane catechesis from visiting speaker Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, who was touring Australia at the invitation of Parousia media.

He preached on the theme chosen for WYD Lisbon by Pope Francis, “Mary arose and went with haste” (Lk 1:39).

“We often make the mistake of saying, ‘All you young people, you’re the future of the Church.’ No, you’re the Church now,” Deacon Burke-Sivers said.

“We need your energy. We need your passion. We need your vitality, your witness, your enthusiasm, and your joy – Oh Lord, we need your joy! – probably now more than ever.”

Sydney Catholic Youth team leader Milad Khalil “guaranteed” every attendee would be changed by the pilgrimage if they took the plunge, citing his own encounter with God at WYD Sydney in 2008.

“Going from somebody who didn’t really have much of an interest in anything ‘churchy’ really, to looking after youth ministry for the Archdiocese. That’s the effect it had on me,” Mr Khalil said.

Bishop Richard Umbers told the young Catholics in attendance that WYD was about showing the world the joy of what it means to be a Christian, and experiencing that joy for ourselves.

“It’s as if we think, ‘What does it mean to be Catholic? It means you can’t do this, and you can’t do that.’” Bishop Umbers said.

"That's not what drives us, that's not what drives us!

"We need to be able to show people, not just with words, what it means to be Catholic. What it means to be in love with Jesus Christ.

"It's a good thing, and that joy overflows. Very, very, very important for ourselves to experience something of that."



Pilgrims can travel direct to Lisbon, or via Rome or the Holy Land. Photo: Giovanni Portelli/The Catholic Weekly

Pilgrims received information from veteran WYD organisers Kathy Campbell and Selina Hasham, CEO of Harvest Journeys, alongside Dr Robert Haddad, Manager, Network Catholic Identity for Sydney Catholic Schools.

Lisbon will be Mrs Campbell's seventh WYD, and Mrs Hasham's ninth.

Pilgrims have the opportunity to travel to Lisbon direct, or on extended pilgrimages through the Holy Land or Italy.

They will also enjoy a visit to Fatima, site of the historic apparitions of Our Lady in 1917, and a retreat afterwards to reflect on their experiences.

Want to attend World Youth Day with the Archdiocese of Sydney? [Register your interest at the Sydney Catholic Youth website by clicking here.](#)