

FULLY ALIVE



INCYC

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Teens from the Diocese of Gary, Ind., laugh on Nov. 18 during the homily of the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Fun and faith combine to create a 'Fully Alive' celebration at NCYC

"You're not a problem to be solved, you are a mystery to be encountered."

Those words shared by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 16 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis set the tone for a three-day gathering of faith for more than 12,000 teenagers, chaperones, clergy, religious, speakers and volunteers. That phrase was repeated several times during the weekend.

The archbishop's message tied in with the gathering's theme, "Fully Alive," where young people were reminded that they are called to be disciples who let the light of Christ shine through them in all they say and do.

Archbishop Thompson reminded the teens that each of them is defined by their identity in Christ, whose body,

blood, soul and divinity is present in the Eucharist.

"The Eucharist has been given to us through the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we have life, that we have what is necessary to be witnesses to the good news, what it means to be fully alive," he said.

"We are most fully alive when we live our lives not with ourselves at the center, but keeping Christ at the center. We are fully alive when we live for the glory of God and in service to others."

The teens were reminded several times during the weekend that Jesus loves them and wants to have a relationship with them.

During a Mass on Nov. 17 at St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis, Bishop Bruce A. Lewandowski,

an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Md., told young people, "Jesus only wants one thing from you—make him the love of your life!"

In today's ever-growing secularistic world, we know that charge is no easy task.

In his homily at the closing Mass on Nov. 18, Bishop Joseph A. Espaillat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, implored his young listeners to take up the mission given to them by Christ in their baptism.

"We are the now of God," he said. "NCYC, we are counting on you. Jesus started with 12 Apostles. We have 12,000 here today. So, we can change the world!"

"God bless you. God keep you. May he continue to let his face shine upon you. And always remember: have faith, have fun while you're doing it," Bishop Espaillat continued. "And remember, hold on to the Church, because the Church is holding on to you."

We hope the stories and photos featured on pages 1B-12B in this week's issue of *The Criterion* paint a portrait of a young Church that is serving as a beacon of light in a troubled world.

For more photos from the conference, visit www.CriterionOnline.com.

And we pray that you enjoy the young people's stories, their enthusiasm and their passion for our shared faith.

—Mike Krokos, editor



Youths from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, kneel in prayer during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

On the cover, page 1B

At top, scores of priests process into Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18 during the closing Mass for the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC). An estimated 12,000 teenagers attended this year's gathering. (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)

At bottom, an NCYC participant stretches out her hands in prayer during eucharistic adoration in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 17. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Bishop exhorts youths at closing Mass of NCYC to choose 'joy over fear'

By Sean Gallagher

The joyful shouts of 12,000 Catholic teens from across the country echoed loudly during the two-hour closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Bishop Joseph A. Espailat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, described the scene well during his homily in which he often led a loud call-and-response dialogue with the youths.

"Jesus, my sisters and my brothers, left us the best party! He left us the Eucharist," Bishop Espailat shouted. "This is the party *par excellence*, man! You've got a front seat, buddy! This is good news!"

The congregation responded immediately with a deafening, "Amen!"

"Did you hear that? I think that was louder than a [Indianapolis] Colts game," said Bishop Espailat from the floor of the stadium where the city's National Football League team plays its home games.

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., was the principal celebrant of the Mass. He was joined by 17 concelebrating bishops, including Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and approximately 175 concelebrating priests.

While Bishop Espailat had many moments of fun and laughter during his homily, he also gave important messages to his listeners to take with them as they returned to their homes across the country.

The first was that they were called to choose "joy over fear."

In explaining this, Bishop Espailat distinguished between a "worldly fear that creates panic and anxiety" and "a holy fear, or fear of the Lord, [that] is a source of peace and happiness."

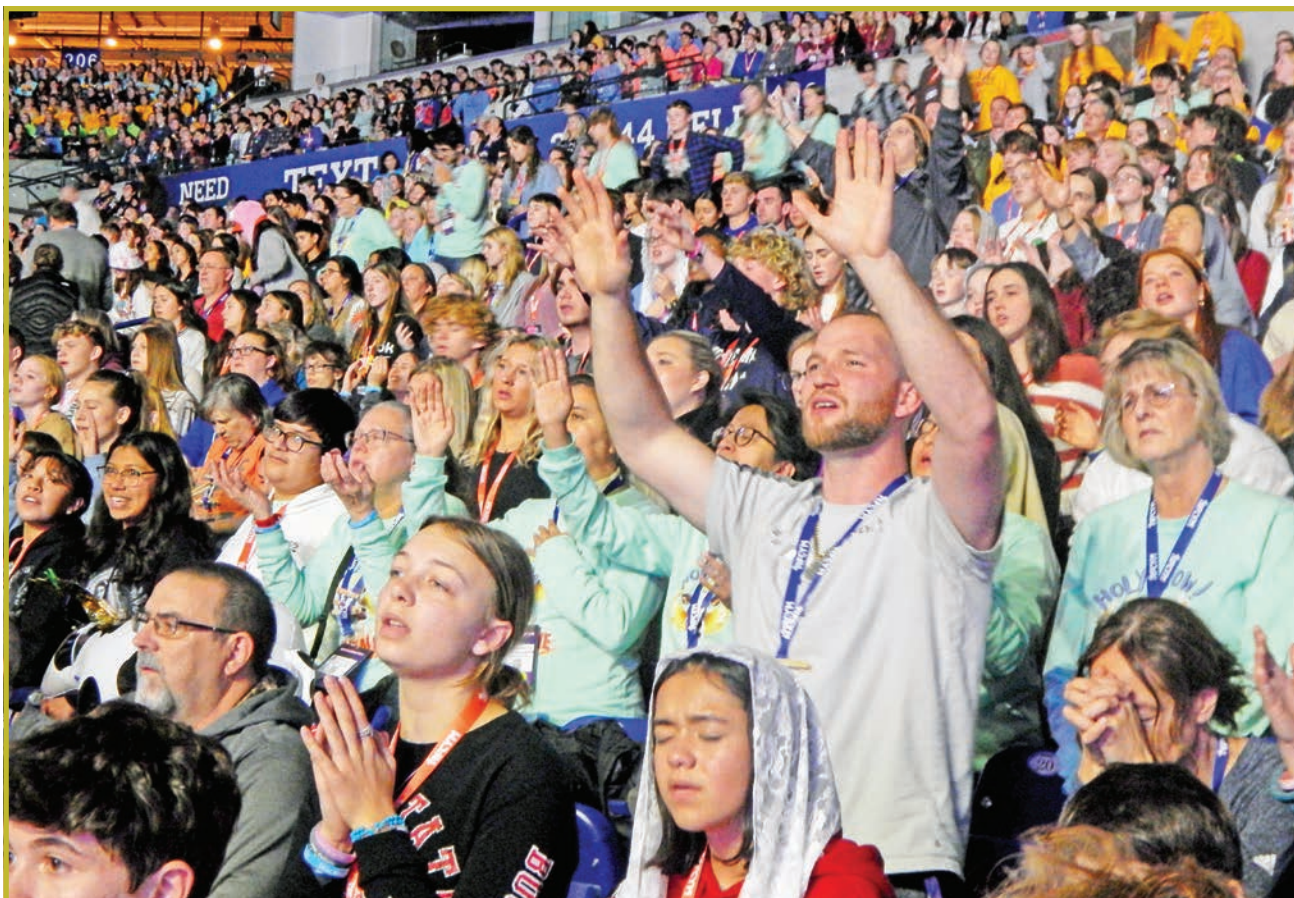
"If we love God and know that we are loved by God, then why do we need to fear?" he asked his listeners.

Bishop Espailat then laid out three simple points he wanted the young people at NCYC to take home with them.

"You've got to have faith," he said. "You've got to have fun while you do it. And you need family and friends and community along the way."

Bishop Espailat added that the faith to which he exhorted the youths involved more than simply affirming that God exists.

"It's not just about believing in God," he said. "It's



Participants in the National Catholic Youth Conference raise their hands in prayer during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

accepting what God gives us, especially through the Church, and then responding by our actions by how we treat each other and the way we live.

"Faith is critical because it leads us to joy. And joy overcomes worldly fear because it leads us outside of ourselves."

During his homily, Bishop Espailat quoted from Pope Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation "*Evangelii Gaudium*" ("The Joy of the Gospel"), in which the pontiff wrote that all believers have the "mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing" (#273).

Regarding the blessing mentioned by the pope, Bishop Espailat asked his listeners with a smile to raise their hands if they knew how to curse at people.

Many in the stadium predictably did.

They also cheered loudly after Bishop Espailat told them that "if you know how to curse, you know how to bless. If you know how to curse, you are following what the enemy wants you to do. That's what the devil wants. But God doesn't want you to curse. God wants you to bless. So, instead of cursing somebody out, we need to bless people up."

In closing his homily, Bishop Espailat called his young listeners to take up the mission given to them by Christ in their baptism.

"We are the now of God," he said. "NCYC, we are counting on you. Jesus started with 12 Apostles. We have 12,000 here today. So, we can change the world!"

A long, loud cheer filled the stadium in response to Bishop Espailat's call. As the cheer died down, the bishop gave a parting blessing.

"God bless you. God keep you. May he continue to let his face shine upon you. And always remember: have faith, have fun while you're doing it. And remember, hold on to the Church, because the Church is holding on to you."

The raucousness of the 35-minute homily later gave way to quiet, emotional and heartfelt prayer during Communion as the house band played such popular contemporary Christian meditative songs as "Yeshua" and "Lord, I need you."

As the Mass closed, the rejoicing returned, with flashlights on smartphones lighting up the floor and stands in the stadium. When the closing



Bishop Joseph A. Espailat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, gives the homily during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

procession was over, the band began playing upbeat music and teens rushed forward to celebrate as close to the stage as they could get.

Zach Spahr, a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis, was proud that so many of his Catholic peers from across the country had come to his hometown to celebrate their faith.

"There are a lot of times when I think that Indy is not really the best place," said Zach in a concourse of the stadium after the liturgy. "But then you see something like this and it's like, 'What a great place to live!' There's a little bit of pride."

He spoke about how he, as a Catholic, sometimes feels alone at North Central High School in Indianapolis where he is a student.

"So, seeing that there are so many other Catholics across the country is important to me," Zach said.

The jubilation of the 12,000 young Catholics at the closing Mass confirmed that conviction in Ean Nelson, a sophomore from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa.

"It was something like I'd never seen before," he said of the closing Mass. "It's something that I'll never forget. It was cool being able to see that I'm not alone."

For Ean, NCYC "was life-changing."

"I'm going to be more aware of myself, more happy and full of the Lord." †



Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., elevates a chalice during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Youths from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, kneel in prayer during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Archbishop calls on archdiocesan youths to be 'eucharistic people'

By Natalie Hoefler

Nina Krueer was amazed when she looked around the room filled with more than 1,100 teens from all corners of central and southern Indiana.

When asked if she'd ever been to Mass with so many of her peers, "That's an easy no," said the member of Holy Family Parish in New Albany.

The youths filled a section of the Indiana Convention Center's 500 Ballroom for a special Mass celebrated by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson on the opening day of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 16.

It's likely that Nina had also never been to a Mass with so many archdiocesan priests and seminarians, either. At least 20 archdiocesan priests processed in with the archbishop.

"And I think all of our 32 seminarians for the archdiocese are here, including these three [transitional] deacons up here [on the stage] that we'll ordain priests next year," Archbishop Thompson said at the beginning of his homily.

"I expect a few of you to be thinking about that and praying about that, about how we might add to those numbers very soon. So, keep open to how the Holy Spirit moves you throughout these couple of days."

'Called to be eucharistic people'

The special Mass just for the NCYC participants of central and southern Indiana was celebrated "to keep



Nina Krueer, left, Avery Drury and Tessa Holifield, all members of Holy Family Parish in New Albany, sing a song for the opening procession during a Mass for National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) participants from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis on Nov. 16.

Christ at the center" of the three-day conference, the archbishop said.

"Remember that we are called to be eucharistic people, people with grateful hearts, people who live, who embody Christ in service to others. And so it's important for us to understand the Eucharist not as a mere symbol but as the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ."

He cautioned the youths that any concerns, struggles or issues they left at home will still be there after the conference.

"For the time being, however, we take solace in the joy, the wisdom, the beauty and spirit of this sacred time in prayer, fellowship, adoration and celebration of our faith in Jesus Christ. ... Let us keep before us the wisdom of his words, namely that the kingdom of God is among you."

We live in a world of idolatry, Archbishop Thompson said, where some believers "attempt to create God in their own image, picking and choosing what to believe about Jesus. Maybe that's why so many think it's a mere symbol, the Eucharist.

"It is only by seeking and embracing divine wisdom ... that we are able to rise above the idolatry, keeping before us the beauty, truth and goodness of God, in whose image we have been created to love and to serve."

It is important to understand the Eucharist as the true presence of Christ, he said, "because we are created in God's image."

Archbishop Thompson mentioned the upcoming National Eucharistic Congress to be held here in Indianapolis on July 17-21 next year.

The congress and the current three-year National Eucharistic Revival "are meant to have the same effect of NCYC," he said. "Namely, to renew our faith, to inspire us to live more fully that faith as missionary disciples, fully alive in Christ.

"The source and summit of our identity and mission, of course, is the real presence of Jesus Christ, body and blood, in the most holy Eucharist.

"We are not saved by trying to conform Jesus to our



Transitional Deacon Bobby Vogel of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, left, and Archbishop Charles C. Thompson elevate the Eucharist as archdiocesan transitional Deacon Samuel Rosko looks on during a Mass for National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) participants from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis at the opening of NCYC on Nov. 16. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

image, but through his passion, death and resurrection we are saved. It is for this reason that we celebrate and adore Jesus in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist throughout this weekend, revival, congress and beyond."

'The kingdom of God is among you'

After the Mass, which included music by a choir of Cathedral High School in Indianapolis, Archbishop Thompson processed with the Blessed Sacrament through the halls of the convention center and along Georgia Street. Those present at the Mass joined the procession. Thousands of other NCYC participants either joined in or knelt along the procession route.

Before embarking on the procession "amid all those gathering for NCYC—as well as those who may just happen to be there along the way," Archbishop Thompson urged the youths of the archdiocese "to realize the awesome privilege and responsibility placed upon us as companions of Jesus Christ and echoing his proclamation: The kingdom of God is among you." †

Dozens of priests at NCYC give the gift of mercy in the sacrament of penance

By Sean Gallagher

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) is known for its large crowds of boisterous Catholic teens from across the country rejoicing together as one.

But the conference is also marked by more intimate experiences. That happens especially, and in large numbers, in the sacrament of penance.

Dozens of priests from across the U.S. heard confessions for hours in a large ballroom on Nov. 17 and 18 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis and during conference general sessions in a concourse of the adjacent Lucas Oil Stadium.



Father Noah Diehm of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, hears the confession of a National Catholic Youth Conference participant on Nov. 17 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Teens gladly waited for the sacrament of penance for 30 minutes in a long winding line that extended from the confession room well out into a convention center hallway.

Demi Bolen, a high school junior and member of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield, went to confession at NCYC this year, the second time she had attended the conference.

"It's worth it," she said of waiting in line for the sacrament. "You're confessing your sins and getting forgiven. That's important. Having that weight lifted off your chest is really good."

Seeing so many of her peers wanting to receive God's mercy in the sacrament was encouraging to her.

"It just shows that everyone's going through the same things you are," Demi said. "Everyone has their faults like I do."

She was also impressed by the dozens of priests hearing confessions.

"It's insane how many priests take their time to do this for people," Demi said. "They're passionate in what they do, and they're here to help you."

One of those priests was Father Jeffrey Starkovich of the Diocese of Lake Charles, La.

"The greatest encounter of our life is the encounter with mercy and forgiveness," he said. "In my experience as a priest, to be forgiven is one of the deepest desires of the human heart. That applies whether you're a 7-year-old making your first confession or you're at the end of your life and you want to be forgiven before you go to your judgment and eternal reward.

"Teenagers are human, just like everybody else. They want to be forgiven."

Being in the ballroom with so many priests from across the country was a blessed reminder for Father Starkovich of the fraternity of the priesthood.

"I love being part of what I call the world's biggest fraternity," he said. "I've never met you. I don't know anything about you. But I know the most important thing about you. We both love the Lord, and we've been ordained to serve.

"And we're willing to sit in these not-very-comfortable chairs for long hours hearing stories from everybody about their sins to give them the gift of mercy and forgiveness. It's what unites us. I love the visual of seeing 50 priests hearing confessions at the same time and seeing the people in line."

Monica Robinson loved that sight as well. A pastoral associate at SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish in Greenwood, Robinson has been a chaperone at many past NCYC gatherings. This was the first time she served there as a volunteer. Her job was to give out stickers to penitents leaving the confession room, stickers that said, "I'm forgiven."

She remarked on Nov. 17 that many people receiving the sticker had said that it was like an "I voted" sticker handed out at polling places on election day.

"I told them, 'No. It's way better,'" said Robinson.

She was amazed at the long line of teens waiting to experience God's mercy in the sacrament of penance. "I've been here since [noon], and the line has not ceased the entire time," said Robinson more than three hours later. "There are more than 50 priests here. It's unbelievable. To see all of this beauty in front of me, my heart has just exploded."

Not only was Robinson impressed by the number of teens waiting to confess their sins and be forgiven, she was also encouraged by the number of priests ready to hear those confessions.

"To see the love that they're offering these young people speaks volumes about our Church," she said. †

Teens at NCYC show love for Christ in the Eucharist during adoration

By Sean Gallagher

Some 12,000 youths from across the country showed their love for Christ in the Eucharist in a profound time of adoration on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

From the start of the conference the day before, the Blessed Sacrament had been exposed in a monstrance for adoration in a chapel in the adjacent Indiana Convention Center.

During the evening general session of NCYC on Nov. 17, Bishop Joseph A. Espallat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, carried the monstrance in a procession from the convention center to the stadium where he placed it on an altar for all 12,000 youths to see and adore.

Dominican Sister Jude Andrew Link gave a reflection before the Eucharist was brought to the stadium that helped prepare the youths for that time of adoration. She told them that the Eucharist is “the secret of transformation” in their own lives.

“When you and I go to Mass, bread and wine are brought up and offered to God. And he changes them into himself,” Sister Jude Andrew said. “Then, in the very same spot where we brought up the bread and wine, we now receive Jesus Christ.

“When that happens at Mass and the bread and wine are offered up to God, offer yourself. I promise you, if you offer yourself, your whole self to God, he will transform you. It’s what he does. He makes all things new.”

A young man from the archdiocese who has experienced that transformation then offered a witness talk to the youths in the stadium.

Garet Colburn is a member of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. A senior at Silver Creek High School in Sellersburg, he grew in his appreciation of the Eucharist and the Church’s liturgy through taking part twice in One Bread One Cup, a summer youth liturgical leadership program of Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad.

Garet shared with his Catholic peers from across the country how he was afraid in the past to share his faith with his non-Catholic friends because of how they ridiculed him for it.

One Bread One Cup and his parish helped change him, he said.

“I’m here to tell you tonight, don’t worry about ... what anyone else has to say about your relationship with your Lord, because that’s what’s most important,” Garet said. “Be steadfast in faith and your love for the Lord. I implore you. When you go home from this place, go to your home parish, your family and even your schools and show the love that a Catholic community like this one has to offer. It’s beautiful and everyone deserves it.”



Teens kneel in prayer during eucharistic adoration on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference. Among the teens is Zowie Pierce, in a gray T-shirt at left, of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)

In a later interview with *The Criterion*, Garet said the time of adoration at Lucas Oil Stadium “was the most moving adoration experience I’ve ever had.” He added that he hoped that the adoration that night would help all the teens at the stadium “turn closer to God and grow closer in their relationship with Jesus Christ.”

The adoration that took place after Garet’s witness talk featured a homily by Bishop Espallat and contemporary Christian meditative music played by the house band. While they played Matt Maher’s song, “Lay It Down,” Bishop Espallat invited the youths to place themselves entirely before Jesus present with them in the Blessed Sacrament.

Youths came from their seats higher up in the stadium to get as close to the stage as possible. As they prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, many knelt, others stood with their hands raised in prayer and a handful laid prostrate on the stadium floor.

After the music and homily, Bishop Espallat invited the youths to move to silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. “At this moment, just let this beautiful silence reign

in this arena right now,” he said. “We’ve laid it down. But what does God say to us? Let’s spend a couple of moments in deep silence, in penetrating silence, and let God speak to us. ... There’s beauty in the silence.”

The band stopped playing. And Lucas Oil Stadium, which so often was pulsating with loud music and the rejoicing of jubilant teens in other NCYC sessions, was entirely silent.

Afterwards, Bishop Espallat presided over Benediction before taking the Blessed Sacrament from the floor of the stadium.

Liam Slotten, a member of Holy Family Parish in New Albany and a sophomore at Our Lady of Providence High School in Clarksville, was present during the time of adoration in the stadium.

“It shows that, even with our society starting to stray further from God, there are still people wanting to stay close and get others to stay close,” Liam said. “It encourages me to dedicate more time in my life to God and try to encourage some of my peers, whom I know aren’t religious at all, to have a deeper thought about experiences like that.” †



Garet Colburn, a youth of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg, gives a witness talk on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference.



Bishop Joseph A. Espallat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, carries a monstrance holding the Blessed Sacrament during a eucharistic procession on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference.



FULLY ALIVE



Jose Alvarez, an adult from the Diocese of Gary, Ind., stands with hands raised in prayer on Nov. 18 during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. Kneeling in prayer behind Alvarez are teens from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Karen Amayo Castro of the Diocese of Knoxville, Tenn., reflects on her Mexican heritage and explains her family's tradition of recognizing "El Dia de los Muertos" ("The Day of the Dead") during a Nov. 17 general session in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mike Krokos)



Holy Family of Nazareth Sister Josephine Garrett, a National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) emcee, offers a reflection to more than 12,000 youths in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the opening session of NCYC on Nov. 16. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson addresses more than 12,000 youths in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 16. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Teens use their cell phones to record the band for KING + COUNTRY playing their rendition of "The Little Drummer Boy" before the opening general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



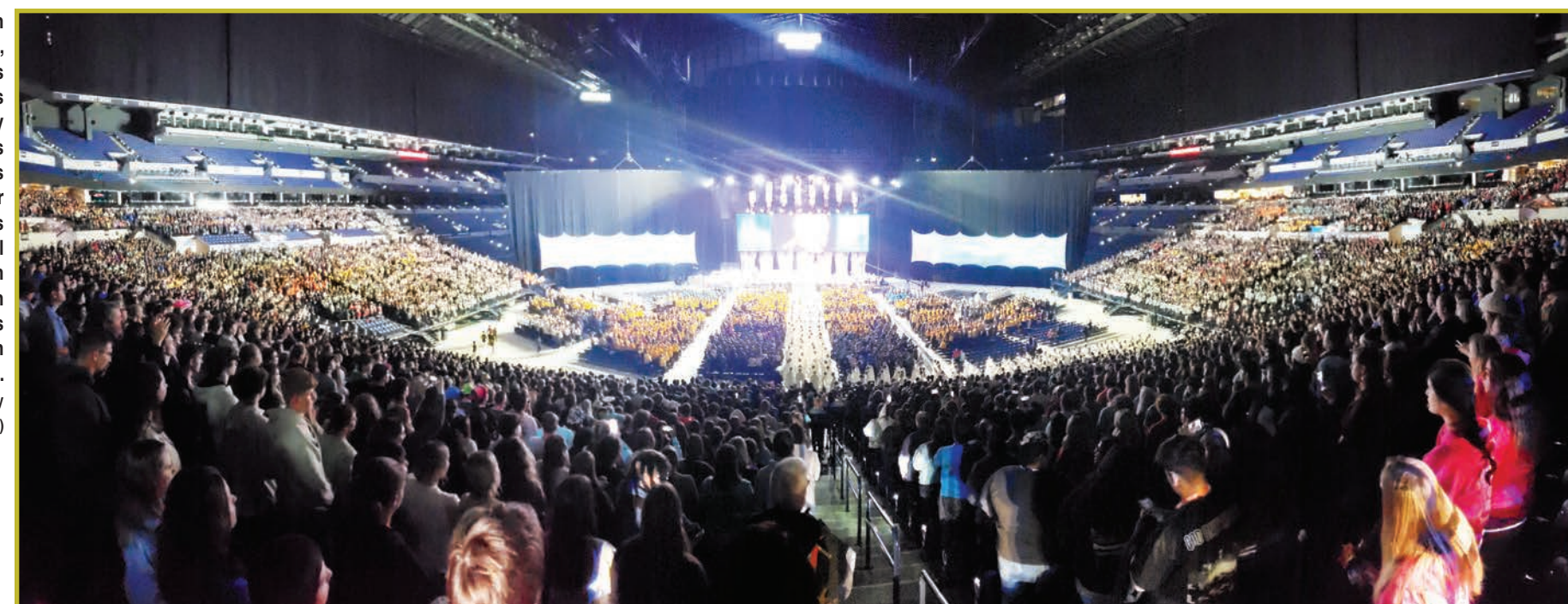
Father Michael Keucher, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville and St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shelby County, gives absolution in the sacrament of penance on Nov. 17 to a youth taking part in the National Catholic Youth Conference. The three-day gathering of faith took place at the Indiana Convention Center and the adjacent Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. Father Keucher also serves as archdiocesan vocations director. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Below: A teen readies his bow and arrow to aim for a target in the interactive exhibit hall in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 18 during the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Teens and adults kneel as Archbishop Charles C. Thompson processes with the Blessed Sacrament through the halls of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 16 for the opening of the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

More than 12,000 youths, chaperones and volunteers stand as nearly 200 priests and bishops process in for the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



NCYC is a place where seeds of vocations are planted in hearts of teens

By Sean Gallagher

When archdiocesan seminarian Kristopher Garlitch first came to the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), he was a high school senior and a member of St. Mary Parish in North Vernon.

While he was discerning a possible priestly vocation at the time, taking part in a Mass at NCYC in which many archdiocesan seminarians were assisting in the liturgy helped confirm in him God's call.

"It was attractive to me to see them serving at Mass all together," said Garlitch, who is now in priestly formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad. "I still think of that. That's where I saw them together for the first time."

At NCYC this year, Garlitch got to do what he witnessed many seminarians doing when he was a high school senior—assisting in liturgies and taking part in a eucharistic procession.

Openness to a variety of vocations was emphasized during NCYC.

At 19, Bridget Hegarty was technically a chaperone at NCYC for youths from the Diocese of Springfield, Mass. But discerning God's will in her life was still very much on her mind and her wish for the high school students traveling with her to Indianapolis.

"You get so much insight from so many people in so many different ways of going about the faith," Hegarty said. "It's good for kids in high school who don't know what they want to do in life yet to get a little peek at everything and then choose what they want."

She spoke with *The Criterion* on Nov. 16 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis after speaking with Providence Sister Marilyn Baker at a booth for her



Providence Sister Marilyn Baker speaks with Bridget Hegarty of the Diocese of Springfield, Mass., on Nov. 16 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference.

religious community, the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in western Indiana.

"They give me hope," said Sister Marilyn of the youths at NCYC. "I think they're searching for something that's going to have a real impact in their lives. Having us [here] sharing our work and our charism helps them to see that there is a vitality in the Church."

Kara Hartz and Amanda Mullin, both from the Archdiocese of Las Vegas, spoke with *The Criterion* after visiting with Viatorian Brother John Eustice, who ministers as a transitional deacon at Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Bourbonnais, Ill.

The girls were amazed at the broad variety of priests, seminarians and religious at NCYC.

"It's interesting to see so many different kinds of people, especially nuns," Kara said. "But it's also a little overwhelming."

"I love seeing all the different people and how they practice their faith," added Amanda.

While many people involved in promoting vocations in religious orders were at the conference, Brother John was quick to emphasize that leading young people to their vocation is the work of all the faithful.

"Everybody is a vocation promoter," said Brother John. "It starts in the home and among friends. I'm a religious because my friends sold me on it. They saw something in me, knew the Viatorians and said, 'John would be good at that.'"

"My hope is that every single person knows that God's invitation is waiting for them and probably will come to them from someone they're not expecting."

Dominican Sister Mercedes Torres serves as the vocations director for the Dominicans of Mary Mother of the Eucharist based in Ann Arbor, Mich. She spoke with *The Criterion* on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium.

Looking out at the 12,000 teens filling the floor and stands of the stadium filled her with wonder.

"It's such a blessing," Sister Mercedes said. "These young people come here because they choose to be here. They choose to have an encounter. They're hungry for it. That encounter is what's going to help them grow and understand over time their vocation."

She and everyone else at the stadium looked forward



Viatorian Brother John Eustice poses for a selfie with Amanda Mullin, left, Bella Vazquez and Kara Hartz on Nov. 16 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference. The youths came to the conference in Indianapolis from the Archdiocese of Las Vegas. Brother John, a transitional deacon, serves at Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Bourbonnais, Ill. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)

that night to eucharistic adoration. Sister Mercedes said that time of prayer and an encounter with Christ in the Eucharist could be an important moment in the vocation journey of many at NCYC.

"Right now, the Lord is planting seeds," she said. "Just seeing the religious, seeing the priests and speaking with them is all very encouraging to them. The Lord is working in their hearts now."

"The encounter with the Eucharist that they're going to have here is going to be what transforms their hearts and opens their hearts to what he's going to do to bring them to himself and their vocation. For a lot of them, that's going to start here."

As Garlitch saw the 12,000 Catholic youths at NCYC, he appreciated their openness to the faith and wondered what the future held for them.

"Them just being here is a sign of that openness," he said. "This is kind of the first step for them, in a sense, no matter what vocation they're called to. Just being here is a good start."

(For more information on vocations to the priesthood and religious life, visit the website of the archdiocese's vocations office at HearGodsCall.com.) †

Teenagers embrace volunteer opportunities during NCYC

By Mike Krokos

It may still be a month away, but the Christmas spirit was alive and well in an exhibit hall at the Indiana Convention Center during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

As part of an outreach effort for Catholic Charities Terre Haute, teenagers from across the U.S. spent time decorating brown lunch bags—many with faith-based messages—and making Christmas cards that will be shared with the less fortunate through the agency.

Jennifer Tames, assistant agency director for Catholic Charities Terre Haute, said the lunch bags will be used for the organization's Fishes and Loaves' soup kitchen when they distribute sack lunches on weekends and holidays. The Christmas cards, she continued, will be distributed to families who visit its Christmas store.

"It's a great opportunity for the kids not only to be creative and to take a break, but then, to pass along that love they have for God and for Jesus to others in our community," she said on Nov. 17, the second day of the three-day conference.



Jennifer Tames

About 1,000 lunch bags and the same amount of Christmas cards were brought to NCYC, Tames noted, "and if we go through all of those, we will be astonished."

High school seniors Julia Trainer and Taylor Roemmich of the Archdiocese of Omaha, Neb., were among a group who embraced the opportunity to make Christmas cards for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

"I think it's really cool that through this conference we're able to spread a little bit of holiday cheer to the Indianapolis [area] community," Julia said, "and to make a difference."

Added Taylor, "There are a lot of families out there that might not experience joy [during the Christmas season], ... and I think it's great that we're able to do this."

Taylor Vitteco, a sophomore from the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, and a group of her friends were all smiles as they decorated lunch bags.

A few feet away in the convention center, other teenagers were embracing the mission of Hands Across Haiti, a ministry of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. The outreach provides decorated T-shirts, school supplies, tote bags and backpacks, among other things, to its sister parishes in Haiti.

Natalie Bixenman, a freshman from the Diocese of

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Freshman Natalie Bixenman of the Diocese of Salina, Kan., displays the tote bag she decorated for Hands Across Haiti, a ministry of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

Archbishop Thompson calls youths 'a mystery to be encountered'

By Natalie Hoefler

Grace Stecker of the Diocese of Helena, Mont., pulled out her cell phone and called her dad, right in the middle of a talk during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

In fact, teens all around her were talking on their phones, even as the speaker stood on the stage.

But they had his permission.

"I want you right now, in one minute, to just make a call to somebody in your life whom you love, who's pretty special, whom you appreciate," Scripture scholar and astrophysicist Father John Kartje asked of the more than 12,000 NCYC participants.



Fr. John Kartje

The request came as part of his talk on the oneness of God and the universe—faith and science—that served as the topic of the opening session of NCYC in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16.

He began the talk echoing words spoken by Archbishop Charles

C. Thompson just moments before.

"The line that really struck me amongst everything [Archbishop Thompson] said is this," Father Kartje noted: "You're not a problem to be solved, but you are a mystery to be encountered."

'What it means to be fully alive'

Archbishop Thompson spoke to the teens about this year's NCYC theme "Fully Alive" in a prayer service at the beginning of the opening session—after the teens had settled down from a rousing concert by Christian rock band for KING + COUNTRY.

He quoted his "favorite line" from Pope Francis' encyclical, "*Laudato Si'*: On Care of Our Common Home": "Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise" (#12).

"We heard that beautiful reading about creation from the Book of Genesis," Archbishop Thompson said of the Scripture proclaimed at the beginning of the prayer service. "But the ultimate part of that creation is when God created humanity, when God created us. We are part of that creation that's been given life by the Spirit breathing into us, by the Word taking root in us, claiming us as his own.

"And so, no one here is a problem to be solved, but is to be contemplated as a joyful mystery with gladness and praise.

"Whatever pains in our lives, whatever is going on, whatever hurts, whatever guilt, whatever fears, whatever anxieties, whatever it is—that does not define us."

Rather, he said, we are defined by our identity in Christ, whose body, blood, soul and divinity is present in the Eucharist.

"The Eucharist has been given to us through the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we have life, that we have what is necessary to be witnesses to the good news, what it means to be fully alive," Archbishop Thompson said.

"We are most fully alive when we live our lives not



Teens sing a song of praise in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16 during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

with ourselves at the center, but keeping Christ at the center. We are fully alive when we live for the glory of God and in service to others.

"We gather tonight remembering that we belong to something greater than ourselves as children of God, created in the image of God. We have a dignity, a dignity no power on Earth can take away.

"That's why we can claim to be fully alive."

'The one through whom astronomy is possible'

Father Kartje, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, picked up where Archbishop Thompson left off—speaking about the NCYC theme.

"If you talk about being fully alive, I can't think of a better way to get at what that actually looks like in our world today than to look at this interaction between faith and science," he said. With doctorates in Scripture and astrophysics, the current rector and president of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Ill., is an expert on both topics.

He quoted John 1:3: "All things came into being through him. Without him, not one thing came to being."

"A hundred billion galaxies exist," Father Kartje said. "That very same God of creation is the God alive in our own bodies. The very same God that gives you the galaxies ... gives us the very life in our hearts."

Science and faith are both a way of looking at the

world, he explained—one through the lens of a telescope, the other through the glass of a monstrance.

"The Eucharist you see through the glass of the monstrance gives us the ability to see the body and the blood of Christ in a way that doesn't look like the body and blood of Christ," Father Kartje said.

Meanwhile, the new, high-resolution Webb Telescope launched in 2021 can view objects much further out in the universe than its predecessor, the Hubble Telescope.

"Through the Webb Telescope, you can see the world that goes all the way back to Genesis," he said. "It's the world that goes back to the life that is in us. That is a monstrance all its own, these beautiful images from the Webb Telescope, to look at them for who Jesus is precisely because he is the one through whom all of that glorious astronomy is possible."

To gaze upon the universe or to gaze upon Christ in the Eucharist, said Father Kartje, "is literally to let yourself be gazed upon by the one who delights in your very existence."

As for his request for the more than 12,000 youths to call someone they love, Father Kartje explained the connection to faith and science.

"The person you called is probably feeling loved right now," he said. "The reason something special happened at that connection is because of what you see in the monstrance. That's why Christ came into the world—the one who does all of this is love." †

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Salina, Kan., used her artistic gifts to decorate a tote bag, because "I like donating to good causes."

Dan Ohlmann, a member of St. John Paul II's board of directors for Hands Across Haiti, has been involved with the ministry for several years and has attended NCYC in the past. He said the parish's overseas outreach has become a staple at the conference because they want to get "the youths interested in what's happening abroad."



Dan Ohlmann

"Haiti is close to my heart ... but we want to get the youths involved, and to bring awareness to what's going on."

The T-shirts, tote bags and other items provided to the sister parishes, he added, "are a way for them to communicate with our students that we sponsor in Haiti. ... Our goal is to get people involved nationally [and] internationally."

Further toward the back of the convention center, teenagers were helping put together meals for Pack Away Hunger, an Indianapolis-based organization that provides nutritious dehydrated meals to local food pantries throughout Indiana. They also work with international populations.

Lea Snyder, an event manager for the organization,

supervised a group of young people as they worked tirelessly to put packaged meals together.

"We've sent to Hawaii, we've sent to Ukraine, Russia, Haiti. ... It just depends on where the need is at the time," she said.

The meal consists of soy and rice, a mixture of vegetables and a vitamin nutrient packet. The meals are sealed and have a long shelf life.

As in years past, NCYC participants again stepped up and took this volunteer initiative to heart.

"Oh my gosh, these young people, the past two days, they have been on fire!" Snyder said. "It's amazing. They've done a wonderful, a great job. We have had some of them stay quite awhile. ... A lot of them really enjoy it. ... They're doing something good for society." †



Teenagers assemble ingredients for Pack Away Hunger, an Indianapolis-based organization that provides nutritious dehydrated meals to local food pantries throughout Indiana and around the world. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

Bishop Cozzens: NCYC is a preview of the National Eucharistic Congress next summer in Indianapolis

First of two parts

By Sean Gallagher

As Bishop Joseph A. Espallat of the Archdiocese of New York processed into Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis with the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance, thousands of youths fell to their knees in adoration.

It was Friday night at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), when there is ordinarily eucharistic adoration and Benediction.

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., walked in the procession with Bishop Espallat into the stadium turned into a massive place of worship.

For Bishop Cozzens, adoration on Nov. 17 and NCYC's closing Mass the following night, at which he was the principal celebrant, was a preview of the National Eucharistic Congress to be held in Indianapolis on July 17-21 next year. Bishop Cozzens has led the National Eucharistic Revival and the planning for the eucharistic congress.

He spoke with *The Criterion* earlier in the day before the closing liturgy about his experience of the love the teens at NCYC showed for Christ in the Eucharist and how it was encouraging for the eucharistic revival and eucharistic congress.

The following interview has been edited for clarity and content.

Q: What were your impressions from being present during the time of adoration in the stadium?

A: "It was inspiring to be there, especially with the young people. Of course, I was praying for them, but also for the eucharistic revival and for the eucharistic congress. There was just a sense of the Lord wanting to continue to bless the young people and our country through a love of the Eucharist.

"It was beautiful to be up on the stage praying before the Blessed Sacrament surrounded by 12,000 young people."

Q: The Eucharist has long been at the heart of NCYC. What can the rest of the Church in the U.S. learn from the witness of the teens' encounter with Christ in the Eucharist at this conference?

A: "It's part of what we're trying to do in the eucharistic revival. Those of us who have been doing youth ministry for the past two decades have seen this reality. Young people love to be with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Many of them actually come to understand the Mass through adoration.

"They come to encounter Jesus in his presence in adoration, and then it draws them into the Mass. So, they start to go to Mass more.

"It's a beautiful thing, too, that teens come to know

the love of Jesus and want to express their emotion and their devotion toward him. It can have an impact on their whole life. It's also the reason why we as a Church have to be involved with young people. It's when people are young that they make their most important decisions in their life.

"The Church has a responsibility to be there to present Christ to them so that, as they're making those vocational choices and deciding what they're going to do for the rest of their life, they know Christ and can be a part of it. That's the beauty of NCYC and other youth events in the Church. We can accompany youths at those important moments."

Q: How might what happens at NCYC be a way for Catholics in the U.S. to anticipate what will happen in Indianapolis next July in the National Eucharistic Congress?

A: "Since I landed in Indianapolis [before NCYC], I was filled with a desire to pray and an enthusiasm for what Indianapolis means for the Church right now because of the coming eucharistic congress. We're going to have a huge impact on the Church here.

"These kinds of events can be life-transforming. Look at the event of World Youth Day in Denver and what that did for the Church in the United States. So, NCYC is kind of a foretaste of that. It's why I love coming. This event is a rare opportunity for our young people to have an experience of Christ and his Church that they can't have elsewhere.

"The eucharistic congress is going to be that. It's going to be a rare opportunity to have an experience of Christ and his Church that you can't have elsewhere and that we haven't had in the United States in decades. It's going to be an event centered on the heart of our Church, which is the Eucharist, where the Church herself in all her cultures and races, her beautiful diversity, gathers together to celebrate this gift that makes us one.

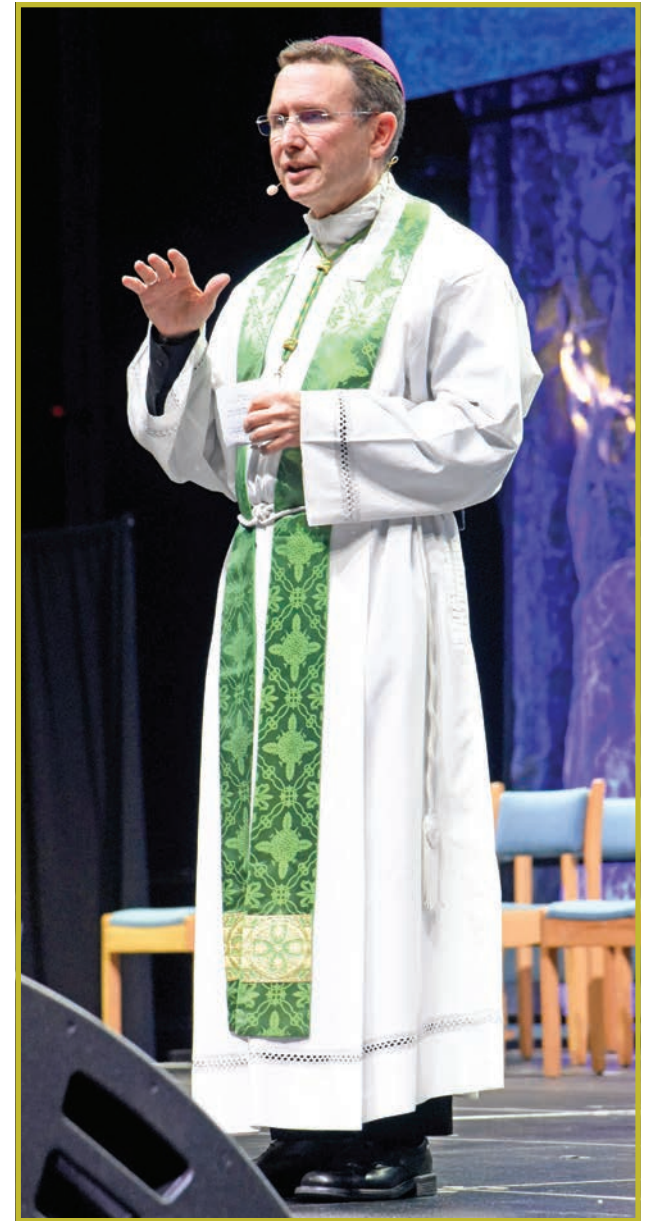
"Seeing the power of this event certainly helps me to remember the power of the event that we're planning."

Q: What can the organizers of the eucharistic congress learn from NCYC to make it more effective in drawing Catholics from across the country into a deeper relationship with Christ and each other through the Eucharist?

A: "There are members of our team who are here this weekend. They're scouting everything and watching everything. NCYC has been great to give us full-access passes for our team so they can learn from what's happening here and how they do it and what they do. That's been a huge help.

"One of the reasons why we chose Indianapolis is because of the positive experience of NCYC. Even in the bishops' minds, they're used to coming here for this kind of an event. They know that this is a good city for events.

"We're significantly larger than NCYC, so we have



Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., speaks before the National Catholic Youth Congress' closing Mass on Nov. 18 about next summer's National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

challenges that they probably don't have. But there certainly is a lot that we can learn from how they do what they do. We just have to multiply it."

(For more information on the National Eucharistic Revival, visit eucharisticrevival.org. For more information on the National Eucharistic Congress, including on how to purchase tickets for it, visit eucharisticcongress.org.) †

Become the man or woman that God made you to be, NCYC speaker says

By Mike Krokos

God sees us, he knows us and he is strengthening each of us to become more of the man or woman he made us to be, said a keynote speaker at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.



Brian Butler, executive director and co-founder of Echo Community, speaks to young people during the National Catholic Youth Conference's Nov. 17 general morning session in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

Our Creator is helping all humanity to grow "more deeply into the masculinity or your femininity that God has given to you, and becoming more and more of the gift that you already are, in all your uniqueness," noted Brian Butler, executive director and co-founder of Echo Community, which cultivates chastity and authentic masculinity and femininity with teenagers, young adults and families through the lens of St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body.

"Each one of you, all you men in the house, are refracting the light of God in a way that none of these women do," he continued, "and all of you women in the house are refracting the light of God in a way that none of these men do. That's good. In fact, it's very good."

A father of four, Butler said the trust that children develop for their parents from a young age leads them to more freedom, allowing them "to become more and more fully alive."

"This is what God wants for each one of us, but not to stay distracted in the shallows, but to go to him, to go to his own Word, to go to the sacraments, to hear the truth about who he says you are," he continued, "the gift of your dignity and your call to a destiny that's far beyond what you can imagine."

We must remember that God is always inviting us into a closer relationship, Butler noted.

"Even though you don't always feel it, the grace is not always affective, it is always effective. It's always

working, to help us to be more fully known, to help us to be more fully grown, that we might be able to be more free."

While life's challenges may pull us away from our faith, we must not become distracted in our relationship with our Creator, Butler said. God sees our pains and he knows what we're going through, he added.

Reflecting on a memory of playing hide-and-seek with two of his children, Butler recounted how his daughter Lauren always ran into his arms whenever he found her, saying, "Daddy, hold me for a long, long time." That is what God wants from us, he said.

"For her, the whole point of the game was not to run away. The whole point of the game was to be found and to be reunited with her good father, to be at home in my arms," Butler said.

Citing Scripture, Butler said adults need to remember the Bible verse "Unless you become like children, you will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Mt 18:3).

"At the very end, we're going to cross the threshold of eternity, and we pray that, by his grace ... [he will call] us toward our eternal home, where we'll be fully known, we'll be fully grown, we'll be fully free.

"St. John Paul II says that 'freedom exists for the sake of love,' to be fully in the love that you were made for, and that's when you'll be fully alive. And we'll all throw our arms around God the Father's neck and say, 'Daddy, hold me for a long, long time.'" †

Archdiocesan youths experience 'a deeper connection with God' at NCYC

By Mike Krokos

Sophomore Lilly Hertel was eager to experience the National Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis for the first time.

Junior Joseph Waterman was looking forward to taking part in an NCYC gathering post-COVID.

When he attended in 2021, some of the pandemic's restrictions—including wearing masks—were still being observed at the conference, and getting to know other participants was challenging.

The teenagers approached the Nov. 16-18 gathering of 12,000 youths with open minds and hearts.

A member of St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville, Joseph was looking for a spiritual recharge.

Lilly said she was hoping the youth gathering would be "an emotional experience." But that changed after she attended a session that opened her eyes about her Creator.

"I learned that God isn't an emotion, and that we can't always expect big emotional things from God," said Lilly, a member of St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Liberty, "that we just have to trust and believe that God is always with us."

'A really eye-opening experience'

As they were leaving Lucas Oil Stadium after NCYC's closing Mass on Nov. 18, both were energized by the two-hour liturgy and happy to talk about their time at NCYC.

"It's been a really eye-opening experience, ... to see so many different things with so many people," Lilly said.

"Adoration—that was really cool for me," she continued. "I actually cried through that because I really felt God in my heart, that he loved me. I really felt God's presence."

Joseph called his second NCYC experience "awesome," adding, "I felt fully alive" taking part in this pilgrimage of faith.

"It has helped me get out of the lukewarmness I had with my faith," he said. "The whole experience was fantastic."

Lilly, who plans to attend NCYC in Indianapolis in 2025, encouraged future participants to "keep an open mind. The experience is different for everyone. ... Whatever God wants to happen to you during this time will [happen]."

'A deeper connection with God'

Freshman Bella Hubert and junior Margeaux Stewart were both first-time NCYC participants who viewed the conference as a way to build their relationship with God.

As she prepared to take part in the closing Mass, Bella, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Corydon, said she was



Teenagers and chaperones from St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville and St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Liberty pose in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 17 with their pastor, Father Dustin Boehm. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

leaving NCYC with "a deeper connection with God and my faith, remembering the beauty around me and the knowledge [shared]."

"I will walk away with the relationships that we've built," noted Margeaux, a member of St. Mary Parish in Lanesville, "and knowing that NCYC doesn't stop here, that we have to take it home with us and share [our faith] with others."



Bella Hubert, left, and Margeaux Stewart

Following his older brother's advice, senior Nick Eve jumped at the chance to attend NCYC this year.

As he reflected on his experience, Nick, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Corydon, said he could sense a palpable joy among the participants.

He especially felt that connection during eucharistic adoration with all 12,000 NCYC participants on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium. "Everyone was there to praise the Lord. ... It was an amazing experience."



Nick Eve, left, and Hays Ferriell

Sophomore Hays Ferriell, also a member of St. Joseph, heard about the biennial gathering through a friend. He repeated a phrase first shared by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson during the opening night on Nov. 16 and repeated several times during the weekend: "You're not a problem to be solved, you are a mystery to be encountered."

Reflecting on those words, "That was definitely a high point for me," Hays noted.

'Getting a front seat for what God is doing'

Katie Warren, the youth minister for both St. Joseph and St. Mary parishes, came to the conference with no expectations. But like so many others who attend NCYC, the three-day pilgrimage of faith "blew that lack of expectations out of the water."



Katie Warren

"Part of the beauty of my experience is getting to see [our teens'] experiences, ... seeing them experience the Lord in a new way."

Becoming emotional, she added, "That's been my favorite part of this [conference], getting to accompany them, and watch. Working in youth ministry, the best part of the job is getting a front seat for what God is doing in their lives."

As she looks beyond NCYC, Warren hopes to help the teenagers nurture the seeds of faith planted.

"How can we cultivate that culture back at home, where God is first and important always?" she asked, where "we can have the same Jesus, here and there?" †

Young people, religious embrace devotion to Blessed Mother through the rosary

By Mike Krokos

At 6 feet 5 inches tall, Abraham Wolf towered over the majority of the nearly 12,000 young people who participated in the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis.

But his height advantage was not as evident as he knelt in prayerful reverence in front of a monstrance inside the

chapel at the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 17 as he took part in a recitation of the rosary.

A high school senior from the Diocese of Erie, Pa., Abraham was among a group that took part in praying a rosary led by members of various religious orders. Like many others there, he made it a point to include prayers to the Blessed Mother during his time at NCYC.

"The rosary is very important to me to ask for the intercession of our Mother Mary, and to truly honor her, and to pray," Abraham said. "Praying is the biggest thing that we can do, to communicate with God, to communicate with Mary, to communicate with all the saints. It's a huge thing."

While Abraham admitted up to that point he did not have any favorite NCYC moment, he said being part of a group praying the rosary together "was truly amazing."

"It's been a little while since I've done a group rosary that big, and it's always great to just be in the same moment as everybody else, doing the same prayer."

When he attends Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pa., next fall, Abraham said he plans to double major in political science and philosophy, then God willing, transition to a seminary to begin formation for the priesthood.

"I know this [NCYC] experience will truly light my faith on fire again, even though it has already been on fire," he said. "It will be further engulfed in flames, even brighter, better than ever."

Abraham said he has always felt called to teach. But as he has prayed more and more on his faith journey, he

has slowly realized he is "meant to teach the word of God."

"It's become an overwhelming feeling upon me, that that's my call, to teach the word of God, to spread the love of God to everybody, to bring people closer to God."

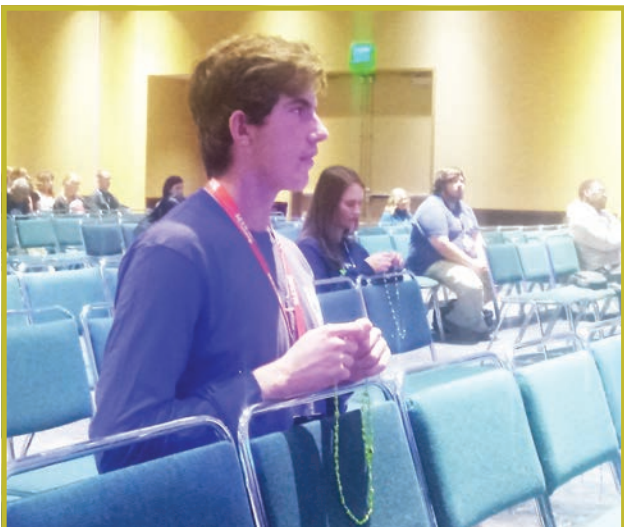
Sister Emily Beata, a member of the Daughters of St. Paul, led the first decade of the sorrowful mysteries that day for vocations.

"I thought it was beautiful the number of people that came, and the variety of people, too," she said. "There were some religious there to pray with us, and a number of young people. There were also chaperones and priests who are here [attending NCYC]."

Like so many others who recited the rosary that day, Sister Emily said she and the members of her order have a special devotion to the Blessed Mother.

"For us, Mary is the model of our mission ... to give Jesus to the world through the media," she noted. "Her whole life was about giving Jesus to the world, so we look to her a lot for that, and for how to be close to Jesus."

When asked about the message she wants young people attending NCYC to take home, Sister Emily said, "It's a big, exciting weekend with a lot going on, and you're here with your family and friends. ... I really hope they take home the sense that God wants to walk with them in their daily life, that he's not separate from what they're going through, from what they're living, that he's right next to them, that he's walking with them." †



Abraham Wolf of the Diocese of Erie, Pa., prays the rosary on Nov. 17 inside the chapel at the Indiana Convention Center.

(Photo by Mike Krokos)

Teens describe NCYC as ‘amazing’—and so much more

Compiled by Natalie Hoefler

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) can have a deep impact on high school teens. For three days—this year on Nov. 16-18 in Indianapolis—their faith is enriched through speakers,



“It’s amazing,” said Sabrina Howard of the Diocese of Covington, Ky., shown here second from left. “There was a point where our entire diocese that came, like 275 kids and adults, were in one really tiny room where we were having Mass, and it was fantastic. We were all singing and having fun. And just the fact that everybody is here for the same thing, for our faith. It really is awesome!”



This was the second NCYC for Alexa Foxx, left, and Kaylen Snovak, both of the Diocese of Orlando, Fla. “This one was just so moving,” said Kaylen. She noted the freedom from COVID-19 restrictions in place at the last NCYC in Indianapolis in 2021. “So, it was a lot more powerful and just absolutely wonderful. My favorite moment was adoration. It was just amazing.” Kaylen said she walked away from the conference with a desire “to be fully present with the Lord and fully embrace him in my life and with others.” Alexa agreed. “I think you don’t get to fully realize the power of NCYC until you see 12,000 young people on their hands and knees crying and seeing the face of Jesus in the Eucharist,” she said. She is going home “invigorated with the Spirit, invigorated with the Lord, to bring that energy to my own parish, to pray with them more deeply, to share [with them] what I experienced here, and to keep it going.”

uplifting music, eucharistic adoration, group or quiet prayer, the opportunity for the sacrament of penance and daily Mass.

Their faith is also emboldened in witnessing and worshipping with thousands of their Catholic peers, leaving the youths encouraged by the fact that they are



Jacob Lamoureux of the Omaha, Neb., Archdiocese, was unable to speak immediately after the closing Mass on Nov. 18. But he did share with *The Criterion* earlier that day about his experience. “It really clicked for me in the talk on ‘I Believe It But I Don’t Feel It,’” said the teen, shown here second from right praying the rosary with other NCYC participants from his archdiocese on Nov. 16. “The speaker said faith isn’t about emotions. It’s about surrender. And [opening session speaker] Father [John] Kartje was talking about how faith isn’t just about what you see—it’s called faith because it’s believing in something even if you don’t see physical evidence. God has taught me that even if I don’t feel that sense of another presence with me, even if I feel like I’m just sitting there and there’s no one else in the room and I’m just all alone and wasting my time—God is telling me just to remember I’m not alone, he’s there.”

not alone in following Christ in the one true Church. *The Criterion* spoke with five teenagers in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis after the closing Mass there on Nov. 18—and one youth earlier that day—about their overall NCYC experience. †

(Photos by Natalie Hoefler)



His subtle smile hides the emotion Bryan Chavez, fourth from left, of the Diocese of Raleigh, N.C., expressed when sharing his thoughts on NCYC. “Honestly, it was so amazing, just being around all these teenagers who are Catholic just like me, so I know that I’m not alone here and I know that I have everybody, not just like in my youth group, but other people out there who have the same faith as I have,” said Bryan, who sometimes feels alone in his faith at his public high school. He was especially moved by the closing Mass. “Sometimes I have trouble focusing on the Mass, but today it was just so different. I felt very emotional, and I started crying. It was honestly one of the most beautiful things I’ve experienced so far. I want to try to live out my faith more and not just keep it in my church or around my youth group.”



“This is my first NCYC, and it’s been a really life-changing experience,” said Davis Coppola of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. “Being able to be around so many faithful Catholic people is something that I may never get to experience again. Being able to be in the small groups and talk with people, hearing people’s testimonies—it’s an amazing, amazing experience.” Davis, center, smiles with Gabriel Mattson, left, and Caleb Perkins, also of the Dubuque Archdiocese.

NCYC teens share new-found insight on what it means to be ‘fully alive’

Compiled by Natalie Hoefler

The theme of this year’s National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) was “Fully Alive.” Throughout the three-day conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 16-18, youths heard from Scripture passages and speakers on what it means to be “fully alive.” Six teens shared with *The Criterion* the knowledge they gained from this NCYC on what living fully alive means.



I’ve realized that fully alive means not just being alive when you’re feeling it, but being fully alive in all ways of your life, in all situations, knowing God is there even if you might not feel him.

—Jacob Lamoureux, St. Francis Borgia Parish, Diocese of Omaha, Neb.

(posing with Deacon Jeff Zurek, a chaperon for his group)



To be fully alive is to completely give yourself to Christ in a way where you will live your life for Christ completely.

—Olivia Murrey, St. Thomas More Parish, Mooresville, Archdiocese of Indianapolis



It means to not be scared of what others think, to be able to be yourself and to express your faith. It’s a big part of just being yourself in Christ and expressing your love for him.

—Avery Drury, Holy Family Parish, New Albany, Archdiocese of Indianapolis

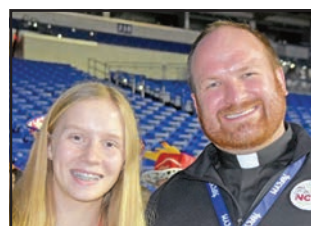


Fully alive to me means no boundaries, hiding nothing from God, no phoniness, no lies, just me being completely, bearing my soul completely to my Lord.

—Alexa Foxx, Diocese of Orlando, Fla.

It means to stop living the way I’m living, which is kind of hiding in the shadows. To be myself, show my religion, be proud of who I am and who I believe in.

—Davis Coppola, Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa



It means to not miss an opportunity to celebrate God.

—Claire Welsh, Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Mont. (posing with Father Samuel Spiering, a chaperone priest from the diocese)