



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Office for Youth

Bishops' Delegate for Youth: Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE

MEDIA RELEASE

DECEMBER 8, 2019

Australian Catholic Youth Festival pilgrims told: 'Rebuild my Church'

Thousands of young Australian Catholics have been challenged to "go out and rebuild" God's Church on the opening day of the 2019 Australian Catholic Youth Festival.

The opening session of the Festival, which has drawn 5500 young people from across Australia, featured a Welcome to Country, high-tempo music, inspirational speakers and moments of prayer.

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, the host of the Festival as the Archbishop of Perth, welcomed pilgrims and encouraged them to bring every part of themselves to the gathering.

"You are welcome here with your questions, with your hopes, with your dreams. You are welcome here with your doubts and with your fears. You are welcome here with your hesitations and you're welcome here with all your enthusiasms," Archbishop Costelloe said.

"God is real. Christ is alive. The Church of which you are a part is yearning to help you and to hear you, to teach you and to learn from you, to challenge you and to be challenged by you."

Archbishop Costelloe's opening address drew upon the exhortation that St Francis of Assisi received 800 years ago and a similar encouragement from Pope Francis in more recent times.

He combined God's request to St Francis' – "Go and rebuild my Church, which is falling into ruin" – with Pope Francis' comments at World Youth Day 2016 in Poland.

Archbishop Costelloe challenged young people: "Get up off your couches, go out and help rebuild my Church. Help it to set out on new and uncharted pathways. Help stop the Church, my Church, from falling into ruin."

Fr Rob Galea, a priest of the Sandhurst Diocese and a renowned singer-songwriter, used the Festival's opening session to invite delegates to be open to the voice of God in their lives.

"I pray that throughout this time, as we gather here as a family, as we gather here as your people, that you give us the grace to hear you speak," Fr Galea said.

"Lord, we don't want to walk out of this place the same way we walked in. We know that when you speak, our lives, our hearts are changed forever. So Lord, we give you the permission these next few days to speak to our hearts, to speak into our lives.

"Lord, we give you the permission to mess up our plans. We want you, Jesus. We want your guidance, Holy Spirit. You can take the world, you can take everything. Give us you. Come, Holy Spirit."

In the evening plenary session on day one, pilgrims heard humorous and faith-filled insights from Missionary of God's Love Sisters Therese Mills and Judy Bowe, who recently appeared on television show *The Amazing Race*.

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Sr Judy said when someone suggested the idea to go on the show, they thought it could be from God, but they needed to – in the theme of ACYF and the Plenary Council – listen to the Holy Spirit.

“When it’s God, anything can happen. It was so ‘God’ because it was so positive. It was like the whole Church has this big collective laugh, all together,” she explained.

Sr Therese said they were given the opportunity to bring the Gospel message to people’s lounge rooms through actions like praying at the demilitarised zone on the border of North and South Korea.

And that allowed them to speak with their fellow contestants and crew – and the audience – about their own vocation and how God can work in people’s lives.

“If you know that you’re listening to the Holy Spirit, you can do anything with great courage that it will go well,” Sr Judy said.

Sebastian Duhau and Holly Roberts, who have each represented young Australian Catholics at the Vatican, told their peers that they should take up Pope Francis’ challenge to be “protagonists of change” and “the now of God”.

They explained that the Plenary Council 2020 allows people of all ages in Australia to be both of those things.

Delegates closed the first day by participating in the meditative prayer form that originated from the Taizé community in France, followed by a musical performance from Gen Bryant.

Other highlights on the opening day included:

- The first two “Cruisin’ with Columba” conversations – chats between Bishop Delegate for Youth Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE and a group of young people;
- The first Bishops X-Change sessions, in which bishops from across the country engage with young people on important issues facing the Church and society;
- Dutch priest and author Fr Michel Remery asking the question: “Is there social media in heaven?”;
- Catechetical sessions on prayer, including participation in Sunday Mass;
- An exploration of how young Catholics can continue to advocate for action on climate change.

For more information about the Festival, including speaker and performer profiles, go to www.acyf.org.au

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