

WORLD & NATION

Teens find faith and reconciliation in Denver

By Peter Droege
Catholic News Service

DENVER — Catholic youths at a conference in Denver gave testimony to their peers about feeling isolated at school, being rejected by their parents, and watching friends die from alcohol and drug abuse.

And the gathering, called the Steubenville of the Rockies Youth Conference, offered the teens a chance to find healing and reconciliation.

These were just some of the stories shared during a conference that drew about 2,000 young people to the University of Denver July 30-Aug. 1. It was one of several regional summer conferences sponsored by the Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio.

The weekend had as its theme "Goin' Home to My Father's House," and included Mass, eucharistic adoration, talks and lots of worship music, which the youths danced to as they shouted out lyrics.

The university's gymnasium was decked out as a train station and was the focal point for events designed to reconcile teens to God, their families and one another.

"When I came here on Friday, I was lost," one young man told a rapt audience during the testimonials. "My father left when I was 6, my life was going nowhere and I lost faith. Three weeks ago, I was involved in a serious car accident — not a single one of my bones was broken — but my friend slipped into a coma and died.

"I thought my life was over," he continued. "A friend invited me here and I am so



James Baca/CNS

Andrea Kitten receives the sacrament of reconciliation from Father Don Willette during a Catholic youth gathering at the University of Denver in early August. More than 2,000 participants, some from as far away as France and Canada, attended the Steubenville of the Rockies Youth Conference.

glad I came — I am lucky to be here."

Moderating the session was Jim Beckman, youth minister of St. Frances Cabrini Church in Littleton, who assisted families and students following the Columbine High School tragedy in April.

He approached the young man, put his arm around him and said, "I know a lot of people here are struggling with the death of friends. You have to understand that you

are here for a reason. You are alive for a reason and God has a plan for your life."

As Beckman finished and the young man began to leave the stage, the young people jumped to their feet in a standing ovation.

One of several young women who spoke told the gathering that she came to the event seeking peace after having been raped two months earlier.

"I came here hoping that the burden would be lifted from me; instead, when I looked upon the Blessed Sacrament, I was given the gift of forgiveness. I forgave him, and forgive myself," she said.

The young people leapt to their feet, again offering words of encouragement and a prolonged ovation.

At the closing Mass Aug. 1, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Denver explained to the young people that everyone has a hunger that longs to be satisfied. Paraphrasing St. Augustine, he told them, "Our hearts will not be at rest until they are at rest in God."

The archbishop also exhorted the young people not to spend their money and time on things that fail to satisfy — "like mascara, or video games," he said, to groans from the assembly. "Or pickup trucks," he added, to loud groans from young men in the crowd.

He told the youths that there is always room in God's house and that nothing can separate them from God's love. He also challenged the young people to share God's love with one another in the same generous way that God shares his love with them.

At the conclusion of the Mass, more than 100 young men and women came forward when asked if anyone felt called to a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

The event drew groups from Kansas, New Mexico, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wyoming and Canada. More than 70 young people from France who were visiting Denver on a pilgrimage also took part.

Knights reiterate commitment to consistent-life activities

MINNEAPOLIS (CNS) — Looking back to the inspiration of their founder and forward to the next millennium, some 2,500 Knights of Columbus heard exhortations from today's church leaders at the organization's 117th international convention in Minneapolis.

The Aug. 3-5 meeting brought together Knights from 72 different nations, states, provinces or territories representing the 1.6 million member organization.

In opening remarks, Archbishop Harry J. Flynn of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte of Montreal thanked the Knights for their work to build up the church and stand up for life.

"My prayer is that you will continue to do more beautiful things for God, and that nothing will disturb the harmony that should be in such an organization, but rather, that every day, each one of you, will come more clearly to know and be con-

vinced of that there is nothing that can outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ," Archbishop Flynn said.

"How beautiful it is to do something beautiful for God," he added.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a keynote talk also had words of praise for the Knights but urged them to take up the cause to abolish capital punishment with the same enthusiasm they have devoted to fighting abortion.

Pope John Paul II teaches that "one cannot truly be pro-life and support killing life by capital punishment, even though there is a difference in degree in the moral evil between the two," the bishop said. "He rejects the notion that we can teach killing is wrong by killing people who kill others."

Bishop Fiorenza encouraged the Knights of Columbus to continue their efforts to

achieve a "badly needed pro-life victory" on partial-birth abortion and thanked them for their support of Catholic education, their work to attain tax relief for Catholic school parents, and their historical opposition to racism and bigotry.

The Knights, at the close of their convention, pledged continued efforts against abortion, especially partial-birth abortions; assisted suicide and euthanasia; U.S. funding of abortions overseas; marketing of abortifacient drugs such as RU-486 and Preven; and the use of tissue from aborted babies for research.

The Knights also reiterated their long-standing policy against inviting to Knights' events "public officials or candidates for public office who do not support the legal protection of unborn children or who advocate the legalization of assisted suicide, euthanasia" or partial-birth abortion.

The policy also precludes such politi-

cians from renting Knights' facilities, speaking at events sponsored by the Knights, or receiving any honors from local councils.

On other matters, the Knights approved resolutions:

- Urging the media to "voluntarily refrain from producing morally offensive and socially and psychologically injurious forms of communication."

- Supporting passage of legislation that would permit Congress to prohibit physical desecration of the U.S. flag.

- Criticizing groups that have been working for revocation of the Holy See's permanent mission status at the United Nations.

- Advocating vouchers or other means of educational choice for parents of students in public, private and religious schools, as well as the freedom of Catholic schools to operate "without state interference, coercion or control."

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