

## Inspiration in Indianapolis

It is always a pleasure to spend time with our young people. That is especially true on occasions that gather them in significant number to share experiences that are tailored to them.

I am returning from just such an occasion — the biennial National Catholic Youth Conference hosted this year by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. This year's conference was the largest ever. There were nearly 25,000 in attendance — youth ministers and young people from all parts of our country.

The official opening of this incredible gathering was on Thursday evening in the RCA Dome. The concluding session was the Sunday morning Eucharistic liturgy. The dome also was the venue for all of the major convention speakers and a Marian prayer service commemorating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

A convention center connected to the dome was the site of a wide range of events and activities. Kids danced their shoes off at that venue. They traded souvenirs, bought CDs, worked with clay, sang songs, milled about and generally had a marvelous time.

In addition to the planned convention activities, the young people had the opportunity to move around downtown Indianapolis. Some of their sight-seeing was shopping-related. A lot of it had to do with finding places to eat. One of the blessings of the days was fair weather, which allowed everyone to move around without boots or umbrellas or even heavy clothing.

More than 40 of us bishops were among some 400 participants in the Youth Congress on Vocations — an event within the larger convention, which ran from 11 a.m. through dinner on Friday; and from 9 a.m. until lunch on Saturday.

An adult youth leader, a bishop and six or seven young people sat together at round tables for the duration of the congress. Our table leader was a young priest from Dubuque, Iowa. The young people at the table hailed from the dioceses of St. Cloud, Minnesota; Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Missouri; San Antonio and San Angelo, Texas; Wilmington, Delaware; and Trenton, New Jersey.

It was joy to be with them through those hours. We reflected together on our great baptismal call

### along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

and what that means in all of our lives. We considered the gift of the Christ life we receive in that sacrament, its call to worship and service, and the relationship to which it calls us with one another.

We also spent times talking about the ways in which God calls us to live out our baptism — in the single life, married life, vowed religious life and in the ordained life. I had a chance to share my own vocation story with the table. In turn each of the participants, with their usual openness, talked about their own dreams and hopes for their lives' paths. They spoke of the people who inspire them, the difficulties they meet and of the ways in which they test possible directions that attract them. It was a moving thing to hear them speak about the importance of faith and prayer in their discernment.

I hope that the comments above give you some sense of the NCYC. Time and space constraints make it impossible to go into all of the details. But I would like to share a couple of reflections on what were among the highlights of the experience:

1) The participation of the young people in all of the forms of prayer that were so beautifully a part of our days together. Some of the prayer was elaborate and on a grand scale. Other prayer was quiet and quite simple. But none of it seemed to be an appendage. It was carefully integrated into all of the events. I believe such manifest thoughtfulness enriched everything that we did.

An added note: Every effort was made to involve the young people in all of the prayer by sharing their

many and diverse talents. This they did with joy and generosity. The beauty of it all for me was the sense I had — well-founded, I believe — that for the participants this was not a talent show but a sharing of their faith.

2) Archbishop Dan Buechlein and all the people of Indianapolis could not have been more hospitable to us. They were courteous, warm and genuinely helpful during our stay. I am quite sure that they are always that way. But I also want to say that the kids behaved in such a way as to invite a warm and open response to them.

3) An exciting night at the Hard Rock Cafe with our great kids from the parishes of Tioga County. When we weren't having a great time at the table or enjoying the good food, we were on our feet moving to the music. I remember at one point coursing down the aisle doing all of the gestures of The Village People's "YMCA."

I want to thank Anita and Dan Martin for setting that up and for so graciously allowing me to be part of the evening. And I thank them for so generously allowing the Tioga group and yours truly to love their beautiful Sarah.

4) I have to tell you that preaching the homily at the closing liturgy of the convention was a great thrill for me. That thrill related to the size of the assembly, the fact that they are our incredible young church and that they represented the vitality of our church across the nation.

5) Finally — and always — I am inspired by and grateful for the generosity of the adult leaders who offer such loving support and encouragement to our young people. They go beyond the call of duty to help the kids. I mention in particular Maribeth Mancini, diocesan director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, and her great staff; among them is Michael Theisen, director of youth ministry for our diocese.

I express sincere gratitude as well to our parish priests, lay pastoral ministers and all of the adult youth ministers and volunteers who offer such generous support and faith witness to our wonderful young people.

Peace to all.



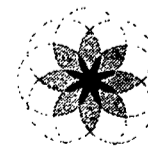
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