

CONTINUED...

God's love fills the air through song, prayer



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16
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"Hope at the Crossroads" was the theme for this year's conference, which gathered almost 24,000 teens and adults in the name of Jesus Christ. We went to find hope at the crossroads of America and the crossroads of our lives.

What we found was love, a stronger faith, a deeper relationship with God,

and hope in the knowledge that we have a God who loves us deeply, who loves "in a way we have never been loved."

Each day, the entire NCYC gathered in the RCA Dome, filling the floor and the lower section of seats. The area around the stage was constantly flooded with excited teens dancing and singing along with musicians such as the rappers Know da Verbs, the Irish band Ceili Rain, the Texan duo Sudden Impact, and punk group Scarecrow and Tinman.

These groups applied the words of the Bible to modern life and set them to music - an extremely youth-friendly medium! Their music brought the message of the Good News to teens in a less direct, but just as meaningful, way as the keynoters who followed them.

The sense of God given by the music was so powerful, it made the entire dome clap in unison, sway together, sing together, even jump together. It gave a sensation unlike any other. The Spirit was clearly present in every note, every beat, every word and every motion.

Music was followed by prayer - prayer unlike any other. Bible passages were read over music and accompanied by dance. Spiritual songs filled the arena. Teens presented their own prayers through skits. The dome was silent, filled with the Holy Spirit.

Keynoters were the third component to the general sessions. Jesse Manibusan, MC for the conference, had a warm and inspiring presence. "God is good," he would shout. "All the time," came the booming reply. He would always have "a round of applause for Jesus."

"What's at the crossroads?" he would



Karen Callaway/CNS

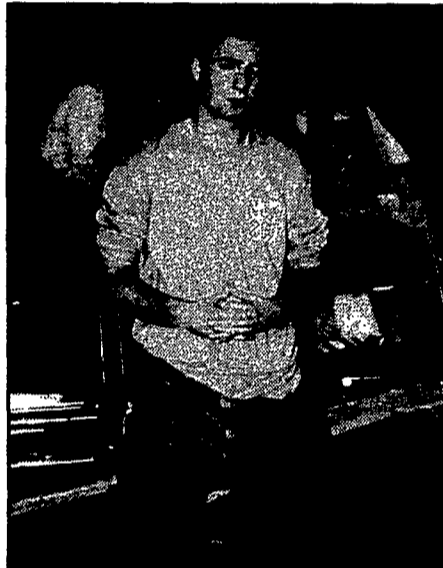
Jenny Gac from Tioga Catholic Community fills out a survey on religious values at an interactive indoor "park" in Indianapolis Dec. 7. She was among nearly 1,000 teens and adults from the Rochester Diocese who attended the NCYC.

ask. "Hope" came the answer.

Anne Ryder, an anchor for the Channel 13 Eyewitness News in Indianapolis, gave an inspiring presentation about hope and the power of God. Her faith in God brought her from having a mediocre job in television to an amazing career as a renowned reporter.

Her series "Hope to Tell" is a group of stories about hope and faith. She went to Calcutta to help the poor and ended up being the only American reporter to interview Mother Teresa in more than a decade. When Air Force Captain Scott O'Grady returned after being shot down over enemy territory, it was her interest in the spiritual side of his experience that made Anne Ryder one of very few reporters to interview him. Her story gave us hope in the knowledge that God hears us and is watching out for us, looking after us in ways we may not always see at first.

Renee Bondi, now an inspirational singer and speaker, told the story of how she became quadriplegic. She was a Christian singer before her accident but afterward she could not sing; she could barely even talk. Her forced dependence on other people has caused her to depend completely on God. She has learned that if you surrender the large problems in your life to God, it will be easier to surrender the small ones and you will be more at



Bob Nichols/CNS

Lee Twigg of Fishers, Ind., prays after receiving Communion during the closing liturgy Dec. 9.

peace. Now, 13 years later, Renee can sing beautifully, has regained use of her arms, and even has a 6-year-old child. Her hope and her amazing faith served as a source of inspiration to all who heard her speak.

More than 50 workshops were offered over the course of the conference. They covered topics ranging from HIV and

AIDS, to youth leadership in rural communities. Doug Brummel, Vince Nims, Kim and Reggie Harris, Steve Angrisano and Matt Smith of MTV's "The Real World," just to name a few, led workshops. These sessions were spiritual at different levels but all brought hope, in some manner, in the message that good things will come if you trust in the Lord.

Raceway Park, an interactive, indoor conglomeration of displays, was a huge part of the conference. Thousands of teens gathered to play basketball or volleyball, participate in team building activities, perform in a coffeehouse, visit a number of Catholic performers and keynoters, get information about Catholic colleges, learn about vocations, or just mingle with other teens from all over the United States.

Perhaps the most popular activity in the park was trading. Memorabilia from one city or state would be swapped off for mementos from another. T-shirts and hats were hot items on the trading floor. Raceway Park was also the site of a youth rally on vocations.

On Thursday evening, the Rochester delegation was blessed with a special treat, a private concert with renowned Catholic musician and keynoter Steve Angrisano. Bishop Clark came in and spoke with us about being at NCYC and how we can change for the better.

On Sunday before Mass, Steve Angrisano performed in the RCA Dome for everyone. It was an overpowering event. It seemed like everyone knew the words and motions to his music, and those who did not caught on quickly. Can you imagine 24,000 young Catholics proclaiming that "Our God is an awesome God" while raising the roof for Jesus Christ?

Closing Mass on Sunday was truly amazing. Everyone participated and made the Mass one of the most spiritual moments of the conference. Bishop Matthew Clark of Rochester gave a powerful homily about the influence young people have on the world and on older generations. He let us know that we are the light of tomorrow. He showed us how to love our neighbor and how to bring hope to others now that it has been brought to us.

I cannot express in words the powerfulness of this experience; so many teens coming together in one voice to praise our God. Each day, each moment in Indianapolis was one of new beginnings, of faith, and most importantly, of hope.

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