

WORLD & NATION

Pilgrims swap trinkets to remember youth day

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

TORONTO — A glance at the backpacks of many World Youth Day pilgrims revealed what many of them were taking home with them besides sunburns, blisters and soggy clothes.

For many, the red and beige backpacks given to all World Youth Day delegates were either covered with signatures from other pilgrims from around the world or decorated with buttons obtained in the thousands of trades made during the week.

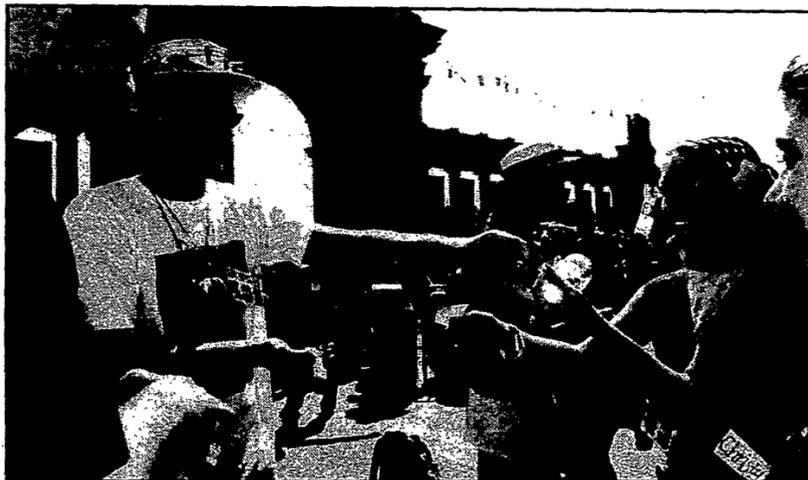
Some of the collections were inside the backpacks and included everything from e-mail addresses, key rings, magnets, bracelets, medals and rosaries to bandannas and shirts.

Pilgrims made deals even when they didn't speak the same language in this universal trading system that has become a World Youth Day tradition.

James Foster, 19, of Leeds, England, brought 50 pins with him to trade with other pilgrims. In exchange, his hat was covered with buttons from around the world.

The way he and his friends saw it, the tokens were ways to remember everyone they met.

But they also were quick to admit that



Karen Callaway/CNS

Brad Abbott from Pittsburgh (left) watches French youth Jeremy Rigaux exchange pins and buttons with U.S. pilgrim Christie Neville during festivities at Exhibition Place in Toronto July 23 during World Youth Day.

the free souvenirs weren't all they would have to show for their time with hundreds of thousands of other Catholic youths.

Foster said he planned to take home some of the religious songs he learned at some of the events and even on the street-car.

He and his friends also wanted to take back with them some of the ideas that they picked up while staying with Canadian families for the Days in the Diocese program that preceded World Youth Day activities.

"I noticed how strong the faith was in Canada. It's not that way back home," said

Humphrey Casey-Hayford, 18, of Leeds.

"There was a strong sense of community," added 19-year-old Ruth Hodgson of Leeds.

The group of friends, who spoke to Catholic News Service while they were waiting for the pope to arrive for the July 25 prayer service, said their own church experience was more cut and dried. They said parishioners went to Mass, then went home without even talking with one another afterward.

Some pilgrims planned to return home and simply tell other youths what they heard.

Anna Gelano, 22, of the Philippines, said she and her friends were going to "echo World Youth Day in our parish so other youth can experience the same thing."

Henry Ouku, 35, of Kenya, had an extra motivation to share his experience with his friends back home, because many of them had wanted to come to World Youth Day but were denied visas from the Canadian government.

Deanna LaValle, 20, of St. Agnes Parish in St. Paul, Minn., said she was leaving World Youth Day with a clearer understanding of "the reality of Christ" and a "deeper love for the Eucharist."

But Pablo Casaseca, 28, of Madrid, Spain, said that what people get out of World Youth Day might not be clear until three or four months afterward.

That was his experience nine years ago when he attended World Youth Day in Denver. He said he was an atheist at the time and only went to accompany his girlfriend.

"I came back to Spain and in a few months I saw that God was real and that he loves me," he told CNS July 27 while waiting for the prayer vigil to begin.

He said he is not the only one who experienced a delayed effect from World Youth Day, adding that he knows people who were on drugs but stopped using them not long after they attended one of the gatherings.

"I know a lot of people might look (at this event) and ask, 'Why are they there?' That's what I was thinking."

But, as he pointed out: "You don't know what's going to happen."

Visa denials sadden youths

TORONTO (CNS) — Many World Youth Day pilgrims had mixed emotions for the event — experiencing the joy of seeing the pope, but saddened by the absence of friends who were denied visas to attend the gathering.

Henry Ouku of Kisumu, Kenya, said he was thrilled to be surrounded by other people of the same faith from all different parts of the globe, but he wished some of his friends from his homeland were there to share the event with him.

Ouku told Catholic News Service that only 100 of 500 Kenyans were granted visas by Canadian immigration officials. The others were told they did not have the necessary paperwork either proving financial stability or strong family ties to ensure their return.

Many Ugandans experienced similar difficulties.

Ugandan World Youth Day organizers said they were told by Canadian officials that "the economic and security situation in Uganda" caused many in their group to be denied visas.

When she saw the pope July 23, 26-year-old Maria Luisa Gonzaga of Ecuador cried, in part because her best friend, Lourdes Castillo, was not there to share the experience with her.

Canadian immigration officials in Ecuador denied Castillo a visa, saying she failed to prove her personal economic stability within her country.

She was one of many Latin Americans denied visas.

Youths from the Philippines had to pass an independent screening before their paperwork was submitted to Canadian immigration officials in Manila.

Those who successfully obtained visas and attended World Youth Day still did not want to take any chances. When a photographer asked to take some of their pictures, they refused, saying they did not want to have trouble with immigration officials.

WYD delegates show interest in vocations

TORONTO — Benedictine Sister Rosann Ocken wondered how she would attract young people to her order's booth during the vocations exhibit at World Youth Day.

For starters, she brought along 6,000 medals to give away.

But half of them were gone during the first day, as a constant stream of young people stopped at her booth near the back of an exhibit hall filled with booths representing hundreds of different religious orders as well as lay ministries and missionary groups.

Sister Rosann said she knows that not everyone who took a medal will consider religious life, but was encouraged by the

fact that a fair number of youths signed up to receive more information.

Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia, who was working the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' booth, said he "never expected to see not hundreds, but thousands" of people at an event promoting vocations.

Archbishop Roger L. Schwietz of Anchorage, Alaska, agreed.

"We've come through this difficult time in our country, and it doesn't seem to have left a pall on our young people, who are filled with joy. It's great for us old folks who have been in the trenches for awhile," the archbishop said.

It wasn't so bad for those new to reli-

gious life, either.

Eric de la Pena, who handed out buttons and literature at the Franciscan booth, planned to start his novitiate program with the Franciscans at the end of July.

He said he thought the crowd was part of an overall trend of curiosity about religious life that was unique to the World Youth Day experience, where "people are so open" to thinking about their faith.

Josh Davis, an 18-year-old from St. Luke's Parish in Dayton, Ohio, said he has told people he wants to "either be a priest or have 14 kids."

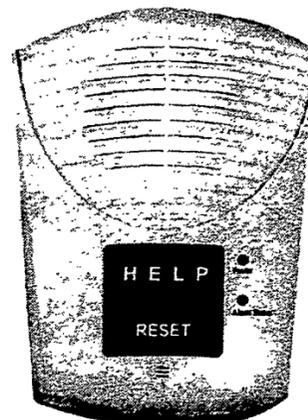
And, a month before starting college, he had his mind set on the priesthood.

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