

Many memories made in Houston

Youths of St. John's, Spencerport/
Guest Contributors

HOUSTON — The National Catholic Youth Conference is an event which occurs every two years. It presents an opportunity for the youths of our faith to come together in prayer and worship. This year, on Nov. 13-16, NCYC visited the city of Houston, Texas. More than 23,000 participants — including 600 teens and 250 adults from the Diocese of Rochester — gathered for four days in Reliant Park, just outside Houston. Highlights included keynote speakers, nationally and world-renowned musicians, comedians and a Mass in Reliant Stadium on Sunday morning for everyone attending NCYC.

The entire conference was an amazing experience; however, there are certain events that stand out to us as leaving a profound impact on all those who attended.

One such event was the opportunity to listen to keynote speaker Bud Welch, whose 23-year-old daughter was killed when the Murrah Building was bombed in Oklahoma City. That day in April of 1995, Welch embarked on a journey he never thought he would be forced to face, one on which he would face his own moral convictions about the death penalty. After a period of time, Welch came to the realization that the death penalty is about revenge — the same revenge which caused the death of his daughter and 167 others. Welch



Photo courtesy of Nikki Legere

David Hull (left) and Laura Uschold of Spencerport's St. John the Evangelist Parish take part in the National Catholic Youth Conference.

left NCYC participants with words of wisdom: "It's OK to feel revenge, just don't act on it."

Another event which left a huge impact was the speech by Craig Kielburger. He helped found an organization called "Free the Children," which helps children in poor countries. At one point, he stated how the world spends billions of dollars on cigarettes and ice cream, when it would take a fraction of that to educate all the children in a Third-World country. These numbers show that money is spent on items we don't need, instead of going to children who have nothing.

Kielburger's message is that everyone has a gift, be it talking on the phone or making other people smile, and that each person should



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Teens from St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport pray with parents, other teens and chaperones Nov. 13 at St. John's parish center, just prior to leaving for Houston to attend the National Catholic Youth Convention. Teens who were to attend the conference included Mark Czelusniak (clockwise from left front row) Teresa Devlin, Bethany Arganbright, Laura Uschold, Shannon Harwood and Katie Hull.

use their gifts to help others. The most interesting part was the slide show that had pictures of all the kids in different countries that he had visited and helped. Through "Free the Children," school supplies and other things are given to children who cannot get them on their own. Kielburger made another comment about how he was talking to a boy in a poor country about school. The boy turned to his father and asked him what school was. That touched off a million feelings: How can he not know what school is?

Another big part of the NCYC was the music and entertainment. At this conference we got the opportunity to sit and talk with Scarecrow and Tinmen, a Christian music group with a rock and rhythm-and-blues sound. This band, which is very energetic, has a great way of showing its faith and getting very involved with the youths. While sitting with them we realized that by just being the way they are, Scarecrow and Tinmen have a great thing going for them and it makes us, as the youths, feel cared for. As people came up to their booth, they took the time to know each individual. Most importantly, we could tell they were happy to be there. It's the greatest feeling to have a band like Scarecrow and Tinmen who are there to put a smile on people's faces and to make God a bigger part of each person's life.

A truly inspiring person we had the chance to meet was singer/songwriter Rachel Lampa. She has had a record deal since she was 14, is now 17 and has produced three albums. She spoke of inspirations lying in Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder and her mother. We believe that all youths can be inspired by her be-

cause she chooses to sing about God and faith. She also deals with some of the pressures with which other teens must deal. Hers, however, are slightly different. For example, instead of going to President Bush's inauguration, she went to her prom.

Some motivational words said by Lampa were "Pay attention to the little whispers and everything because God is trying to tell you what to do — big time." Lampa gave a beautiful performance on Friday night. Seeing how she achieved so much before she even graduated gives the youths inspiration in their own lives.

Somewhere between the singing, the laughing, the dancing, the trading, the overtired crankiness and giggling silliness, between the bumpy buses and walking what seemed like miles, between meeting new friends and mingling, we think just about every single one of the people who spent four days with God in Houston realized something. We think we all realized that not only was God there with us, but 23,000 people believed he was, and that means something. That means we can do something!

We are 23,000 Catholic youths who are adamant about our faith, and we can accomplish what we previously thought impossible. We are returning home full of God, hope and faith, with new friends who live all over our beautiful country. NCYC has impacted us tremendously, as well as the 23,000 others who joyfully experienced it with us. We, as youths, are powerful and can do good in our world.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was a combined effort of four young parishioners at St. John the Evangelist Parish, Spencerport: Bethany Arganbright, 17; Teresa Devlin, 17; Nikki Legere, 16; and Emily Phillips, 17.

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