

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

Christian Formation & Catholic Schools

Diocese of Ogdensburg

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## A Message from Sister Ellen Rose . . .

As the end of the year approaches the Holy Father meets with the members of his Curia to review the past year and give a direction for the year to come. This past December when Pope Benedict spoke to the Roman Curia he referred to his experience at the World Youth Day in Madrid. He talked about “a new youthful form of Christianity” and the “new evangelization put into practice.” He described his experience at World Youth Day under five headings.

1. A new experience of the Church’s universality: Although the young people came from every continent, had never met one another, spoke different languages and came from diverse cultural backgrounds, they were all moved by the one Lord Jesus Christ. “In this setting, to say that all humanity are brothers and sisters is not merely an idea: it becomes a real shared experience generating joy.”
2. A new way of living our humanity: Pope Benedict noted one of his most important experiences in Madrid was meeting with the volunteers, nearly 20,000 young people, who devoted weeks and months to the preparations for World Youth Day. “Those who give their time always give a part of their lives.” They were concerned not only about themselves but about others. “These young people did good, even at a cost, even if it demanded sacrifice, simply because it is a wonderful thing to do good, to be there for others.”
3. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: Thousands of young people, in the midst of a thunderstorm which almost ruined the night vigil, responded in eloquent silence to the Lord’s sacramental presence. “The risen Lord enters into our midst. And then we can do no other than say, with Saint Thomas: my Lord and my God! Adoration is primarily an act of faith . . . . God is not just some possible or impossible hypothesis concerning the origin of all things. He is present. And if he is present, then I bow down before him.”
4. The sacrament of Confession: Increasingly the sacrament of Confession is coming to be seen as an integral part of the World Youth Day experience. “. . . in consequence of our sinful history is a tendency that is opposed to love – the tendency towards selfishness, towards becoming closed in on oneself, in fact towards evil . . . . Therefore we need the humility that constantly asks for God’s forgiveness, that seeks purification and awakens in us . . . the positive force of the Creator, to draw us upwards.”
5. Joy: “Where does it come from? How is it to be explained? Certainly there are many factors at work here. But in my view the crucial one is this certainty, based on faith: I am wanted; I have a task in history; I am accepted, I am loved.” We need the other’s presence, telling us “with more than words: it is good that you exist.” Only faith gives us this conviction. And with this conviction comes joy.



As we look at parish and school faith formation programs for our children and young people we might ask how our programs provide them with:

*the realization that the Church extends beyond the borders of their parishes and schools, that it embraces all cultures and languages and that all people are their brothers and sisters?*

*opportunities to volunteer their time and talent even when this service involves sacrifice? How are they learning to give of themselves without expecting to receive a reward for their time and effort?*

*an appreciation for the sacramental presence of God and opportunities for silence and prayer to express their faith in the Risen Lord?*

*an authentic understanding of the human person, redeemed by Christ yet capable of self-centered choices. How do we teach them about the sacramental life and the importance especially of regular participation in the Eucharist and Sacrament of Penance?*

*an experience of joy, a fruit of God's love for each person?*

World Youth Day was an extraordinary event and yielded extraordinary experiences. While we cannot replicate the event, it is worth our time to review how we provide experiences which address the universality of the Church, the generous and unselfish use of one's time, appreciation for the sacramental presence of the Risen Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, regular participation in the Sacrament of Penance and joy founded on the realization of God's love.

These elements are not reserved for programs with children and young people. They are elements of faith formation programs for people of any age. Our Holy Father has called us to a new evangelization. The message, the proclamation of Christ is the same, but its proclamation in our times requires a renewed enthusiasm and vigor. May this enthusiasm and vigor for the Gospel, for announcing the good news of salvation through Christ be evident in our faith formation programs.

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*"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow" (Heb 13:8).*

*"The key theme this year, and the years ahead, is this: how do we proclaim the Gospel today? How can faith as a living force become a reality today?"*

*Where is the light that is capable of illuminating our perception? Where is the force that draws us upwards? These are questions that must be answered by our proclamation of the Gospel, by the new evangelization, so that the message may become event, so that proclamation may lead to life" (Benedict XVI, Address to Roman Curia, December 2011).*

