

January 19, 2011
11-015EA

Entre Amigos – Opinion / Commentary

WYD Madrid 2011: Let's return the favor

By Mar Muñoz-Visoso

(January 19, 2011) There are many good reasons to visit Madrid any time of the year: beautiful city, plenty of monuments, churches and museums to see, the kindest of people and great food! This summer there is an especially good one: World Youth Day 2011.

Those who have been at previous World Youth Days can tell you how the experience has changed their lives, how it has motivated them to seek a more profound understanding of their faith, a deeper commitment to it or, simply, how it has recharged the batteries of their spiritual life. This includes, of course, the adults and the pastors of the church who accompany the young people on their pilgrimage.

Even those who went along out of curiosity or with a more 'touristy' mindset always seem to return home with a mix of inexplicable emotions, fascination, and sense of "camaraderie" with their fellow human beings. People who had never met before became the best of friends and kids who didn't speak the same language understood each other perfectly.

What we often do not hear about are the effects of these massive, though temporary, infusions of enthusiastic and faith-filled youth in the hosting cities and countries. I was not in Denver for WYD '93 but arrived in the city shortly after. Almost two decades later people still talk about it and remember it vividly, as if it happened yesterday. Most importantly, WYD greatly increased the number of adult baptisms and conversions to the Catholic faith locally.

So here is a challenge for the youth of the United States and the Americas. Let's return the favor!

Over the centuries, Spain has given the Church many holy men and women and the New World many missionaries. Today, though, this former bastion of Catholicism seems to be moving away from its Christian identity. The Church in Spain is in a severe crisis. Mass attendance is depressing. Many self-identified Catholics no longer practice or even raise their kids in the faith. The Spanish Church is now importing clergy instead sending, and religious vocations from other countries, even if scarce, are fast outpacing homegrown ones.

Spanish society has not been immune to the secularization and materialism that have overtaken Europe. The Church there has taken to heart the call of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, for a New Evangelization of the continent.

The Spirit is awakening new movements and charisms to aid the Church in Europe and in Spain, but she can also benefit tremendously from an infusion of new blood; modern missionaries with

the old-time determination of people like Junípero Serra, Alonso de Benavides, Bartolomé de las Casas or Francisco Kino. So let's honor their legacy by returning the favor.

WYD 2011 offers us the opportunity to be missionaries in Europe for a few days. Let's us help the Spanish youth of today sing with confidence the words of St. Paul that have provided the theme for this WYD: "Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith." For a few days, let us also be a giant loudspeaker for the Holy Father, who insistently has brought this message to ambassadors, academics, chiefs of state and even the European parliament: Europe, recognize, appreciate and don't turn away from your Christian roots!

The presence of many young Catholics from around the world in Madrid this summer will no doubt be prophetic and leave a profound mark.

In person or in spirit, see you in Madrid!

Mar Muñoz-Visoso is assistant director of Media Relations at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops