May 4-5, 2001

World Youth Day, 2002- The Catholic Church in Canada

Before, During and After

INTRODUCTION

For the sixth consecutive year, the Episcopal Commission for Relations with Associations of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Laity hosted a Forum with national Catholic associations.

The General Objectives of the annual Forum are: 1) to discuss and make recommendations on a topic that is a priority for the Commission; and 2) to enable the associations to have some time to share their concerns and activities with the Commission and with one another. The Commission has found the Forum to be an effective vehicle for fulfilling its mandate to assure dialogue between the CCCB and national associations.

The Forum took place at the CCCB offices on May 4-5, 2001 on the theme of World Youth Day, 2002 – The Catholic Church in Canada Before, During and After.

Eighteen associations attended the Forum (five bilingual, six French-language and seven English-language). They were: Association of Catholic Universities and Colleges of Canada; Association of Ministries Programs; Association des Scouts du Canada; Canadian Association of Knights of Columbus; Canadian Catholic Campus Ministry/Canadian Catholic Student Association; Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace; Canadian Catholic School Trustees’ Association; Canadian Religious Conference; Catholic Health Association of Canada; Catholic Organization for Life and Family; The Catholic Women’s League of Canada; Conférence canadienne des institutes séculiers (Canadian Conference of Secular Institutes); Foi et lumière (Faith and Light); Mouvement des femmes chrétiennes; The National Federation of Presbyteral Councils; The Society of St. Vincent de Paul; The Ukrainian Catholic Council and La Vie montante (Ascending Life in Canada).

INFORMATION SHARING

The associations had introduced themselves in advance of the meeting by providing for circulation to all participants a one page self description which included information such as their mandate, mission, objectives, current priorities or major projects. The self descriptions are in a document entitled Who’s Who? which is available from the CCCB Secretariat.

At the opening session of the meeting the individual participants introduced themselves in light of the theme. After telling their name, and where they are from, participants were invited to tell the group a little bit about themselves by briefly responding to one of the following questions:
1) When I heard World Youth Day was coming to Canada I thought....

2) When I was young or younger I was attracted to the Church because...

3) If I were young today, I would like the Church to be...

4) My hope for young people in the Church is...

Some of the reflections shared during a very lively evening were:

- World Youth Day is a marvellous opportunity to revitalize the whole Church through a profound sharing of faith with people from all across the country and around the world. It is a chance to deepen our relationships with Christ at the centre of family, school and parish.

- It is a pilgrimage that has already started; the journey is as important as the event.

- The experience of other World Youth Days in other countries has shown that it can not only change hearts but lives; resulting in increased faith and greater vitality and visibility for the Church.

- It is an enormous organizational and pastoral challenge for the whole Church.

- It is a welcome occasion for youth to link together to strengthen the Catholic community and effect social change.

- World Youth Day offers the possibility of fostering a larger network of youth and a national approach to youth ministry.

- While World Youth Day will not involve most of the schools because most students are under 16, it may involve many teachers because most of them are under 35.

- It is an opportunity to be “entirely Church”, to energize and change us and give us all hope.

- The witness of service to others was a powerful attraction years ago and is still a major motivation for youth who get involved in the Church today.

- For youth to be attracted to the Church they need to be invited in a very personal way through words and gestures and to be offered unconditional love, forgiveness and hope. The Lord is present in such a welcome.

- During World Youth Days there is a profound understanding of the Church as a family that gathers us; that stirs the desire to get involved and participate.
Youth are not only the future of the Church but the present; they are the Church and their enthusiasm and generosity are very needed. Young people can become missionaries to the Church in Canada that is in need of renewal.

World Youth Day is a privileged chance to listen to youth, for youth to be with other youth from a variety of social and economic cultures who also believe, for youth to be encouraged and challenged by other youth who are personally committed to a life of faith and justice.

Clergy need to show youth that they are young whatever their age.

World Youth Day will be very important for families, a chance for families to listen to youth, a chance for rapprochement between parents and youth.

World Youth Day must be more than an event; follow-up is extremely important.

World Youth Day could renew the associations if they get involved, lighting a fire under the older members and attracting new ones.

World Youth Day has the potential to awaken the Canadian Church and discover what it means to be youthful. It is a unique occasion to meet young people, to listen to them and acquire a better understanding of their values and priorities. It is a chance to embrace the whole world and have Pentecost in July. World Youth Day can be a prophetic celebration by which we contribute, through our words and gestures, to the creation of the future of our Church and society.

World Youth Day is truly a time of grace, from the beginning it has been less “our project” and more of God.

PANEL I - INFORMATION SESSION BY MEMBERS OF THE WORLD YOUTH DAY TEAM

Participants were treated to an excellent information session by four dynamic members of the World Youth Day team: Fr. Tom Rosica, National Director; Sr. Francine Guillelmette FMA, Associate Director; Dr. Katherine Rouleau, Director of Diocesan Hospitality; and Mr. Paul Kilbertus, Director of Communications.

The following is a summary of some of the points made in the presentations and in the exchange with participants. Current information about World Youth Day is available on the organization’s website www.wyd2002.org.

The panel began with a vibrant video of John Paul II in Rome on Palm Sunday presenting the
cross to 47 Canadian youth who will carry it to different places in Canada; including shopping malls, prisons, youth hang outs; during the year preceding World Youth Day in much the same way that the Olympic torch is carried throughout the host country in an Olympic year.

- The theme will be “Salt of the Earth and Light of the World”.

- World Youth Day is a grace, a privilege, a blessing, the door to unity and peace. We can’t miss the moment because it won’t happen again, let the grace flood in.

- World Youth Day originated very modestly in 1976 when Pope Paul VI decided to give Palm Sunday a special youth flavour, growing in the early eighties into a one day event in Rome for ecclesial lay movements and expanding beyond movements to all youth and eventually to other countries such as Argentina, the United States and France.

- Previous World Youth Days in other countries have meant new life for the local Church. A national youth ministry was launched in Argentina because of World Youth Day and as a result of the French event there was an explosion of youth ministry throughout the dioceses.

- Denver created an openness; Paris started a revolution with the freedom to walk and pray; and Rome created a moment of conversion. The hope is that we in Canada will discover our youthfulness, that we will recognize that the Church is young, that by coming together in all of our diversity we will appreciate that we are Church together.

- World Youth Day will only work if the whole Church gets involved and decides to breathe life back into the local Church. The entry point for associations is to make contacts with those on the diocesan committees who are organizing the diocesan days; rekindle and make beautiful what already exists.

- At the Youth Forum hosted by the World Youth Day Committee in February in Toronto every diocese was represented by people full of energy and passion about World Youth Day and full of love for youth. It was a taste of what could follow after World Youth Day.

- Some of the most memorable moments for participants in World Youth Days in France and Italy were the days spent in the dioceses with host families before meeting with the Pope in Paris and Rome. In Canada participants will stay with families and experience life in local churches from July 18-21, 2002 and travel to Toronto for July 22-28. The World Youth Day offices will make the linkages between the dioceses and participants from other countries.

- The days in the dioceses have the potential to involve the whole community because all youth are welcome not just those who go to Church; Christ is recognized in everyone.

- The diocesan days are an integral part of World Youth day, and will anchor it in the same way that roots anchor a tree. These days will link the youth with each other and with the local Church. Make sure that youth are involved in planning these days so that there will be something after the event. While each diocese will have its own flavour of hospitality, there will probably be in each diocese a meeting with the bishop, a meeting with the community and a
Eucharistic celebration.

· The riches of Canada are our forests, our lakes, our mountains; some would describe them as the new cathedrals; World Youth Day gives us a chance to share and show our riches.

· Some of the programs during the common Toronto days will be the Way of the Cross on a main Toronto street, catechetical sessions, open air confessions along the lake, an evening vigil with the Pope before the mass on the final day, musical and theatrical entertainment, a youth festival, seminars on social justice and ecumenism.

· The Associations were encouraged to use the World Youth Day logo subject to the specifications set out on the website.

· The CCCB National Liturgy Office has prepared in co-operation with the World Youth Day office a book of prayers for World Youth Day.

· It is hoped that young people will begin in September a process of reflection and action on what it means to be a Catholic. A Manuel will be available to guide this process including sections on knowing Christ, celebrating faith, saints, models of faith, social justice, ecology.

· Associations should be ambassadors for World Youth Day, get the message out through their networks, ask people to pray. There may be an opportunity for associations to have booths in some of the pavilions in Toronto and funding is always needed.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In small groups, the participants discussed a number of questions related to the presentations of the World Youth Team. The following are some of the points made in the discussions.

1. What struck you most in the presentations by the World Youth Day Team?

· The participants admired the presenters spirit, energy, vision, joy, team work, openness and conviction. The team gave them confidence that they would get the job done.

· They thought that the video was fantastic.

· Many expressed surprise at how huge and complex the project is and admiration at how much had already been accomplished. It was almost like jumping on a moving train that had already left the station.

· They appreciated the historical background, which gave them a sense of the universal Church. Their imagination was captivated by the image of pilgrimage.
They were impressed by the significance of the days in the dioceses and the emphasis put on social justice and ecumenism.

Others were struck by the importance the team was giving to follow-up; that it was not just thought of as a singular event but with long-term repercussions in the life of the Church in Canada.

2. What are your hopes and expectations of World Youth Day for the Church in Canada? for your association?

The biggest hope expressed by the majority in one workshop was that World Youth Day might change and rejuvenate some of the “fossilized structures” of the institutional church as well as those in some of the associations. It was understood that if you bring youth in the structures have to change.

The hope was expressed that many associations would see World Youth Day as a golden opportunity to connect and plug into youth ministry, something that always seems so problematic and difficult to realize. It is also a great chance to involve young couples in the life of the Church, for young people to be at home in a faith community.

Some saw World Youth Day as an excellent source for vocations not just to the priesthood or consecrated life but also as a time to foster good marriages out of which vocations invariably come.

There was also the hope that the generation gap between the young and those who have “been young for a long time” would be bridged; that the faith of the youth would alter the stereotypes of some adults; that there would be a boost for family life. Parents in the group were grateful that World Youth Day was happening.

Another hope was that the image of the Church, which is promoted by the media, as old, sleepy, irrelevant and passé would be turned upside down.

It is a real chance for pastors to be with youth.

A persistent hope was that there be an increase in faith as a result of the witness of so many fulfilled young people.

There was the hope that national youth ministry would develop out of the links made and excitement generated and results achieved by World Youth Day.

3. How will your association get involved in World Youth Day?
Many participants agreed to assist in publicizing World Youth Day more and making its deeper spiritual implications known.

It was suggested that prayer for the success of this event was crucial because first and foremost it is “God’s project”. Offers were made to help financially, to volunteer, and to donate teaching or catechetical skills.

It would be interesting to have a booth on medical ethics.
Activities will be proposed for families.
Sponsor families with youth to go to Toronto; offer to baby-sit children of young couples so that they can go to Toronto.
University Student residences can be used for the pilgrims; students can be hired over the summer to help organize.
School boards can make it easier for students and teachers to attend events.

PANEL II – AFTER WORLD YOUTH DAY – How do young people see themselves in the life of the Church?

Two young people, Ms. Leah Daley and Madame Rosalie Gagné, who have participated in previous World Youth Days, gave presentations on this question. Some of the points made in the presentations and exchange with participants were:

· It is not easy to be young today; there are many obligations and concerns. While the Church and religion seem to be the last thing on the mind of youth, the thirst for spirituality is very strong.

· For some youth, no one spoke to them about God when they were younger, adults did not always indicate that they were important, that they had a place.

· John Paul II told the youth in Rome “Do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium”. Youth want to take up challenges and will be there to the extent that older people give them the space and trust to be there.

· Instead of asking what the Church can bring to young people, we must ask what youth can do for the Church.

· Stop wondering why youth don’t go to mass; Go where the youth are – school plays, discos, parks, coffee houses, concerts – acknowledge and support what they are doing. Challenge the nucleus of a youth group to invite their friends.

· One of the presenters said that she felt that she had been waiting for World Youth Day all her life. She found in Denver what she had been missing in her own parish – a feeling of being at home and being alive where she could express her Catholicism and have room to express
herself. World Youth Day at Denver meant that confirmation was not the end of the line and it was the beginning of a significant journey.

· Young people at World Youth Days are excited about Jesus Christ and willing to shout and scream and pray fervently.

· World Youth Day gives an energy and unity to youth ministry and the desire to bring it home.

· Youth have a lot to offer: imagination, creativity, enthusiasm, energy, sense of adventure, curiosity, questioning, hunger for knowledge, and new ideas. They need space; they need to be invited to dialogue; you need to talk with not to youth.

· Youth also want a lot from adults; formation to be the future Church and your wisdom and gifts to get us there. Let us hope that World Youth Day will get us there; this is the time.

· Young people will come to the Church if we build a strong community and make it clear that we want them to stay.

PANEL III – AFTER WORLD YOUTH DAY – How do you see ministry with young people after World Youth Day? What will have to change?

Two participants with experience in youth ministry, Sr. Francine Guillemette of the World Youth Day Team and Mr. Rick Benson of Catholic Campus Ministry, gave presentations on the above question. Some of the points made in the presentations and subsequent exchange were;

· This is the most critical question because World Youth Day will stimulate the inner and outer energy of youth and we will want to capitalize on that. It should not just be a fantastic event but one that completely immerses the participants in God and transforms them. We should already have the people and resources in place.

· World Youth Day itself is an amazing crash course and trial run of what youth ministry could look like. It is already making us experience Church in a very different way. People are smiling, seeing more options, walking more quickly, and the topic of young people is at every level of the Church.

· World Youth Day is putting into motion resources of society (media, government, corporations) and resources of the Church (human, material and spiritual). This is a vision of comprehensive youth ministry. Adapting the African proverb that it “takes a whole village to raise a child” it takes a whole Church to evangelize youth.

· We cannot do it alone. Campus communities can welcome some but most young people will continue to live in their homes, their parishes and dioceses. Young adults do not all attend post secondary institutions and many institutions do not have a campus ministry presence. Who will
meet the faith needs of young people after World Youth Day? How will the associations welcome them? The networking and bridge building that we are experiencing now must not fade after World Youth Day. We must all continue our networking and collective obligation to teach, pray, support, do justice and follow the Gospel.

· Youth can be missionaries to their peers. They need the tools, programs, and relationship to maintain the dynamism of World Youth Day.

· Existing associations and parishes need to re-evaluate how welcoming they are to young adults. There will be great numbers who will come back to the Church after World Youth Day. How will they be received? Will their leadership be encouraged? Will their enthusiasm be channelled in an encouraging and proactive way? Or will they be given the feeling that this is not how we operate and that they must adapt to the existing structure? Openness to change and an acceptance of joy and vibrancy must be fostered.

· Promote youth as leaders in the Church today, don’t isolate them, invite them to be at the heart of the Church. Don’t think for them but plan, implement and evaluate with them. Replace parallel efforts with long-term vision; instead of responding to crises, be pro-active in the development of youth ministry, empower youth to go and be passionate disciples of Jesus Christ, think with them not for them. Young adults need a non-judgemental environment that will nurture and at times challenge them in their faith development.

· World Youth Day is already changing our perception of youth. We have the public opinion surveys but now we are discovering their energy, their potential, their talents and thirst for God. It is like having God’s take on young people. We are developing a new reflex; instead of waiting for people to come to us we are asking them for their contribution.

· World Youth Day is soliciting collaboration and dialogue and stimulating a common vision among different expressions of Church (schools, movements, parishes, committees, various ministries such as social, liturgical, family, media). How about the “whole village” getting together after World Youth Day? (e.g. campus ministry linking with parishes and movements).

· There could be a new national structure for youth ministry that maintains the dialogue among the wonderful expressions of youth ministry using diverse means and spirituality but sharing the same vision. Let us set fire to our youth ministry by practicing and experiencing a new way to be Church.

· We must spend a significant amount of time on prayer, listening, planning and action at the same time we are planning for World Youth Day. It is in this discernment where we will find God speaking through the young people and letting us know how we are to minister after World Youth Day. The Holy Spirit has provided a unique opportunity to revitalize youth ministry.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS
In small groups, the participants discussed a number of questions relating to the presentations. The following are some of the points raised in the discussions.

1. What struck you most in the presentations by the Panel members?

   · Everyone was impressed by how the panel members spoke from personal experience and out of deep conviction. Many commented on the authenticity and genuineness of their words.

   · Some were struck by the urgent appeal made by the young to the older generation – an appeal to listen more attentively to their aspirations and suggestions and become more creative and more open to doing things differently in the Church. There was a deep desire to see something happen.

   · There was also the strong realization that it was more important to work with young people instead of merely working for them.

   · It is important to know how to welcome different charisms in the Church.

   · The young presenters reinforced for some participants how much young people have to offer, their solidness and their strong faith as well as the importance of openness and dialogue.

2. What do you think are the challenges for youth in the Church?

   · The challenges really belong to the Church; it is a call to be more outward looking and supportive of the gifts of young people, a willingness to let itself be evangelized and transformed by youth.

   · Many participants suggested that the liturgy was one of the biggest stumbling blocks for young people today – “lifeless”, “boring”, “uninteresting”, “irrelevant”.

   · Young people today are often well educated, knowledgeable, and curious about many things. The Church’s official answers to their queries do not satisfy or seem to “cut it” with the young. Young people want to engage in ethical debates where they can develop their minds and be challenged. It is important for older adults to be prepared to listen and recognize that times are changing.

   · The young often hear contradictory messages, not only in the world but also in the church.

   · There does not seem to be an adequate model for integrating the young into parish organizational structures.
The welcome is a big key; the importance of belonging and to know that one is loved and accepted as one is. While it is important to invite youth back to the Church, it is equally important to ask why they left. A better effort should be made to apply inculturation to youth culture.

A big challenge is to know where the youth are and to go there and to form youth who will evangelize youth.

Another challenge for the Church is to truly take youth on board and involve them in a meaningful way. A young participant reminded the group that there is a distinction between age and youthfulness. For example, the Pope is older but he is very youthful. Young people want to be with people of all ages but they want to participate. Age is not important but it is important to be youthful.

3. How can World Youth Day revitalize your association? What will your association do to integrate youth? What impact will that have on parish life?

One suggestion was that older young adults should be encouraged to attend World Youth Day since they will become leaders in the parish sooner.

The Catholic Women’s League would like to provide the space for youth and lay formation. If young people are around, others will want to be with them; it will revitalize the League. We’ll open the doors and let women know that the role of the League has changed. There is a role for small faith sharing communities.

Development and Peace is trying to open the doors to youth and go beyond activities to open up the organization so that youth can bring their culture to ways of thinking and organizing. It will require a lot of letting go on the part of older adults.

The Association of Ministries Programs will be asking the question “what kind of leadership will be needed in a post World Youth Day Church?”.

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT YEAR’S TOPIC

Two suggestions were made by the participants: 1) the collaboration of lay and ordained ministries and 2) the Pope’s letter to close the Jubilee, Novo Millennio Ineunte. The Commission will make a decision at the annual CCCB Plenary Meeting in the middle of September 2001.

CONCLUSION

This was a very dynamic Forum thanks to the enthusiasm of the presenters and the active involvement of the participants. The Forum gave the representatives of the associations a
valuable opportunity to become aware of the scope of World Youth Day and to appreciate the enormous amount of work that has already been accomplished. They will share the information and spirit of this gathering with their members thereby creating a spirit of communion around World Youth Day as well as a network of people from across the country committed to making it a joyful and meaningful experience for the whole Church. It is hoped that the many ideas generated in the discussions at the Forum will be useful for those planning the diocesan days or the national events. In the months leading up to World Youth Day let us try to be salt of the earth and light of the world.