

## **World Youth Day Madrid 2011**

**By John**

I am from a small, inland country parish from the Great Southern deanery of the Bunbury diocese. I was very fortunate and blessed to be able to take annual leave from work and attend WYD in Madrid, which allowed me to deepen and energize my faith and meet lots of other young Catholics from around the world. Prior to leaving for Madrid, I prepared myself for the long queues, less than comfortable sleeping arrangements, long waits and hot weather! Our group was unique in that we had pilgrims from our own Bunbury diocese, as well as pilgrims from Geraldton diocese, Perth archdiocese and Trinity College in Perth. We enjoyed making friendships with the youth from outside our diocese and sharing stories with them about our own parishes and youth ministry.

Our experience began with the 'Days in the Diocese'. We flew into Madrid and travelled by bus to Salamanca, our host diocese which was 3 hours from Madrid. We slept on the floor in a convent school gymnasium, which we shared with a fun-loving group of German pilgrims. For 5 days we explored Salamanca which was a university city so had a high population of youth during the university semester. One of the most prominent things which struck us was the long history of the city over thousands of years and the large number of beautiful churches. We also were able to attend praise and worship sessions, daily mass and visit the Plaza Mayor in the evening – the large city square which was the central gathering place for the city. We travelled from Salamanca to Madrid on the feast of the Assumption (15<sup>th</sup> August) and stopped at Avila. It was a special experience to visit the birthplace and final resting place of Saint Theresa of Avila. On the bus to Madrid we prayed the Rosary together as a group using the PA system, and our bishop gave an explanation of each mystery.

Upon our arrival in Madrid, we travelled to the Getafe parish which were hosting us. After participating in mass for the Feast of the Assumption, we collected our WYD backpacks and were picked up by our host families who were billeting us out. Myself and another young guy were hosted by a lovely elderly couple who welcomed us with open arms but spoke no English. It was a fun but challenging experience to communicate with them during the week using only a Spanish phrase book.

One of the highlights was attending daily Catechesis. This would consist of singing, a question and answer session, testimonials, prayer, a talk from a bishop and mass. In the Getafe cathedral we were fortunate to hear an address from Archbishop Phillip Wilson from Adelaide and Cardinal George Pell from Sydney. A major challenge was trying to stay in a group and get a good spot at the major gatherings including the opening mass, papal arrival and stations of the cross. Due to the large number of people we were well back from the altar but managed to get glimpses of the ceremony on the large screens. As we moved around we were accompanied by Jose and Patricia, parishioners from the Getafe parish who spoke good English and made sure we didn't get lost!

The final highlight of WYD week was the evening vigil and mass with Pope Benedict at Cuatro Vientos airfield in Madrid. When we arrived we were disappointed that we were unable to access the main arena, which had been closed off as it was full and we instead occupied a position well back from the main altar. We endured a brief storm during the vigil but stayed on through the night and enjoyed the experience of sleeping under the stars. Celebrating mass with Pope Benedict and 2 million other

young catholics was a special moment on the final day of the WYD week. It was announced that Rio De Janeiro was to be the next venue for WYD in 2013.

After WYD I used the opportunity whilst in Europe to travel on to Barcelona within Spain, then throughout Germany and Italy. Special highlights during my post-WYD travel included visiting the La Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona (one of Antonio Gaudi's famous works), visiting the relics of Saint Catherine of Siena in the city of Siena in the Tuscany region of Italy, visiting the tomb of Pope John Paul 2<sup>nd</sup> in St Peters Basilica in the Vatican and participating in a papal audience with Pope Benedict 16<sup>th</sup> in St Peters Square.

I would like to thank KSC for their generous assistance provided to me to enable me to attend WYD in Madrid. I am very grateful for this financial assistance and will strive to become more involved in the liturgy and activities of my parish and diocese. It has been a faith-enriching experience for me and has given me renewed enthusiasm in participating in the life of my local parish and building the youth ministry within my diocese.