

WORLD YOUTH DAY

A 'manifesto' at World Youth Day calls attention to environment

BY CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

PANAMA CITY (CNS) - Young people attending World Youth Day called attention to the world's environmental problems, issuing what they called a "manifesto" for the "care of the common home."

"We, young Catholics from World Youth Day in Panama, would like to raise our hearts and minds in praise, joy and gratitude for the beautiful gift of our beloved 'sister, Mother Earth,' in the beautiful words of St. Francis," they said in the Jan. 21 statement. "At the same time, we are painfully aware, as Pope Francis reminded us, that 'our common home is falling into serious disrepair.'"

They called Church officials and other young Catholics to repentance and conversion before environmental conditions - including the increasing of the planet's temperature, lack of biodiversity and loss of ancestral lands for indigenous people - put the poor, youth and future generations in "grave danger."

"For a long time, humanity has embarked on an irresponsible path of environmental destruction that



Tourists walk along a trail in 2018 at El Parque Natural Metropolitano outside Panama City. World Youth Day 2019 was celebrated Jan. 22-27 in Panama City. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

still makes our present precarious and affects the future," the statement said.

While some may see some of the urgent calls

as Doomsday predictions, they should not be met with irony or disdain, they said. Bishops from around the world have admitted

that present generations have left the planet in less-than-healthy conditions, and some of those have resulted in conditions that

have forced populations, particularly the poor, to migrate from their homes.

To seek reversal or to find solutions, "indigenous

peoples have a critical role to play in protecting their ancestral homelands from indiscriminate exploitation activities," the statement said.

"Time is running out and leaders from all sectors are showing very low ambition to embark on the rapid transformation that is needed to protect our precious common home and all its inhabitants," the statement said, adding that they will pray so that the pilgrimage to Panama for young Catholics will prove an important milestone as Christians in a commitment to integrate "the role of creation care in our faith."

"We are mindful that we, young Catholics, are not doing enough. Despite commitments assumed in earlier 'Laudato Si' conferences on the safeguard of Creation at World Youth Day 2013 and 2016, we still are not mobilizing enough for our common home," they said. "We will study and better understand the ecological issue, in the quest to better prepare ourselves to advance the transformation that is needed at all levels: in our families, schools, universities, work environments, sport circles, through media and culture."

ENGAGING THE SPIRIT

St. Patrick parish turning to small groups to better serve youth

BY VANESSA NEGRETE
Northwest Indiana Catholic



They started large, now they're going small.

As part of a synod focus on young Catholics at their parish, St. Patrick in Chesterton has started forming small groups for youth as a way to connect on a deeper level, rather than relying solely on large, fun activities.

Father Nate Edquist, associate pastor, said he has seen that youth group events can be fun, but they don't always lead to young people staying involved in their faith when they head off to college.

The parish turned to small group formation.

"What we wanted to do was focus a little bit more on how to promote the youth, but not using the same methods we've used for ages," Father Edquist said.

This is a different world. Methods to serve youth may have worked well in the past, but they need to be updated. The model of hosting large youth groups does not meet people on a one-on-one level, and youth can fall through the

cracks, he said.

"It's fun, but where does it lead them?" Father Edquist said. "We wanted something more ongoing. What are their needs? First and foremost, there's a need for guidance, there's a need for authenticity, there's a need for critical thinking."

The new approach embraces youth meeting in small groups, divided by age and gender. Six or seven of the groups have been formed and are meeting regularly with two adult mentors per group, and more groups are being established, he said.

The small groups will serve as a foundation for the youth ministry. Larger, fun group activities will

continue at the parish as the icing on the cake, Father Edquist said.

"We're not doing away with large-group youth ministry," he explained. "We're helping put a better base in place. I really want to build youth ministry around small groups."

Eventually, Father Edquist wants to bring the small group concept to the larger parish, likely in the form of Alpha, a global program that pairs food and faith in a small group setting.

The parish will host weekly FORMED nights in addition to the small group meetings, alternating between middle school material and high school material available through

FORMED. FORMED is an online multimedia resource often referred to as "Catholic Netflix."

Evangelization and young Catholics are two areas of focus in the parish synod plan. Programs supporting those efforts can utilize the newly opened Heeg Center, a two-story home that is being used for parish meetings, spiritual study and more.

The open house for the Heeg Center was in November, and groups have been slowly starting to meet there. Furniture and furnishings are still being added to the building. Ideally, it will serve as a place for middle school and high school kids to go after school and

hang out or do homework under adult supervision, Father Edquist said.

The center, about a quarter of a mile away from the church and school campus, offers a homey atmosphere in a little more neutral setting, he said.

"You always have to have a forward-looking vision—what more can we do with this place?" he said. "You keep looking forward and seeing how to best utilize your resources."

To tell us how your parish is following the Holy Spirit's lead in this synod process, contact Vanessa Negrete at vnegrete@dcdgary.org or 769-9292, ext. 246.

Northwest INDIANA CATHOLIC

nwicatholic.com

Official newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Gary, Indiana (USPS 403-670).
Published weekly, 43 times a year at 9292 Broadway, Merrillville, IN 46410-7088.
Telephone: (219) 769-9292. Fax: (219) 736-6577. E-mail: nwic@dcdgary.org

Subscription: \$26. Periodical postage paid at Gary, IN.
POSTMASTER: Send change of address to: Northwest Indiana Catholic
9292 Broadway, Merrillville, IN 46410-7088

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