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## London, 8,000 young people at Wembley Arena: rappers, prayers and vocation

On Saturday March 4, the heart of the Catholic Church in England was beating loudly in Wembley Arena, a few steps away from the world-famous stadium where, back in 1982, John Paul II brought together eighty thousand believers. The event was marked by Eucharistic adoration and rap music, prayer and theatrical performances, and the testimonies of acts of charity and courage.

**Pope Francis' words.** Eight thousand young people, with an average age of fifteen, travelled from across England, Scotland and Wales to attend "Flame", the UK's Largest Catholic Youth Conference. The previous gathering was held in 2019, before the pandemic. "Have the courage to be different, the courage of sharing dreams that this world is not offering you, the courage to show generosity, service, purity, fortitude, forgiveness, fidelity to one's vocation, prayer, the fight for justice and the common good, love for the poor, and social friendship." The day kicked off with the reading of Pope Francis' message and a procession that brought the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, England's most important Marian shrine, a symbol of faith that survived centuries of persecution, to the same stage where rapper Guvna B and singer-songwriter Adenike performed, amidst vigorous music and captivating dances, rhythmically accompanied by the flashes of thousands of cell phones.

In preparation for the WYD. "It's not the kind of music I'm particularly drawn to, but it doesn't matter," Cardinal **Vincent Nichols**, the Catholic Primate of England and Wales, told SIR. "What matters is that these young people are prepared to listen to the message of this day that draws inspiration from the WYD in Lisbon and the figure of Mary - 'Mary arose and went with haste' - and their hearts are open to listening to the message of the Gospel." Several speakers - Australian Archbishop Timothy Costelloe and American lawyer Robert Bilott, renowned for challenging the multinational corporation "DuPont" that was polluting the town of Parkersburg, West Virginia, where he lived - devoted their reflections to the theme of vocation and calling, searching and self-esteem, starting with the figure of Our Lady, and the doubts she may have had.

**Christian vocation.** Reon Barrie, 24, is completing his Master's degree in Food Sciences at the University of Greenwich; Karron Pinto, 18, attends St. Mark's Catholic High School in Hounslow; while Zaylin Mascarenhas, 23, is a law student at St. Mary's Catholic University in London. They are in charge of the "National Office for Vocation" booth at the 'Flame' Conference, promoted by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. "We offer young people the opportunity to explore their Christian vocation, which can be lived out in so many different ways, not only by making the choice to be priests or nuns, through prayer meetings and even retreats," they explain. "I think it's very important that young Catholics come together, because our faith is a minority group in the UK and there is a risk of isolation, which would undermine our identity."

**Not feeling lonely.** This view is shared by Carmelite friar Matthew Janvier, accompanying Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, member of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelization, while ensuring that he will have the opportunity to meet many young people before taking the stage. "Catholicism is a minority belief in Britain, comprising only 8 percent of the overall population. Moreover, against the backdrop of growing secularization, these young people are often the only practicing Christians present in their school, their parish, or their group of friends. It is therefore very important for their religious identity that they meet with like-minded peers. It gives them a sense of belonging. And they stop feeling lonely."

A good-humoured bishop. Speaking with SIR, also attending the 'Flame' Conference, Cardinal Luis

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Antonio Tagle remarked: "Today's young people are drawn to the Christian message, which speaks to them of God's love. But the challenge is the way in which we communicate it. One day a young man asked me if I was really a bishop because he found it strange that I was being funny and that I was laughing. This story made me think about conveying the Gospel in a way that attracts and interests young people."

Silvia Guzzetti from London