

Pope's Visit to Portugal on August 2nd: Fr. Chagas of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, Life highlights “the remarkable opportunity for young people to reconnect”

Pope Francis will travel to Lisbon Aug. 2-6 this year for the upcoming World Youth Day and will visit the Shrine of Fatima on August 5, the director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, announced yesterday. This is Pope Francis' second trip to Portugal, having presided over the Centenary of Apparitions ceremonies at the Fatima Shrine in 2017. That visit was marked by the canonization of the two little shepherds Jacinta and Francisco Marto. For **Manuel (José Macário do Nascimento) Clemente**, cardinal-patriarch of Lisbon, the formalization of these dates is the "confirmation of the expressed desire that the successor of Peter wants to meet, once again, young people from all over the world. That he wants to listen to them, see them and pray with them. With everyone." The **Portuguese Bishops' Conference** (CEP) also welcomed the announcement with delight and expressed the hope that "the presence of Pope Francis among us, including a significant pilgrimage to the Shrine of Fatima, will be a powerful moment of renewal and grace for the Church in Portugal, especially for young people, who are called by the living Christ to be true evangelizers in a synodal Church and always on mission." The president of the Republic, **Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa**, spoke of a "unique and unforgettable moment in our collective life" instead. Ahead of this event, SIR interviewed Father **João Chagas**, coordinator of the youth office of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life and charged with coordinating the Holy See's preparations for World Youth Day.



Each WYD is, first and foremost, a wonderful opportunity for an encounter with God, with young people from all over the world and with the host country. It is an invitation from the Holy Father to each young person to encounter Jesus Christ in a highly personal way. To facilitate this encounter, several venues are provided during the WYD: for major events such as the Stations of the Cross, the Vigil and the concluding Mass with Pope Francis, but also during morning catechesis, in the celebration of Mass, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation or in the events of the Youth Festival. The center of every WYD is the encounter with Christ. For this reason, young people, after having been more isolated and "stationary" due to the pandemic period, will have a wonderful opportunity to meet again. Pope Francis emphasized these two dimensions in his message for this year's WYD. Mary, who met Christ and said "yes" to him immediately, sets out to meet Elizabeth. Meeting Christ creates a meeting with others. All the young people who will go to Lisbon, from different backgrounds and cultures, will experience this profound moment of friendship. On July 23, one week after WYD in Lisbon, the Church will celebrate the 3rd World Day for Grandparents and Elderly with the theme "His mercy is from age to age". Is there a connection between the two Days? Pope Francis linked the two Days by choosing as the theme of the 3rd World Day of Grandparents and Elderly a verse from the same Gospel passage that recounts Mary's meeting with Elizabeth. The Pontiff has, in addition, invited young people to visit an elderly person before leaving for WYD. Encounter is the common thread of every WYD but, as the example of Mary and Elizabeth shows us, a bridge between generations is one of the most important encounters to experience in living our faith. Right before the WYD, on July 23, we could celebrate the World Day of Grandparents and Elderly in our churches. This may be a good opportunity to ask the elders of the parish, diocese, movement or association to which the young people belong for their blessing for the upcoming trip and then tell them about their experience.



A "digital

accompaniment" has been imperative for some time now. The WYD will be assisted by a smartphone app; in addition, young people will be able to listen to the Pope's speeches in their own language through the service offered by the Vatican News channel. At the same time, young people are also invited to disconnect from technology and activate "airplane mode," to experience moments of silence that facilitate listening to the voice of God. The pilgrimage to WYD is an outer journey, but it is above all an inner journey. Silence can be very helpful in being able to listen to what God puts in our hearts. **What is your Dicastery's contribution to the local organizing committee of the Portuguese WYD?** From the very beginning, in 1984, the then Pontifical Council for the Laity was charged by Pope John Paul II to accompany the preparation of WYDs in individual countries. Today, as the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, we continue to help each organizing committee, and specifically the organizers in Lisbon, with our experience, while making sure that we always remain faithful to the spirit of the WYDs. **In terms of organization, how are the preparations going?** There are different levels of organization. First, there is the great event in Lisbon, which is remarkably well prepared and is now in its final stages. Then, there are the countless pilgrimages and preparatory meetings of the Bishops' Conferences, Movements and Associations. The reports coming to us from various parts of the world are very positive. We can experience a young generation that - like Mary - is truly on the move. For example, there are more than 2,000 young Australians who have decided to make the long journey to Portugal which includes about 3 weeks during which they will visit other important pilgrimage sites in Europe such as Rome, for example. This shows how young people invest time and resources to grow in following Christ and community with other young people.



Enrollment numbers are at the same level as the most recent World Youth Day that took place in Europe, Krakow 2016, and we are very pleased with that. Of course, we are thinking about how to facilitate the participation of young people from more distressed or war-affected countries. For this purpose, the Dicastery has a solidarity fund into which young people, when they register for WYD, can contribute a small voluntary amount. It is heartwarming to see how young people are driven by the urge to help their peers in their desire to be able to meet them later at the WYD. This shows the treasure we have as a Church that is a place of friendship, sharing and coming together. **Do you also anticipate the presence of young people from other Christian denominations and faiths?** Every WYD is open to all young people. Everyone is welcome! Naturally, the Day is an event in which young Catholics are invited by their Pope, but all are welcome. As in the past, friends from other Christian denominations will also be present.

The ecumenical dimension is of importance in delivering concrete examples of dialogue among Christians to the younger generations.

The interreligious one and with those who do not believe offers a chance to experience the social friendship that Pope Francis invites us to embrace.



First of all, I would like to invite all young people who have not yet decided to make the pilgrimage to WYD to make this trip, because it is worth it! Come celebrate your faith together with hundreds of thousands of young people and experience the culture of encounter after the pandemic and despite the difficulties of the moment! Of course, the WYD can also be followed on live TV, radio and social media. Pope Francis' messages are not only for the youth gathered in Lisbon, but for everyone. Therefore, if for one reason or another you are unable to attend, we invite young people to join us, perhaps by holding "listening groups" with their friends! **Portugal faces the African Continent where there are Portuguese-speaking countries. Is this a prelude to a possible WYD in Africa?** Everyone would be delighted if one day a WYD were to take place on the African continent. For that to happen, an official and specific request from a diocese or bishops' conference is needed. But as is customary for WYDs, Pope Francis will solemnly announce, at the end of the closing Mass, the place where the WYD will be held internationally. So it is worth tuning in and looking forward to the announcement! **Meanwhile, the Jubilee will be celebrated in 2025: from Lisbon to Tor Vergata, a possible return?** The Dicastery for Evangelization, which is organizing the 2025 Jubilee, announced in a press conference that there will be a Youth Jubilee in its program, but it is too early to define how it will take place. However, there is never a "dead time" between one international WYD and another: every year on the Solemnity of Christ the King, WYDs are celebrated in the particular Churches. For each one there is a message from Pope Francis. In addition, our Dicastery published the booklet "Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of the WYD in the Particular Churches," which contains suggestions on how to celebrate the Day in the Particular Churches. The document can be downloaded for free from our website www.laityfamilylife.va. So one will not have to wait long to celebrate the next WYD. After Lisbon, the next one will take place as early as November 26, 2023 in one's own particular Church.

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