
WYD 2023. Msgr. Aguiar: “A cry of hope from young people. Their strength and courage outweigh their difficulties”

“Hope, a very strong source of hope, hope for the future.” Contacted by telephone by SIR, Monsignor **Américo Manuel Alves Aguiar**, Auxiliary Bishop of Lisbon and President of the Lisbon 2023 WYD Foundation, describes what he found in Ukraine and the most striking aspect of the war-torn population that he will inevitably “take home”. “Their faith,” he immediately added. “It’s faith that has allowed this David to continue to defeat the various Goliaths; it’s faith that gives them strength; it’s faith that nourishes the hope in their hearts, and hope, for them and for us, is the living Christ. This is the lesson, the greatest lesson, that I have learned from the beloved people of Ukraine and the young people of Ukraine and that I will take home with me: their faith, their hope and the strength of the living Christ in their hearts. Monsignor Alves Aguiar, in charge of the organising committee for WYD in Lisbon recently travelled to Ukraine to convey the closeness of the Pope and of the whole Church to the young people of Ukraine who will not be able to attend WYD because of the ongoing conflict, to those who are preparing to go (about 500), and to those who will never be able to go to WYD because they have been killed in the conflict. The Portuguese Bishop - who will be made a Cardinal in the next Consistory, which will take place on September 30 2023 - held two meetings with these young people: on Saturday July 15th, in the Marian Shrine of Zarvanytsia, with the young members of the Greek Catholic Church, and on Sunday July 16th, in the Ukrainian Shrine of the Mother of God in Berdychev, with the young people of the Latin Catholic Church. During the visit, he also had the opportunity to visit the cemetery in Lviv where many Ukrainian soldiers are buried, to meet with the families of the victims, and to visit Bucha, a small town a few kilometres from Kyiv, the site of one of the largest mass graves, a testimony to a bloodbath that sadly claimed many lives, including civilians. SIR interviewed Bishop Alves Aguiar.



[These young people have experienced things that they should never have had to experience. Mankind, society in general, should have tried everything to prevent war in this or any country in the world. Unfortunately, when we exclude God from our hearts, cruelty, evil and war creep in. These young people are sending out a cry of hope, a cry for peace - that this may never happen again. It is also a cry of hope that revenge may not take root in their hearts, that the future may not be one of permanent revenge, permanent hatred, permanent destruction of those who were the cause of their suffering. We want to build a future with these young people, a new future, a future in which they will be able to overcome their difficulties and their problems together, because their suffering, their wounds will be with them for the rest of their lives.](#)

[We must prevent the younger generations from reliving this violence, this war.](#)



Our beloved Pope Francis keeps repeating two things: the first is that the call to participate in World Youth Day must reach young people all over the world. It is a missionary dream to reach everyone, and when we say everyone, we mean all the brothers and sisters, all the sons and daughters of God. Our wish is that everyone in their own country, in the places where they live, will respond to this call to participate in World Youth Day. The Pope also says that we must reach out to those who cannot take part for economic reasons, for social reasons, because of war and many other circumstances: do not forget those who cannot go to Lisbon. Two weeks ago, when Father Valdemar and Father Roman sent out this invitation, this challenge, the Holy Spirit "made a click" in my heart. I remembered the face of the Pope and his love for the young people who will not be able to attend the Day. Young people from Ukraine occupy a special place among those who will not be able to participate in the World Youth Day. Because of the war, they cannot leave their country, some of them have been killed, and for this last and fundamental reason they will not participate in the WYD. That is why, guided by the Holy Spirit, I immediately decided: "tac-tac" and here I am, different, with a renewed heart, full of strength, full of hope, full of faith, inspired by these young people for a different future.



[Christ will win, the Risen Christ will win!](#)

[These young people long to be seeds of peace, seeds for the future. Even though their hearts are bleeding, even though their wounds are still open, they have a strength and a courage that is greater than their suffering, greater than the memory of the tragic, brutal violence that we have seen in Bucha and in so many other places. They want us to know that Christ is winning, in the hearts of these young Ukrainians Christ will build a new Ukraine, he will build a new humanity. Christ wins! **Are you planning to make a gesture of reconciliation during the World Youth Day, a gesture of peace?** We have been working on this for a long time. We have listened to the hearts of Father Valdemar and Father Roman and many other young people, and we know that it takes time. Time will allow wounded hearts and open wounds to take their course. It may seem easy, in terms of media attention, to bring everyone together in a celebration of forgiveness and mercy. But it takes time. And we need to ask the Holy Spirit of God what it will look like, where it will take place, and when it will be the right time and the right circumstances for it to happen. We are working on it, extraordinary gestures with our brothers in Ukraine and with the young people of so many other countries who are unfortunately also victims of war.](#)

[M. Chiara Biagioni](#)