Presentation of Twenty-Sixth WORLD YOUTH DAY

VATICAN CITY, 28 JUN 2011 (VIS) - A press conference was held this morning in the Holy See Press Office to present the twenty-sixth World Youth Day (WYD), which will be held in the Spanish capital city of Madrid from 16 to 21 August. The conference was presented by Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko, president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity; Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, archbishop of Madrid; Yago de la Cierva, executive director of WYD 2011; Elsa Vazquez Maggio, an international volunteer, and Jose Antonio Martinez Fuentes, secretary general of WYD 2011.

"Each World Youth Day is an extraordinary experience for a Church which is friend to young people, which shares their problems", said Cardinal Rylko. "A Church which places herself at the service of the new generations. It is an experience of Universal Church - unique of its kind - which embraces the entire planet, of a young Church full of enthusiasm and missionary vigour. It is an epiphany of the Christian faith which has truly planetary dimensions. And young people, especially in the old and profoundly secularised continent of Europe, have particular need of all this".

The cardinal recalled how this is the second occasion that Spain has "generously welcomed" WYD, and he spoke of the last time the event was held in that country, at Santiago de Compostela in 1989. It was there, he said, "that World Youth Day came to be structured as we know it today: three days of catechesis, a prayer vigil on the Saturday night, then the closing Eucharistic celebration and the dispatch of young people as missionaries. Also at Santiago de Compostela, pilgrimage came to be an essential factor of young people's journey in the footsteps of Peter's Successor.

"Over succeeding years", he added, "each WYD has brought something new to the programme: the Way of the Cross at Denver, U.S.A., in 1993; preparatory days spent in dioceses prior to the main event and the 'Festival of Youth' (a kind of cultural programme) at Paris, France, in 1997; the 'Feast of Forgiveness' (300 confessionals crowded with young people in the Circus Maximus) at Rome in 2000; the 'Vocations Fair' at Toronto, Canada, in 2002, and the adoration of the Eucharist at Cologne, Germany, in 2005. Thus the proposal made to young people on each occasion is in continual evolution, seeking to respond to the true spiritual needs of today's youth".

The cardinal also provided some statistics, noting that "WYD in Madrid is going to be a very significant event". Four hundred thousand young people have already signed up; they will be accompanied by14,000 priests and by 744 bishops, of whom 263 will be responsible for catechesis.

Two hundred and fifty sites have been assigned for catechesis, which will be delivered in thirty languages, and 700,000 copies of "YOUCAT" will be distributed in six languages. Twenty-four thousand volunteers from different countries will be involved in various services. Finally, before reaching Madrid, the young people will be welcomed in sixty-eight Spanish dioceses, "in confirmation of the fact that the entire Church in Spain is directly involved in the WYD experience", said the cardinal. For those unable to reach Madrid, "simultaneous gatherings of young people have been organised in countries such as Ukraine, Burundi and Madagascar. They will be linked to the main event in Madrid by television and internet.

"The Pope's presence is the culminating moment of any WYD", said the president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, noting that the forthcoming event in Madrid "will take place in the light of the recent beatification of John Paul II, founder of World Youth Days. Thus John Paul II will return among the young people he loved so much, and who loved him. He returns as blessed, patron and protector. Indeed, the Eucharistic celebration welcoming the youth to Madrid, presided by Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, archbishop of the city, on 16 August, will be dedicated to the new blessed". OP/VIS 20110628 (670)

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