

By Tanya Connor

“All of it was just one of the most memorable, powerful experiences of my life.”

Lauren Murphy, an Assumption College senior, was describing the college’s pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Spain and Lourdes in France.

“It’s not just our Chapel of the Holy Spirit at Assumption,” she said. “It’s this whole community of faith – the universal Church. Being with Pope Benedict – that was very special. He did drive right by us. … When he spoke … we were all listening. Everyone was chanting for him.”

It wasn’t just the pope she appreciated being with.

“We had such a great group of people,” she said of those on Assumption’s pilgrimage, where students, alumni and the college president became family. “How may presidents of schools travel with students?” President Francesco Cesareo, his wife and their three children, were great witnesses – holiness emanated from them, she said.

President Cesareo said those on the trip are all connected with the college and its founders, the Augustinians of the Assumption, in different ways, and can therefore share the pilgrimage’s messages in different ways.

They left Aug. 9 and returned Aug. 22, stopping first in Lourdes for the national pilgrimage the Assumptionists have coordinated for years, said Assumptionist Father Dinh Vo Tran, a campus minister at the college.

Assumptionists from different countries helped at Lourdes, so the Worcester pilgrims saw that the Assumption family has many faces, but a common mission to serve people and bring them the kingdom, Father Vo Tran said.

The Aug. 11-15 celebration included Mass for the sick, Mass for reconciliation, a rosary procession, Mass on the Feast of the Assumption and a eucharistic procession. This was the first time he was there as a priest, and hearing about 150 confessions affected him, Father Vo Tran said.

Ms. Murphy said that at Lourdes she focused on being drawn to Jesus through Mary.

Afton Caterina, of Belding, Mich., said entering the pools at Lourdes was a highlight for her and others; it was peaceful and a time to pray for various intentions. Ms. Caterina and another pilgrim, Elizabeth Yancey, of Baltimore, Md., served with the Religious of the Assumption as Associate Missionaries of the Assumption (AMAs) in Worcester over the past year.

After experiencing the diversity of the Assumption family at Lourdes, the group went on to World Youth Day to experience the universality of the whole Church.

Father Vo Tran has attended World Youth Days in Canada, Germany and the Philippines. Each had its own characteristics, he said, but the main message was unity around Christ as the foundation of the Church.

“I think that for the group (World Youth Day) was a very powerful experience of the vibrancy of the faith among the young people across the world,” President Cesareo said. “It confirmed for them their own commitment to the faith.”

His son Gianfranco, 14, echoed that.

“I thought it was really inspiring to see all the young people” from around the world carrying flags, he said. “They were just really excited about their faith, that you don’t see here. It inspired me to show my faith more and that there is hope for the Church, because a lot of times today it doesn’t seem like there’s too many Catholic people.”

President Cesareo’s wife, Filomena, cried as she marveled at youth singing religious songs on the buses and in the streets.

“It strengthened our faith life as a family,” President Cesareo said. “It brought us together in prayer on a deeper level and I think it helped us to see how we as a family can witness to the faith.”

“The Cesareo family was a very good witness to us about the small church which is the family,” said Christopher Kelley of Worcester, an Assumption alumnus, who coordinated the college’s pilgrimage.

World Youth Day “really gave people a sense of the concrete reality of the universal Church, which is alive and well,” he said. “It was a real sign of hope.

“We got about 15 feet away from the Holy Father. … He looked right at our group and waved at us,” he said.

During adoration with the pope there was “a moment of … shared silence,” when 2 million youth focused on Christ and made no sound, Mr. Kelley said.

The whole experience … “points to an encounter with Christ,” President Cesareo said. “There

are 2 million individual encounters taking place."

"Out of our relationship with Christ we grow in relationship with one another and the Church," Mr. Kelley said.

"Loyalty to the Church is a critical expression of our life as Catholics," President Cesareo said. People speak of being "spiritual" but not grounded in a tradition, but "you cannot have the Church without Christ and you cannot be a believer in Christ without the community which is the Church."

He said the American bishops' catechesis at World Youth Day highlighted the importance of witnessing to one's Catholic faith despite the difficulties. Being part of a 2,000-year-old tradition "compels us to be evangelizers," he said. "From this experience they're now called to … spread this message – Christ as the center of their lives."

He said he thinks it is too early to tell how the pilgrims will spread the message locally; they need to reflect on it individually, then discuss it as a group.

Ms. Murphy said she wants to keep the joy she experienced and continue working on her relationship with the Blessed Mother. She said she doesn't yet know how she will share the experience.

"I think … they realized the new evangelization happens" wherever they are, Mr. Kelley said. He told the group that the pilgrimage continues.

President Cesareo also looked ahead to the next World Youth Day in Brazil in 2013.

"I would encourage parishes to begin to plan for the next one, that we have a presence as a diocese," he said.

St. Peter inspires marriage proposal at WYD

By Tanya Connor

A statue of St. Peter inspired a local Catholic to propose to his girlfriend at World Youth Day in Spain.

“He said when he saw that statue, he knew he had to propose before we left Madrid,” Mary Ann Thuruthiyil, 24, said of her now-fiancé, Nicholas Everett, 23. “Our main focus, as should be with every Catholic couple, is to get each other to heaven.” And St. Peter was holding the keys of the kingdom.

The week was kind of building up to the proposal, as they attended Theology of the Body talks and other catechesis and saw Pope Benedict XVI, said Mr. Everett, general manager of 1230 AM Emmanuel Radio in Worcester, who attends Mass at St. Paul Cathedral.

It wasn’t that they planned it that way. Yes, he planned to propose at World Youth Day, but not when or where he did. And she expected it, but not then or there.

He’d planned to propose Aug. 17, the day after they arrived, outside the cathedral in Toledo overlooking, what he called, a beautiful, quaint town.

But, they were bumped from their flight. They didn’t arrive in Madrid, where World Youth Day events were being held, until late on Aug. 16. The next day they found registration material was depleted and had to go to different places and stand in long lines before they finished registering. They had trouble finding the convent where they were staying. He lost his camera. And the archbishop they were to record for a Catholic radio station in Pennsylvania cancelled his session.

After the delays, they found that the train to Toledo was full and they never got there, Ms. Thuruthiyil, of Scarsdale, N.Y., said.

These things left them stressed, Mr. Everett said, and “you obviously want to propose” when calm.

Ms. Thuruthiyil said she expected he would propose on the trip; he always told her he’d propose in another country. But with all the stresses, he was talking about waiting until they returned home.

Mr. Everett said they offered up things not going as planned. And they enjoyed the trip.

“It was a great experience overall, because it was my first Youth Day,” Ms. Thuruthiyil said. “Just to see all the different countries and all the Catholics around the world coming together, having the opportunity to see the pope, having him do Mass.” She said her boyfriend put her on his shoulders above the crowd so she could see Pope Benedict XVI as he passed by in the popemobile no more than 20 feet away. Mr. Everett, however, couldn’t see the pope; “he was very selfless,” she said.

Mr. Everett said they didn’t meet the group from Assumption College there, but he was in contact by telephone and email with Christopher Kelley, Emmanuel Radio production administrator, who coordinated that trip.

By Aug. 20, their last evening, they were very relaxed, enjoying each other’s company, Ms. Thuruthiyil said. He started patting his pockets, saying he’d lost his metro card, but knew where it was. They walked up a hill to find it and she began to think “a little fishy.” But, she said, “I just followed him blindly.”

Mr. Everett said they were between the cathedral – Santa María la Real de la Almudena – and a palace – Palacio Real de Madrid – near a statue of St. Peter holding the keys. He had made the decision to propose earlier that day as they walked by the statue, he said.

She said he pulled the ring from his backpack and told her how the statue reminded him of the foundation of their relationship – bringing each other to heaven. After he gave her the ring they went to the statue and placed their hands on it.

“We prayed for the intention of our engagement and future life together,” she said.

“It’s so memorable – the whole trip,” she said. Going to World Youth Day. Going through the stress together “just reaffirmed that we a have a strong relationship,” she said.

And their plans for the future?

The bride-to-be said they will probably set a date this weekend for a wedding in Indiana, where they’re both from.