

Millions gather in Rio de Janeiro for World Youth Day

Written by Becca Brandt

Prior to World Youth Day July 23-28, Pope Francis urged, “Prepare well—prepare spiritually above all—in your communities, so that our gathering in Rio may be a sign of faith for the whole world.”

On Sunday, July 28, an estimated 3 million people answered the Holy Father’s request as they attended Mass on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Among those who attended World Youth Day were Briar Bergner, Diana and Daniela Baeza and Paul, Laura, Diana and Teresa Krogmeier.



A group from Holyoke prepares to see Iguazu Falls as they travel around Brazil as a part of their World Youth Day trip. Pictured from left are Laura Krogmeier, Teresa Krogmeier, Daniela Baeza, Diana Baeza and Diana Krogmeier. Not pictured are Briar Bergner and Paul Krogmeier.

As they approached the beach for an evening prayer vigil with the pope on Saturday, July 27, the group was stopped. The number of people in attendance was too great to be contained on the beach and pilgrims were overflowing onto the nearby streets.

The group joined the masses on the streets for the prayer vigil, and like hundreds of thousands of others, they camped in the same location in anticipation of Mass the following morning.

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The trip began several days earlier for the Holyokites on Thursday, July 18 in Denver where they met up with 117 other members of the Neocatchumenal Way to travel to Paraguay.

Their time in Paraguay was devoted to popular missions where the group joined with the youth in Paraguay as they took to the streets, singing and dancing and sharing stories about God's impact on their lives.

The impoverished people in Paraguay were incredibly generous and welcoming to all the visitors. They were very humble, noted Diana and Daniela Baeza.

The group was pleasantly surprised with many potluck meals throughout the trip. On multiple occasions, they were invited to join the church members for a potluck after celebrating Holy Eucharist.

A stop at the Chapel of the Martyrs in Asunción, Paraguay was a highlight for Laura. This is where the group learned the story of Saint Roque.

Saint Roque was murdered by natives in the 1600s while he was doing mission work, and his heart was thrown into a fire. His heart was burned by the flames but not destroyed. The heart of Saint Roque along with the weapon used to kill him is now on display in the chapel.

The travelers then ventured on to Brazil. One highlight for all of the members was their visit to Foz do Iguaçu to see the Iguaçu Falls. The falls are a spectacular sight and are recognized as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature. "It was amazing seeing all the beautiful places God has created," said Diana Baeza. "I'm nothing without him, and being closer to him is what makes me most happy."

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World Youth Day 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Millions of young people gathered for the event.