

Youth Day: A way for youth to experience 'the big church'

By Brenda Rees

SPECIAL TO THE TIDINGS

At this year's Religious Education Congress, Youth Day organizations wanted to include something a little something extra when they were planning activities for the one-day event: youth.

"The presence of youth is what really makes Youth Day work," says Mike Norman of the Los Angeles Archdiocese Youth Ministry office. "This year, more than ever, youth have an even larger part of the planning of Youth Day from being on stage, developing the scripts, coming up with ideas. So many youth are excited about Youth Day and clearly it shows."

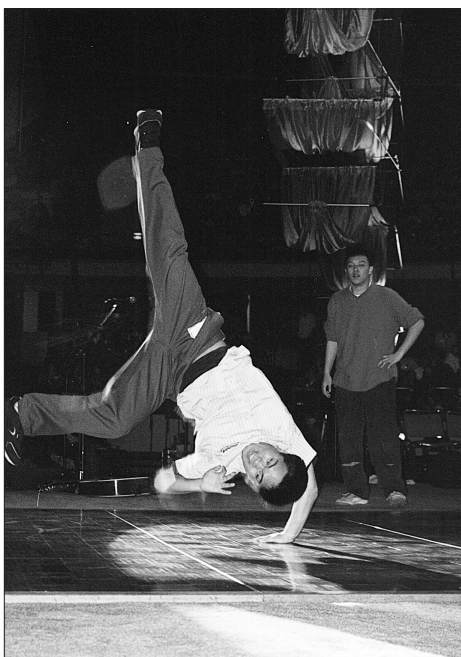
Indeed, with more than 12,000 youth registered to attend the Feb. 19 event, Youth Day is a popular experience not only for local youth, but young people across the country. Youth are scheduled to travel to Anaheim from Alaska, Hawaii and the East Coast, says Norman, explaining that the lure of Youth Day reaches beyond Southern California.

But for local youth, Youth Day is a big event, especially considering that many young people have never attended a huge national conference. "It's a way our youth can experience the big church," continues Norman. "To see 12,000 high school students screaming for their faith is a wondrous thing, no matter how old you are."

Some of the highlights planned for Youth Day include a video-tour of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, done MTV-style, re-dubbed Messiah TV. "A lot of our youth have not gone down to the cathedral and here we give them an overview," explains Norman.

Many of the 13 workshops throughout the day feature the theme of "You May Think You Know...But You Have No Idea." The theme was inspired from well-known Christian speaker Mike Yaconelli who incorporated that idea in many of his talks. Yaconelli, who passed away last fall, had been scheduled to be one of Youth Day's keynote speakers.

"The focus is that our God is a big God with no limits," says Norman. "We may think we know God's love, but we really have no idea on what that truly means. We may think we know what how our life is supposed to



Youth Day highlights teen performers.

go, but we really have no idea."

Case in point is workshop speaker Renee Bondi, a Christian singer who has been living with a disability for many years. "She has a great message for out youth," says Norman about Bondi who, despite living in a wheelchair from a freak accident, got married and had a baby. "You may think your life is horrible, but you have no idea what God has in store for you."

One of the most popular workshops — more than 4,000 youth have already pre-registered — is one that features the juggling/comedic duo ApeX who will be leading a discussion on "Why We Are Catholic."

ApeX (Gene Monterastelli and Brad Farmer) have been crisscrossing North America presenting their Christian vaudeville show, which includes death-defying juggling, humor, drama, storytelling, audience participation and personal testimony. "Their message is very solid, but it's done with laughter and excitement," says Norman. "They get us all back to the basics."

Also the group Daughters of God will lead a workshop on how to "Pray Your Heart." "They are promoting and celebrating Catholic women with a message many young

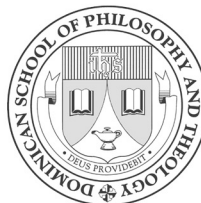
women need to hear," says Norman. "They have developed a unique ministry that blends music and speaking."

And Mark Hart, better known as the "Bible Geek" will be discussing the radicalism of the Catholic faith.

While Youth Day is primarily for young people, chaperones and other adults attending find that they are drawn in by the testimonies, workshops and speakers, says Norman. "Adults can be blown away by the youth," he says, explaining that at first, many older folks think it's a burden to bring a bunch of kids to Youth Day.

"But they say they do it because they watch the kids' eyes and see how they change at the end of the day," says Norman. "The liturgy always moves people. To hear youth singing, reading, being a part of the homily reflections — it gives them strength and hope. They realize they are a part of something bigger than they cannot comprehend." ♦

Editor's note: The Religious Education Congress Youth Day is Feb. 19, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Anaheim Convention Center, 800 W. Katella Ave., Anaheim. For more information, call (213) 637-7348 or e-mail congress@la-archdiocese.org.



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Sr. NANCY MUNRO, CSJ

More than 12,000 youth travel to Youth Day in Anaheim, from throughout California as well as Alaska, Hawaii and the East Coast.