

The following article was written by three Northern California youth that, as members of the St. Anthony's Youth Franciscans, sponsored by the Sung Antonio Fraternity in San Francisco, were fortunate to attend the YouFra International Gathering and the World Youth Day in Brazil. All three young men are college students and council members in their YouFra group. Daniel Shin is the Secretary, Justin Yoo is the Vice Youth Minister, and Austin is the Youth Minister. We thank them for sharing some of their insights and reflections on this wonderful, unique experience.

**Daniel Shin, Secretary  
St. Anthony's Youth Franciscans**

It's hard to describe how life changing the YouFra International Gathering (YIG) and World Youth Day (WYD) have been, but I'll start by talking about the amazing time I experienced at YIG. I think YIG was a more personal event than WYD, because there were only a few of us from each country, and we were able to grow closer by staying in a school together. As soon as we arrived at the school, other youth Franciscans were extremely welcoming. They cheered for us, gave us hugs and kisses, sang songs for us, and even offered to carry our bags. As YIG continued, we learned



*Soil from all over the world was collected and then shaped into this JUFRA (YouFra) emblem.*



*One of the many group pictures we took during World Youth Day.*

about YouFra fraternities in many different countries. We shared with each other the problems that youth faces today, as well as the great things that the youth are doing to help society.

World Youth Day was similar to YIG, but it was an even more life-changing event. After coming home, I realized how humbling the entire trip truly was. Traveling in a country and not knowing a word of Portuguese, I really had to be patient and do whatever it took to understand what was happening around me. I had to completely trust my group, fellow pilgrims and most importantly GOD to help me get through each



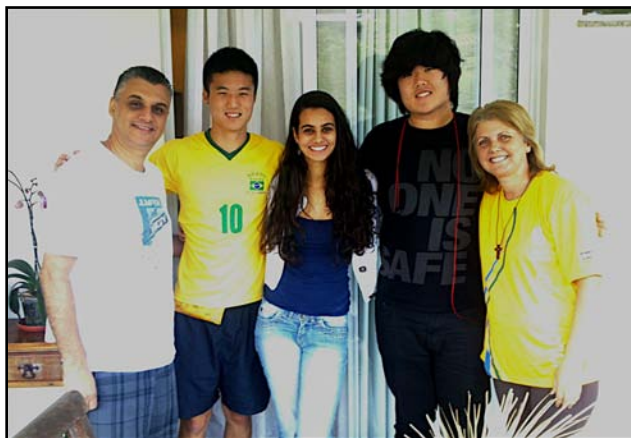
day. It was an incredibly fun experience, but it was definitely a difficult journey. There were many situations where I felt scared and vulnerable, but I've learned so much from each of these situations. I got to meet people from all over the world, try new foods, see amazing sites, communicate with a jumbled mix of English, Portuguese and body language, see the Pope, find close friends, dance and sing songs, and become closer with God. I wouldn't have spent my time in Brazil any other way.



*A picture from our tour of Sao Jao Del Rei, a historic town known for its gorgeous churches.*

**Justin Yoo**  
**Vice Youth Minister**  
**St. Anthony's Youth Franciscans**

The YouFra International Gathering was from the start a welcoming experience, with people from a multitude of nations ready to greet us as we got off the bus. After settling in, we immediately left for a concert, featuring both Christian music and local music. After experiencing the local dances and music, we went back to the school where the groups of different nations sat with each other and bonded, working through language barriers as best we were able. The next days were full of talks and presentations from some of the YouFra groups. We took a tour of the neighborhood, which had many churches and many art exhibits. The final night, all the nations present did a cultural presen-



*Our host family: Pinheiro, Taina, and Lourdiha (The son, Tauan, took the picture)*

tation and the night ended in dance. The next morning, after a short ending speech, we departed for WYD.

Upon arriving at our destination, we waited to go to our host homes. Our host family was very accommodating, warm, considerate and genuine. Luckily, out of the family of four, three could speak English. They made the whole experience much better, even giving a tour of the neighborhood and advice on travel. Thanks to them, we had more chances to experience the local cuisine.

WYD was spiritually up-lifting. In the morning, we would go to a meeting place divided up by language. The first thing after every breakfast was a catechesis where a bishop gave us insight into our Catholic spirituality. We followed it up with a discussion, where we talked with people from around the world. We wrapped up morning activities with a Mass. On the first day, we mostly spent our time at the pilgrim center waiting to get our pilgrim kits, and there was music and dancing, along with an open church to pray or meet new people. As Asians are very rare in Rio de Janeiro, and apparently in South America in general, we were asked for many pictures. Our Venezuelan friends from YIG helped us out with those. On the second day, the main event would be the mass at night at Copacabana, a landmark of Rio. The rosary was said in five languages, which was inspiring, and performances by talented singers from many different nations. The feeling of fellowship in God transcended language and brought the crowd a feeling of unity. This feeling was present once again on the next day, when the people gathered saw the Pope arrive, who was amazing. On the second to last day was to be a long hike to a special location where we would once again see the Pope and have Mass, and where the next

location of the WYD would be announced, but due to the uncharacteristic rainy weather making the location too muddy, it was changed to Copacabana, and a new walk was made to keep tradition. The walk displayed Rio in all its various faces; the beautiful beaches, the crowded streets, the gentle parks and roads, and even a favela (shanty town), and the walk ended with a teeming Mass singing in praise, which continued

long into the evening. The next day, we celebrated Mass one last time with the Pope, who presided over a record 3 million people, the largest Catholic gathering ever, and then we departed back for the States. WYD



*This was our catechesis site (Imaculada Conceicao Parish), where we met every morning with other English-speaking Pilgrims.*



*We were very popular for pictures, as you can tell!*



*People from all over the world came up to us asking for pictures. It was like we were movie stars!*

was an awesome and humbling experience that showed me just how many other people hold as strong a faith in God as I do, and how we as Christians are not alone; we have all our brothers in Christ all around the world.



*We did some sight-seeing as well. This is Jardim Botânico, Rio's world-famous botanical garden.*

**Austin Yoo**  
**Youth Minister**  
**St. Anthony's Youth Franciscans**

Rather than focusing so much on the details and individual events of YIG, I think my YIG experience can be comprehensively summed up in one simple story. At the gathering, I met a man named Luiz, a truly amazing individual from Panama who quickly became a lasting inspiration and influence on me. During the three days I spent with him I never saw him without a huge smile on his face. He danced and praised with all his heart, and brightened our days with a genuine warmth that seems so hard to find in this day and age. He always greeted me with a hug, told me all sorts of tales about his life back at home, and when I was sick he would constantly check on me to see if I was doing better. Even when someone stole his brand new electronic tablet (which are much more expensive in Panama than in America), instead of becoming understandably stressed or angry, he kept that same ear-to-ear grin and said "Things like that don't matter. I can always replace them. What's important is this time I have with all of you, because this is an irreplaceable experience with very beautiful people. So no matter what I am happy to be here".

His unfazed, ever-thankful attitude simply blew me away. How could he wholeheart-



edly admire someone who had robbed him of his hard-earned belongings, at an event that was supposed to be a meeting built on practicing good morals? I, as well as our Franciscan brothers from all over the world who were gathered there during those eventful three nights, should strive to live with the same kind of heart and positivity as he does some day, and I think he serves as a shining example of the brotherhood in which the Franciscan tradition is so ingrained. I've always complained about how loving my brothers and sisters unconditionally is such a difficult thing to do, yet here was someone living that virtue out right in front of my eyes. Thank you Luiz: you and the many incredible individuals I met during my time at YIG helped set the tone for the rest of my World Youth Day experience. Although our time was rather short, we were able to deepen our faith and form a genuine union of nations; whether or not we could speak the same languages, we communicated through our shared purpose of becoming better Franciscans and disciples of God.

However, compared to the close-knit camaraderie of YIG, World Youth Day was a little underwhelming at first. While it was still an amazing experience, the interpersonal interaction was usually limited to people excitedly asking us for pictures, and it became a test of



*A picture of Luiz and I on the last day of YIG.*

patience more than anything. Buses were hectically scheduled and always crammed with people, the weather was rainy and downcast, there was more time spent waiting in line than anything else...still, even among the little trials we were constantly faced with, there was clarity to be found. I believe that God had a purpose for everything, and that he tested our patience to in turn teach us the virtue of patience. Be-



*From the Mass of Nations; the altar was surrounded by the flags of every country that attended YIG, which was symbolic of our spiritual unity in Christ.*

sides, wasn't there so much to be joyful and thankful for? We had a beautiful, welcoming, host family who provided us with all our needs and a loving home, received spiritual enrichment at our daily catecheses that opened our minds to the true meaning of being a disciple of Christ, experienced the diverse culture and sights of Rio de Janeiro, and congregated with 3 million other Catholic youth from all over the world to praise the Lord in one united voice, which in itself is already pretty tremendous. Also, even if we weren't able to meet and speak with as many people as we would have liked, just watching the enthusiasm and energy they worshipped with should have been an inspiration for me to look at things more positively. Though I am only realizing all these blessings as I look back on my trip, I now know that there was and still is much to learn from the time I spent in Brazil.

Seeing the Pope was indeed a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but the common element that highlighted both YIG and WYD was the people. I know it's starting to sound redundant, but I'm so glad I went on this trip and met all these wonderful individuals, many of whom I still keep in contact with today. They are the reason I look back on this trip fondly, with newfound knowledge under my belt. If anything, I wish I studied Portuguese a little more; we lucked out in that Gladys Veloz, one of our fellow group members, was able to translate for us, but it would have been great if I had been able to speak the language on my own. I'll definitely keep it in mind for the next World Youth Day in Poland! Thank you to everyone who supported us, both financially and spiritually, throughout this trip, and presented us with the opportunity to become a more holistic, passionate Catholic—we couldn't have done it without you.