

# Serving at WYD in Sydney as a volunteer

by Liesbeth van Emmerik

Being with and serving young people has somehow in various facets been part of my life. I have a very fond memories of my early days in Australia and that made me eventually part of the Australian tapestry, because we had a Youth Organisation, the YCW, who embraced me into their midst into teaching leadership qualities, that gave me the courage to start groups in Eaglehawk and Cathedral. This happened through my long time friends, Margaret, Georgina, Pat and others, who gave me the courage to speak out even in my broken English and then the teachings of leadership through our dear Barbara in Rosalind Park in her precious lunch hour.

We had teachings how to apply the gospel to everyday life and especially in the workplace. We met with diocesan teams with our chaplains, to name a couple Monsignor Long and the late Monsignor Murphy, who help to drive us to other places in the diocese and were billeted out to families and it always finished with either socials, dancing, or barbecue around the camp fire and of course a time to reminisce and share. What beautiful memories and we were so enthusiastic and busy there was only time for things in life that would make our life, Christ orientated and we had wonderful joyful times beside teachings and learning about scripture.

This actually already started in The Netherlands under the guidance of Pater van Essen. Of late I found the parish book from my later father and saw his name. Pater (Father) checked each of us in the team if we knew our scripture, we were taught at college Religion under the umbrella of Biblical studies, Liturgy and Catechism. I am not advocating that this youth ministry was everywhere in the Netherlands. We were blessed with Jesuit Priests, who were very much ahead of their time. We became members of the youth ministry under the protection of Our Lady after our Solemn Communion, which is a more important feast in Belgium in the church than First H Communion or even Confirmation. In grade six, we pledged in front of the church on the bible and we repeated the words that our Godparents said at our Baptism. We pledged now as young adults before entering High School. At those gatherings, which started first in the church, we went to the Youth House and played a form of Trivia Pursuit with the bible, then a cuppa and table tennis before we went home. Other times we went on a pilgrimage to another city by train and then walked to a particular church, the last one for me was to Delft.

Other ways of communicating with young people is through the gift of music, in sharing their gifts in Homes, churches, Schools, Malls, Town Halls etc. wherever we could perform our music. Therefore it was not a difficult decision for me to make this a pilgrimage of serving the youth at WYD and wow.... that serving turned around in giving me and our volunteers so much grace, love, joy and an overwhelming experience that it was **cool to be a Catholic**. As we welcomed the pilgrims in various languages, we received applause, music, hugs, cheers and the sheer joy of watching the young ones carrying their respective flags with great pride and dignity into the arena, which was for our group for four days the Domain and then at the Southern Cross Precept (Randwick)

The atmosphere was truly electric from where I caught the bus to going home. Each night we had to wait up to one hour for a bus to take us home and that time was embraced with listening and sharing. You know you think of Mexicans with their big hats. There you meet very ordinary girls,

who share their love of Christ. One night I was taking a student doctor from Columbia back to St. James Station and as we walked she became so emotionally about the wonderful atmosphere and friendliness she experienced from the Sydneysiders, so much so that she is thinking of immigrating to Australia.

One night I found the tent in Hyde Park which had the cross and Icon and was able once more to touch and pray with so many others. Each night a different bus got me home, but as it took a different route each time I was worried that I may miss the point where I was meant to descent from the bus. Each night I sat next to people who were getting off the bus at the same stop, except the last night. I am sure Our Lord felt, I should know my bus stop by now!

Everything about the church was discussed on the bus like the Stations of the Cross, the sacraments, where we were going after this event. One girl on the mono rail, mentioned: I am a catholic, but it did not speak to me. Yet now I know I have to embrace it as I have learned and experienced my faith. I was given some tickets to Mary MacKillop for Friday Morning, but said I could not use them as I was volunteering. She said I am sure you will find people who can use them. Well it was Thursday evening, and still in possession of the tickets. I was at the Quay having some soup and saw two nuns, who on approaching told me they came from America. I showed them the tickets and they were thrilled to have them as they were worth 25 dollars each. Another prayer answered!!! After my meal I walked towards the Opera House and saw the sign adoration. That will be easy to do, as so many were feasting outside, but I was faced with a row as only so many were allowed in at the time. Eventually I got inside and breathed in the sacredness of so many young people sitting before the Blessed Sacrament, it was awesome. Sisters of Charity helping with the music while quiet time in between gave the necessary space to reflect. The power of the Holy Spirit was evident as you went to confession and they prayed over you, it was a most beautiful sustaining experience. A place where I have been below the opera House only last October when our son Matthew was performing with the SSO, that shown area was now transformed into a most profoundly sacred and hallowed area.

At the bus I was told that Bishop Grech was talking on Friday night and so when I finished volunteering I went to Darling Harbour, but no one knew anything about that event and it was so dark that I was not able to walk any further, and I had to be at the Randwick the following morning at 5 a.m. So I ventured to the Vocation centre where priests and nuns spend time talking to the young ones and again the atmosphere was just amazing graced and smiling people with expectations.

When I took down my backpack, I found a cloth peg with "Trust in the Lord always" and greetings from USA!!! That was just so cute and beautiful. On my way I found a bunch of Dutchies with their flags and took a photo and shared with them. Actually the first pilgrims I met were outside the Cathedral on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July and were from my husband's township Brunssum. Later I met some with their flags and started to sing the songs we always sing on our walks and they all joined in with the well known tunes. This is something the five German girls from Paderborn mentioned as we sat around the table at our home for an evening meal. They questioned why did Australians not sing as they walk???? They always sing and maybe we can learn something from that. I still remember when us young ones in the 1950s after Cathedral Choir practice. We would sing all the way to the Fountain for a milkshake, admittedly, we had a few dutchies in the choir in those days. One night I was listening to an Indonesian couple, who came out here with their children and were part of 2000

from Indonesia. I was told that it was much easier now to practice your faith. They also knew the area very well where my mother was born.

In the early morning of Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July, the field at the Southern Cross was still and so empty and we welcomed the first pilgrims to their allocated area, who shared with me rosaries and keyrings. In the evening, the wonderful and spiritual atmosphere was electric as we prayed with Pope Benedict the adoration. The evening became cooler so I wrapped around me the silver lining, two Japanese boys insisted that I wear their coat around me. Just before the start of the vigil, pilgrims were dancing the polonaise then the complete opposite the quietness, the reverence as people kneeled with flickering candle lights playing a prayerful shadow over all who adored the Blessed Sacrament and shared in the Benediction. Again, prayers were answered: Our lady had put her blue mantle of cloud around the Moon so the cold air was a little less severe for the very cool evening. That cloud kept the sun away the next day after so many sunny wonderful days in Sydney but helped very much for better photography. These clouds held out until the evening when some showers wetted the Randwick Area which had by then became deserted like it was on the Saturday Morning. This was supposed to be the end but no we still had the audience with the Pope on Monday. Even after the audience with the Pope which was a great and special experience, because some courageous Australians were at the stadium with the Pope and then to hear again the beautiful hymn by Guy Sebastian "Receive the Power..."

It did not finish then, the joy and singing went on as before as groups with flags all headed for Hyde Park where still 30.000 came together for prayers and worship. Again at the airport in the afternoon French pilgrims sang and the music did not stop on the plane or at Tullamarine Airport, what a great way to finish my journey as Volunteer and some pilgrim experiences. Although I had to take a later plane, which left late, I managed to hop on the Bendigo Air Bus just in time before it took off. It is something hard to describe, but I am so happy I had that experience of sharing even in a pub with young men, my sister in law and family. It brought back many memories of my special time in Holland and my time in the YCW in the 1950-60s and experienced the pilgrim spirit again in 1990 in Kevelaar just over the border of Limburg in Germany where we joined in with backpacked pilgrims at the Mass said and sung in various languages.

May the Spirit keep on renewing the earth and in particular way our parishes in Bendigo, and diocese and may the flame never die but ignite many who come in contact with those who were privileged to experience the power of the Holy Spirit through Our Lord's young and not so young pilgrims from all over the World.

*Liesbeth van Emmerik.*