

Catholic teens show solidarity in Kansas City

By **Dominique Becnel**
Contributing writer

Take a moment to close your eyes and imagine this experience: being in a stadium packed full of 20,000 teenagers who are all there for one purpose. You may be thinking that I am at a Kelly Clarkson concert or a Saints' game, but I am not.

In a way, I am at a "concert" whose main act on the stage is Jesus. Over and over, thousands of teenagers repeat one phrase in unison: "Christ Reigns!" This was the theme for the National Catholic Youth Conference which I attended Nov. 19-21 with the Archdiocese of New Orleans Youth Ministry Office.

Although three days may not seem like enough time to deepen one's faith and grow closer to Jesus, that's all it took to totally convince me. Being surrounded by so many other teens with the same beliefs as I was the main reason why it became so easy for me to profess my faith. No one there judged you or thought that he or she was "too cool." It no longer mattered what state you were from or what ethnicity you were. All boundaries seemed to disappear.

During the conference, it was not a rarity to hear people singing at the top of their lungs or to see people being a witness to their faith on the streets of Kansas City, Mo., where the conference

was held. Some people may have attended because they had gone previously and had an amazing experience, or some, like myself, may have attended not really knowing what to expect. No matter what reason, though, I truly believe that most people who went had a life-changing religious experience while they were there. NCYC has vastly deepened my faith and brought me extremely

closer to God. I found the courage and strength that I needed to be proud of who I am as a Catholic teenage girl. I brought home all that I learned, all that I saw, and all that was revealed to me about Jesus Christ. Now, Christ truly does reign at the center of my life.

Dominique Becnel is a sophomore at Mt. Carmel Academy and a member of St. Dominic CYO.

Q & A on youth conference

By **Grace Heidel and Maddie LaForge**
Contributing writers

The National Catholic Youth Conference took place November 19-21 in Kansas City, Mo. NCYC is held every two years and is the largest single gathering of Catholic youth in the United States.

The CYO/Youth & Young Adult Ministry Office from the Archdiocese of New Orleans coordinated 142 participants. This year's theme, "Christ Reigns," celebrated our call to be the kingdom for others. Over 22,000 teens were in attendance, breaking all previous attendance records.

Grace Heidel interviews Maddie LaForge about her experiences with NCYC this year.

Grace: What NCYC was like?

Maddie: NCYC complete-

ly recharged my faith battery because I was able to listen to several speakers share their faith experiences, and I got to be in an atmosphere with thousands of other young people who are passionate about their religion.

Grace: How did you feel when you walked into the Sprint Center the first night?

Maddie: Oh my gosh, I was completely amazed. Only stage lights were on, and the entire arena was filled with over 20,000 people who were all clapping in the sign of the cross. Immediately, we immersed ourselves into the praise and worship session. If singing is praying twice, we must have prayed 8,000 times on this trip! It felt absolutely amazing to be in the arena with so much energy around us because we had woken up at 4 that



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Members of the New Orleans delegation were among the 22,000 young people and youth ministers in the Eucharistic procession through downtown Kansas City from the Sprint Center to the Kansas City Convention Center for the National Catholic Youth Conference held Nov. 19-21.

morning.

Grace: What was it like having Archbishop Aymond on the trip?

Maddie: Archbishop Aymond is the coolest Archbishop I've ever met! He traveled with us, which was really cool, and he sat with us in the Sprint Center instead of sitting with the other bishops. He was really enthusiastic, and it felt good to have him take such a strong interest in the youth of New Orleans. We got to talk and get to know him a lot and, we are all now very excited about him being our new archbishop.

Grace: What was your favorite workshop?

Maddie: Against the Flow, presented by Bob Perron and Chris Padgett, was probably my favorite. I really liked that they focused on how Christ calls people who are broken – not perfect. I also

really enjoyed the workshop by New Orleans' very own Father Tony Ricard, "My Momma always said, remember where you're from, and don't be stupid." His talk was extremely entertaining, and he stressed that there is a difference between ignorance and stupidity. WHO DAT!

Grace: So, overall what was your favorite part of NCYC?

Maddie: The general sessions in the Sprint Center were definitely my favorite, especially the closing Mass because of the strong sense of community. It was extremely powerful to see so many young people participating in the celebration of the Eucharist together.

Grace Heidel and Maddie LaForge are students at the Academy of the Sacred Heart and members of St. Matthew the Apostle CYO.

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The Archdiocese of New Orleans had a youth delegation of more than 140 at this year's National Catholic Youth Conference in Kansas City. Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond attended the conference with the local youth.