News



Members of a youth group from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, have a fun time together Nov. 21, 2019, performing karaoke at the Thematic Village of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. (CNS/The Criterion/John Shaughnessy)

John Shaughnessy

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Indianapolis — November 22, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

For 15-year-old Tabitha Njoroge, being together with 20,000 Catholic youths from across the country is a revelation, especially considering how much her life has changed in three years.

Back then, Tabitha, her parents and her three sisters had left their homeland in Kenya to come to the United States.

"Back there, we were struggling to have a meal," Njoroge recalled.

It's partly why the theme of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis Nov. 21-23 — "Blessed, Broken, Given" — resonates so much with her.

"I'm blessed with my family. I really couldn't be myself without them. They help me a lot in my life," said Njoroge, a member of Holy Angels Parish in her new home, Indianapolis. "And 'given' — I was given a chance to come here to the United States to have a new life. It's a huge opportunity."

She paused before adding, "It's not like I'm broken, but leaving my family members at home — like my cousins — it's kind of lonely sometimes."

Njoroge's insights about her life show the dual nature of the mindset of the youths participating in NCYC, a biennial event organized by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry with help from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis as conference host.

For three days, the 20,000 teenagers form a joyful, energetic and unifying representation of how much their Catholic faith means to them, of how much they have to offer the church.

At the same time, all of them come with their own stories of how the theme of the conference — "Blessed, Broken, Given" — personally reflects their own lives and their ever-developing relationship with God.

Consider the story of 16-year-old McKayla Ewing.

"In early October, my grandpa had two hemorrhaging strokes," said Ewing, a member of the youth group from the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota. "After the second one, he couldn't communicate. He's still in the hospital.

"He's a deacon, and he's always showed us how to live our faith every day.

Everyone is praying for him. To see how God is working through him — through the power of prayer — I feel so blessed by that. He's still struggling, but he's still fighting, too."

Bryce Kuo, 15, chose "Broken."

"That's because I want to be better at sharing God with other people," said Kuo, part of the youth group from the Diocese of Albany, New York. "There are a lot of people outside the church who aren't connected to God, and they could be if they had someone who could influence them."



Mary Quirk from Epiphany Parish in Louisville, Ky., embraces Ahok Wol, a friend from the Diocese of Knoxville, Tenn., during the opening general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference Nov. 21, 2019, in Indianapolis. Quirk, a junior in high school, addressed nearly 20,000 youth attending the NCYC. (CNS/The Register/Karen Bonar)

"I'm blessed to have a connection with God and be here," he told The Criterion, Indianapolis' archdiocesan newspaper. This will help me be closer to God, and then I can help other people."

Alejandra Aguilar, 18, sees all three themes flowing through her life.

"I'm very thankful for everything I've been given," said Aguilar, a member of St. Patrick Parish in Indianapolis. "I thank God for the health of my family and my friends. I just hope I can give everything I can to others for all the things he has blessed me with.

"When I think about 'broken,' I think of all the battles he puts in front of you, but he knows you'll be able to conquer anything that comes your way with his help."

She's relying on her faith and God as she gears up for the latest challenge in her life — a challenge that she knows also is a blessing.

"I'll be the first one in my family to go to college. It's a whole new world for me. A lot of my friends have older siblings and parents who have gone through it. I have older siblings, but none of them have gone through this. My parents are from Mexico City. For me, it's all very new," she explained.

"I want to give back to the community with the degree I get. I hope to be an immigration lawyer and help people through the immigration process."

For 17-year-old Angel Rizo, there's the knowledge of just how blessed he is.

"So many of us take the things we have for granted," said Rizo, part of the youth group from the Diocese of Nashville, Tennessee. "We usually get things, but we never think about what God gives us and how we need to give back. I try to do that by going to adoration, praying for others and doing community service."

Logan Struewing focused on "Broken" as the theme that resonated most with him.

"For me and a lot of people, we all have ways we are broken," said Struewing, 17, a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis. "None of us is perfect. God knows we are broken, but he still believes in us, and he still wants us to be the best we can be.

"That gives me a lot of hope. Even when I'm feeling the lowest I can feel, God is there to pick me back up."

Advertisement