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A book cover features photos of Pope John Paul II, Benedict, and Francis with the words "Um L

This is the cover of the Portuguese-language book, "A Long Journey to Lisbon," chronicling the history of World Youth Day leading up to its celebration in August in Lisbon. The book is by Aura Miguel and features a preface by Pope Francis, which was released May 2, 2023. (CNS photo/courtesy Bertrand Editora)

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World Youth Day is an antidote against indifference, isolation and lethargy, Pope Francis said.

Since World Youth Days were established by St. John Paul II in 1985, "they have involved, moved, stirred and challenged generations of women and men," he said in the preface of a new book, "A Long Journey to Lisbon," by Aura Miguel, a Portuguese journalist for Rádio Renascença. Vatican News published the preface May 2.

The initial intuition that inspired St. John Paul "has not faded," Francis wrote, as today's world, especially its young people, is facing enormous changes and challenges.

Young people, he wrote, "risk self-isolation every day, living in a virtual environment much of their life, ending up as prey to an aggressive market that creates false needs."

"Getting out of the house, heading out with fellow travelers, having important experiences of listening and prayer combined with moments of celebration, and doing it together, makes these moments precious for everybody's life," he wrote.

"We really need young people who are at the ready, eager to respond to God's dream, to care about others, young people who discover the joy and beauty of a life spent for Christ in service to others, to the poorest, to the suffering," the pope said.

Francis repeated his call to young people not to live life "standing on a balcony watching life go by," avoiding getting involved and getting their hands dirty, putting a screen between them and the rest of the world.

"Many times I have told (young people) not to be 'couch potatoes,'" not to be "'anesthetized' by people who benefit from having them 'dumb and numb,'" he wrote.

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Being young is the time for dreaming, the pope wrote, and for being open to the real world, "discovering what is really worthwhile in life, struggling to conquer it; it is opening oneself to deep and true relationships, it is engaging with others and for others."

But, he wrote, the world is facing so many challenges: the pandemic has shown that "we can only save ourselves together"; there is "the vortex of war and rearmament"; the arms race "seems unstoppable and threatens to lead us to self-destruction"; there is the war in Ukraine; and many wars and conflicts continue to be forgotten, "so much unspeakable violence continues to be perpetrated."

How are young people to respond, the pope asked? "What are they being called to do with their energy, their vision of the future, their enthusiasm?"

"They are called to say, 'We care.' We care about what is happening in the world" and about "the fate of millions of people, of so many children, who have no water,

no food, no medical care, while the rulers seem to be competing to see who can spend the most on the most sophisticated armaments," he wrote. "We care about everything," including all of creation and the digital world, "which we are challenged to change and make more and more humane."

"World Youth Days have been an antidote to life on a balcony, to the anesthesia that makes people prefer the couch, to disinterest," Francis said in the preface.

"WYD is an event of grace that awakens, broadens horizons, strengthens the heart's aspirations, helps people dream, to look ahead," he wrote. "It is a planted seed that can bear good fruit."

World Youth Day 2023 is scheduled to take place in Lisbon, Portugal, Aug. 1-6, and the motto for this year's event is a passage from the Luke's Gospel: "Mary arose and went with haste."

In his formal message for WYD 2023, published in last year, Francis said that the figure of Mary shows young people "the path of closeness and encounter" at a time when "our human family, already tested by the trauma of the pandemic, is racked by the tragedy of war."

This story appears in the **World Youth Day 2023** feature series. View the full series .