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Preparing for World Youth Day 2023: "I know it's going to change me"

World Youth Day 2023 will take place in Lisbon, Portugal, from 1 to 6 August. Four young Chileans talk about how they're preparing for the event.

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World Youth Day (WYD) brings young people from all over the world together to meet with the Pope and experience the universality of the

Church. Pope John Paul II inaugurated the first World Youth Day in 1985, and it has been held every few years since then.

"Mary arose and went with haste"

This is the theme of WYD 2023, which will take place in Lisbon, Portugal from August 1 to 6. Over 200 Chileans who participate in the University of the Andes' pastoral ministry or formational activities in centres of Opus Dei will travel to Lisbon to meet the Pope. Allen Iturra, María Jesús Sotomayor, José Tomás Torrejón, and Mar Honorato are among them.

Allen Iturra: inspired by faith

"My faith is the reason I want to go to WYD in Portugal. I'm going to meet many young Catholics from other countries to talk, pray together, and inspire one another... This is an incredible opportunity, and I'm ready

for the adventure," Allen Iturra, an alumnus of Necedal School currently studying Law at the University of the Andes.

He's travelling to Lisbon with a group from the university and is working to pay for the trip: "Instead of wasting time pondering whether or not to go, I went right to work to figure out how to do it. I worked in January and February and started playing the organ at Sunday Masses in the university clinic in March. With that, I've made enough money to pay for the airfare."

"I'm expanding my worldview. I've always lived my faith at school, with my friends, and at university, but this is different. It's global. And I'm going to Europe at 19! It's a new experience and it's going to inspire me to aspire for greater things," he says. "That's what I really want from this trip."

María Jesús Sotomayor: letting the Pope's message sink in

"What moves me," María Jesús says, "is the idea of being with so many young Catholics like me, who love Christ and treasure their faith.

Especially now, when we seem to be a small minority, witnessing so many people embracing the same love is inspiring. It strengthens us to follow the Lord wherever He calls us."

"And I'm so excited to meet Pope Francis, listen to him, and let his message sink in and make me better, stronger in the face of temptation, and eager to struggle to be a saint."

María Jesús is travelling to Portugal with nine people from Araucaria University Residence. She says she hopes "to get even closer to God, who will be in the hearts of everyone there. All our hearts will beat for Him. It's probably the closest we can get to our Lord on earth."

To prepare for the journey, María Jesús has been attending formational activities at the residence and (most importantly) praying to open her heart for the event. She has been working as a teaching assistant to make money for the trip.

"Being able to attend World Youth Day is the most amazing and loving gift I've ever been given," she says.

"That's what it is: a gift from God to young people, to confirm our faith, give us strength, and enable us to continue the tremendous mission entrusted to us."

She concludes: "When he was in Chile, Pope John Paul II told us, 'Do not be afraid of looking at Him.'

That's what we're going to do: we're going to look at Him, adore Him, and live with the joy, love, and energy only young people can. We're leaving our fears behind in order to come

back with clean souls, refreshed by his mercy and love."

José Tomás Torrejón: spiritual and social growth

José Tomás is a student at Montemar School and will travel from Viña del Mar with a group from the school.

"I am inspired by the opportunity to connect with young people from all over the world who share my faith and values, to learn from different cultures, and receive spiritual guidance. I want to be more authentic and committed to my faith," he says.

The group meets regularly to discuss different topics and prepare for the trip. They've also taken part in recollections, workshops, and training sessions to grow in their faith and as a team. "We want to grow both spiritually and socially to get the most out of WYD," he says. "I

have been participating in prayer and reflection groups to share and deepen my faith. And I've been visiting elderly people in Valparaíso to keep them company and give them support."

Mar Honorato: more than a trip

Mar is a student at Huelén School and is going to Lisbon with a group from Estoril Cultural Centre. When she heard that WYD 2023 would be in Lisbon, she knew she had to go. "I talked to my parents, and they said they would be happy to help me, but I had only one year to save up, so I had to start right away," she recalls. "I started working as a babysitter, organizing storage spaces and closets, wrapping Christmas presents, and marking school supplies... Any job I could find! I did it all because I know World Youth Day is going to change me. This trip is going to make a difference in my

life. I have never been to Europe, so getting to visit Portugal is exciting, of course, but I know that this more than just a trip."

Like the other attendees, Mar has been preparing herself through reflection sessions with her group, activities to get to know one another more deeply, service, and prayer. "It's been a long but incredible process. Without this preparation, I don't think the trip would be as meaningful for me."

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