
25,000 young Poles in Lisbon. Bishop Suchodolski: “A great sign of hope for our Church”

“Such a large number of participants at the World Youth Day in Lisbon is a great sign of hope for the Church in Poland,” says Msgr. **Grzegorz Suchodolski**, head of the Polish Bishops' Youth Pastoral Council. “With many young people today distancing themselves from or even leaving the Church, the WYD remains a great opportunity for our time, to tap into the potential of faith flowing from the event.” The prelate says he is impressed by the number of young Polish pilgrims who will travel to Portugal this year. The numbers are only comparable to those of the World Youth Day in Paris in 1997 and in Rome in the year 2000. In fact, more than 25,000 young people have travelled from Poland to Lisbon to meet Pope Francis. They will be accompanied by a large number of bishops, 250 priests and around a hundred women religious. About 350 Polish volunteers and a group of pilgrims from the Military Ordinariate, comprising about forty officers and non-commissioned officers, have arrived in Lisbon. They are joined by 500 scouts who will be ‘in service’ during the event, helping the pilgrims and providing basic health care and assistance. “We have been welcomed with great joy and kindness. Portugal is a beautiful and hospitable country. We are looking forward to our meeting with Pope Francis,” wrote the pilgrims from the Polish Archdiocese of Gniezno, who are staying in Coimbra, in their travel diary. “Language is not an obstacle. We can speak English with some people, but we also communicate with those who do not know the language: we speak Polish, they answer us in Portuguese, but we still understand each other. There is also the language of faith and prayer. We are joined by young pilgrims from the Philippines, Sweden and Germany. We all have the same goal and we are looking forward to meeting the Holy Father in Lisbon.” The young Polish pilgrims had to travel a long way to reach Portugal. “We arrived in Valdocco on the 24th of July at around 7am. It was in this town that Don Bosco opened his first oratory in 1844. There we visited the museum dedicated to this great saint and his care for young people,” said the pilgrims from the Polish Salesian group, who travelled by bus to Lisbon for the World Youth Day. The young people of the “Niniva Team” from Kokotek (south of Czestochowa), on the other hand, travelled more than 3,500 kilometres to the Portuguese capital by bicycle, crossing no fewer than 11 countries along the way. They set off on July 10 and travelled without any outside help, taking with them everything they needed: clothes, tents for sleeping and spare parts. They volunteered to do this “for the youth of the world.” So did Father Marcin Napora, Bartłomiej Michulec and Marcin Kidon. They arrived in northern Italy in the scorching heat and dedicated their 22 days of walking, praying and sweating from Krakow to Lisbon “to new priestly and religious vocations.” “Nothing in life is achieved without effort. Young people today need to be reminded of this,” said Father Marcin, describing his cycling trip with two friends through the Swiss Alps and the San Bernardino Pass. More than 2,100 of the Polish pilgrims currently in Lisbon are from the two dioceses of the Polish capital and 1,900 from the Archdiocese of Krakow. However, young people from all over Poland have now arrived in Portugal: 660 from Gdansk with a group of disabled persons, 140 from Plock, 55 from Rybnik in Silesia, 57 from Bochnia and many others from other Polish dioceses and districts. The diocese of Tarnow, for example, will be represented in Lisbon by 400 young pilgrims accompanied by Bishop **Artur Wazny**. “Participating in previous WYDs has formed me as a priest”, the prelate said. “Now I am looking forward to accompanying the young people in Lisbon and seeking pastoral inspiration. Young people need to be accompanied. In their presence you have to be in the truth. No truth, even the most difficult, can be hidden from them. And our words must be confirmed by our deeds.” “It is time to walk a part of the way yourself, to listen to the Word of God and to accept it as a promise”, said the Archbishop of Lodz, Msgr. **Grzegorz Rys**, recently made a Cardinal and who will be formally invested with the red biretta during the next Consistory, as he greeted the young people on their way to Lisbon. There are also young people from parishes, communities, religious centres and ecclesial movements. Among them are some 6,000 Polish members of the Neocatechumenal Way, says Wojciech Kaczmarek.

They represent the over 1,600 communities in Poland. They often struggle to cope with the challenges of life,” said Kaczmarek. “The World Youth Day will certainly be a precious opportunity to reflect on their personal goals in life: which school they will attend, what they will do in life, up to the most important decisions such as marriage, the priesthood or religious life. The Way proposes that participation in WYD in Lisbon be seen as a vocational pilgrimage.” Nearly 2,000 young people from Jesuit centres around the world have also arrived in Portugal. The 50 Polish pilgrims “will learn to see God in everything and will be able to use the experience of Lisbon to perceive how God works through different people and cultures,” said Father **Grzegorz Lojtek S.J.**, who is responsible for university and postgraduate pastoral ministry in Poland and heads the Magis 2023 programme in the country. As always, the World Youth Day offers an experience of the global community. In fact, groups of Polish pilgrims travelled to Lisbon together with their peers from the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Romania, Germany, Uganda, Ecuador and Spain. This was made possible by the 'Poles from Poland and the World for WYD' project, funded by the Polish Prime Minister's Office. **Tomasz Korpianiuk**, director of the Polish office responsible for organising the WYD in Lisbon, said: "About 1,300 Poles living abroad will take part in the WYD in Lisbon: 350 Poles from the USA, 250 from Germany, as well as from Kazakhstan, Belarus, Greece, Great Britain, France, Lithuania, Ukraine and Romania. The personal contribution of these young people amounts to 20-25% of the total cost of the pilgrimage, while the Polish authorities cover the costs of meals, accommodation and transport to and from Lisbon. "Young people from all over the world will thus contribute to promoting Polish culture and our Christian tradition," the prelate said. Finally, an opportunity for those who were unable to leave their homeland. On the 6th of August, the last day of the World Youth Day in Lisbon, the diocesan shrine of St Anthony of Padua in Ratowo (central-eastern Poland) will welcome young people and families. They will take part in a thanksgiving celebration dedicated to the patron saint who was born in Lisbon.

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