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Alumni Spotlight

A Glimpse into my World Youth Day Experience

By Gabbie Bernhard, Savio Alumni – Class of 2014

“He wants to make of you a concrete response to the needs and sufferings of humanity. He wants you to be the signs of his merciful love for our time!”

These are words taken from Pope Francis’ address to the young people at World Youth Day during the *Way of the Cross*. These words speak the message of Mercy that was the theme of this World Youth Day, during the Jubilee Year of Mercy. All too often I feel like this message of Mercy is lost in our world today, but with my firm foundation in my Catholic faith, and after attending this World Youth Day, I know that this message of Mercy is the most important message that we can bring into this world.

My name is Gabbie Bernhard and I am an alumni of Saint Dominic Savio Catholic High School, and Holy Family Catholic School. I graduated from Savio in 2014, and I graduated from Holy Family in 2010. I currently go to the Catholic University of America, in Washington D.C. and I am working on a degree in Accounting and a double minor in Music Performance, and Spanish. I had the amazing opportunity to attend World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland this summer with my university, and it was such an amazing experience.

I went with a group of about 18 students from The Catholic University of America, my school. Our trip started with three days in Rome, one day in Assisi with a 24-hour bus ride that took us to Krakow, Poland for about 9 days after that, which included World Youth Day and 2 extra days in which we visited Auschwitz, Czestakowa, and Wadawice.

Our time in Krakow was unbelievable. Millions of people descended on this



historic city all because we shared the same faith, our Catholic faith! Everyone was so joyful and welcoming and we met so many people. I even had the wonderful chance to find the group of students from Savio that attended WYD.

Pope Francis' message of Mercy was made known through the saints that came from Poland – Saint Faustina, Jesus' secretary of Mercy; Saint John Paul the Great, the Pope of Mercy; and Saint Maximillian Kolby, who offered his life in place of a stranger's life at Auschwitz – just to name a few. We had the amazing opportunity to visit the convent where Saint Faustina lived, and the Basilica's of Divine Mercy and Saint John Paul the Great. We also had the opportunity to visit the place where Saint Maximillian Kolby died, Auschwitz, and the place where Saint John Paul the Great was born, Wadowice.

Words cannot express how awesome this event was.

Attending a World Youth Day has been something that I have wanted to do ever since my two oldest sisters and my mother went to the World Youth Day in Toronto, Canada back in 2002. I was only about 7 when they went, but I knew that what they went to was something special. When the opportunity arose for me to have a chance to go to WYD with CUA, I was eager to jump at this opportunity. I did not want to pass this up. I have always loved and cherished my faith, and I have Holy Family and Savio to thank for cultivating it. Having the opportunity to attend such an event such as World Youth Day just strengthened my faith even more. Just the thought that millions of people from all corners of the earth gathered in the city of Krakow just because we all shared the same faith, our Catholic faith, is mind boggling.

I think one of my favorite parts about World Youth Day was connecting with all different kinds of people, from all over the world. Whether it was getting to know my fellow students from CUA better, meeting complete strangers from various states and even countries, *or even bumping into the group of students from Savio that attended World Youth Day*, God brought us together in unexpected ways. I would say that the experience that impacted me the most was visiting so many holy places where saints used to live and pray. I learned about so many saints and was able to see how they each showed God's mercy to the people around them.

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