

Nursing student who became Catholic at Easter Vigil preparing for first World Youth Day

- Australian Catholic University student Bryce Kathage will make his first pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Lisbon four months after becoming Catholic
- The third-year nursing student based at ACU Banyo was received into the Catholic Church at Easter in the same chapel where he experienced his first Mass
- 1.5 million young Catholics, including more than 3000 Australians, are expected to attend the large-scale youth gathering in Portugal's capital

In less than two months an expected 1.5 million young Catholics will descend on the capital city of Portugal for World Youth Day. Bryce Kathage will likely be the “youngest” in the crowd.

The third-year nursing student at Australian Catholic University, who has also served in the Australian military's infantry core, became a Catholic two months ago, at Easter, inside the chapel where he experienced his first Mass.

The World Youth Day in Lisbon will be his first international experience of Catholicism.

“At the start of the year I didn't even know what World Youth Day was,” Bryce said.

“My sponsor, Maddie (Luciani) told me about her experience and how it impacted her and her faith journey, and that it really strengthened her faith.

“I thought it would be really awesome to go on something like this after I was received into the Church, to go to those holy places, and to build my own spiritual faith.”

Bryce will join eight other ACU students, as well as 35 students from the University of Notre Dame Australia, on the pilgrimage to Lisbon. On the way, they will follow the footsteps of some of Europe's most notable saints and scholars in Paris, Lourdes, Avila, and Fatima.

“The thing I'm really excited for is to walk where the saints walked, because I find the history about the saints in general in the Catholic Church to be really interesting,” Bryce said.

“The saints were these people who dedicated themselves wholly, in their entire lives, to bringing themselves closer to God and to connect God's teachings.”

When curiosity becomes faith

Bryce said he was taught the basics of Christianity in primary school, but it wasn't until later in life that he started exploring Catholicism.

“I found the more I interacted with the Church and God, and learnt more about Scripture, the less I needed to fill my life with things such as focusing too much on material things, and having bad habits,” he said.

“It eventually led to me becoming Catholic.”

Although he chose to enrol at a Catholic university, he never expected it would be the place where he became a Catholic.

“When I first came to ACU, I could see the campus chapel. I would always walk past it, I was fascinated by it, but I spent a lot of time in the library to start off with,” Bryce said.

“I remember one day when Fr Harry Chan, the old chaplain, was here, he was running a Mass, and I just thought, I might as well attend and see what it's like.”

The next day, Fr Chan approached him, asking if he could see himself becoming a Catholic in the future.

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“I said I was really interested in that. From there he gave me the YouCat and my journey began,” Bryce said.

He was received into the Catholic Church at Easter Vigil (April 8) in the chapel at ACU Banyo in front of family and friends.

“Of course it was very nerve-wracking to stand up and receive your sacraments in front of all those people, but after you do it, you feel a sense of accomplishment,” Bryce said.

“After the service was over, when all the formalities were done, everyone started going outside the chapel and they started welcoming me into the family, and that was, I have to say, one of the best moments of my life, just feeling that welcoming warmth.”

As a new Catholic, Bryce feels the overwhelming size of the universal Church.

“From a surface level, I remember looking at the Catholic Church when I wasn’t Catholic, and I would put it into one box, but there’s so much more to it,” Bryce said.

“There are different parts of the Church where things are slightly different in their practice, and just the scale of that, if you were to compare it to other denominations, it’s significant and pronounced.

“Admittedly I still have a lot to learn about the Catholic faith, I’ve really only learnt the basics, but hopefully I can come back from World Youth Day with a lot more knowledge to share with the community here at ACU.”

Millions expected to gather in Lisbon

World Youth Day in Lisbon, to be held from 1 – 6 August, will be the Catholic Church’s first global event since the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

Lisbon is expected to welcome 1.5 million young Catholics from more than 120 countries, including more than 3000 pilgrims from Australia. Pope Francis will be attending his fourth World Youth Day since he began his pontificate 10 years ago.

Occurring every two to three years, World Youth Day was initiated by Pope St John Paul II in 1985 as a worldwide encounter with the Holy Father. It is celebrated at a local diocesan level annually, and since 2021, on the Feast of Christ the King.

ACU Vice-President Fr Anthony Casamento CSMA said the university community would be praying for its students as they prepared for their pilgrimage to Lisbon.

“Since the first World Youth Day in 1985, young people from all over the world have travelled to a nominated city to pray, worship and celebrate their Catholic faith together with the Holy Father,” Fr Casamento said.

“Over the years, ACU has regularly encouraged our students to go on pilgrimage to World Youth Day to experience the universal nature of the Catholic Church, and to receive the graces offered by going on a pilgrimage, particularly to have a renewed encounter with Christ.

“Both the ACU and UNDA communities are praying for our students they prepare for this momentous journey.”

Bryce Kathage is available for interview.

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