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# French preparations before World Youth Day 2016 in Kraków

I will try to give you an overview of the French preparation for the 2016 World Youth Day in Kraków. We know that many pilgrims from France will come here. This is also because we had World Youth Day in Paris in 1997 and could see that something changed in our Church afterwards. At that time I was a young novice in my religious community in Paris and could remember that this was a very strong spiritual experience. For many young French Catholics World Youth Day is a dreaming adventure, something very present in our youth pastoral care. What I can say is that World Youth Day in our Church is a very powerful and collaborative project which unites all kinds of groups of young people from all our dioceses and different ecclesial communities or movements. They all want to do something for the event. We have an opportunity to work together based on the strong ecclesiology of communion to help a lot of young French come to World Youth Day and discover this experience for themselves. In our French Bishops' Conference, I am responsible for the National Service for Youth Evangelization and Vocations. Long time ago, French bishops decided to begin extensive national preparations to help all dioceses and

movements to organize World Youth Day. We would like to offer World Youth Day as a gift to the young generation. We believe it will be a fruitful event so our objective in France is to offer it to many young people in a very strong missionary manner. As Pope Francis declared, in Kraków we will try to give young people – also those who may have some problems, have no money or live in difficult conditions – an opportunity so that not only young Catholics, deeply involved in the Church, may participate in the event. This is our objective this year, especially as it is the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Therefore, there are – as Gregory said – sixty thousands young French who want to participate, as well as eighty bishops. In France we have around one hundred dioceses and each diocese will form a group. Consequently, we are going to have one hundred groups from dioceses and fifty groups from new movements and religious communities. Most of the bishops in France are very close to young people and they want to be in Kraków with them. In France we can see that World Youth Day is deeply integrated with our pastoral care for youth. We are developing this care and trying to integrate it into World Youth Day. We want to prepare well for the Day. Our experience is that it is an excellent opportunity to give responsibility to young people. It is me who is speaking here but in fact I should give the floor to Anne-Lise. She is a young lady who is preparing World Youth Day with me. She is a full-time coordinator who – within the National Service – shares responsibility with me. We have a national team of young people who are committed to the preparations and so is true for each diocese and group. You can see some of our national teams here. We will try to give our World Youth Day groups and leaders a lot of support. The most important for us is the spiritual and pedagogical preparations for the Day. While coming to Kraków, we need to organize transport but the preparations for World Youth Day are not only about logistics. We really want to emphasize its spiritual dimension and that is why we strive to provide our young pilgrims with many tools online. We have a guidebook, a website and many other aids for groups to support their spiritual preparations. Last but not least, we have different committees for communications and logistics. We are also trying to authorize groups to find more pilgrims to come to Kraków because for many young people this can be a real challenge. Therefore, while helping young people to

prepare for the meeting, it is very important for us to tell them: “This is another World Youth Day. You may have been to Rio and Madrid. Even though it is always the same type of event, each country is different, it has got its own unique culture and the Church looks a bit different. So coming to World Youth Day in Rio is not the same as coming to Poland.” We are trying to emphasize the discovery of the country which hosts us. We give people information about Poland’s history, culture, language and Church because we believe that this is the key to the fruitful meeting. We are all Christians. However, with regards to many subjects, we do not necessarily have exactly the same point of view. Even in Europe, which is now challenged by migration and other serious issues, we do not have everywhere the same kind of realities and analysis. It is very important for us to help young French not to judge but to listen to your point of view and to understand **why you are saying what you are saying** – the impact of history on your today’s life. For instance, we are providing our group leaders with training about the Shoah as most of the groups will want to go to Auschwitz. We think this is very important not only to take them to the camp but also to pray together and to be with them in this difficult experience. We know that we are now dealing with the digital generation and are working with it using Internet, Twitter or Facebook. We think that World Youth Day is a very good opportunity to help young people. In France we have a very secularized society. Many people even say that we live in a post-secular era. It is also very important to develop relationships with the media to communicate about WYD and the Church. Each of our groups has chosen one diocese in Poland. Perhaps you know that the concept of diocesan days came into being during the 1997 World Youth Day in Paris. We believe that this stage of World Youth Day is very important. Interestingly, Poland is not so far away from France. Most of our group leaders went to their own dioceses to prepare for the Day. It is important for us because we have a big group – sixty thousands young people. We know that there will be some problems. We always try to be united in faith and believe that the Holy Spirit is doing its work. But we are responsible and want to prepare everything as best as we can for the sake of security. We are making our preparations in liaison with the French Embassy in Warsaw and have spoken about security to our

foreign ministry. Maybe, in July in Kraków, you will meet some French people wearing our T-shirts. We would like to thank Poland for taking up the challenge of the organization of World Youth Day in Kraków because it is a real gift for our French Church. Not only for young people, who are of course the priority. World Youth Days are designed not only for the young but also for their parents and grandparents – for the whole Church. A lot of people are interested in this year's World Youth Day and support the event with their prayers and money. A great number of French people will participate in it through TV and other media. Therefore, we can share the experience of the Day not only with those who will come to Kraków but with many others.