



# Hearts on fire, faith in focus

**BY MARIE ROHDE**

Phil Hurley was just a typical college student when he arrived in Denver in 1993, one of a half-million young people to flood into the Mile-High City to attend World Youth Day. It would not be his last.

He went to Toronto in 2002, Cologne in 2005 in Sydney in 2008.

When youth from around the world gather in Madrid in August 2011, Phil Hurley will be there, too.

But this time, it will be quite different. This time he'll go as a Jesuit priest, as the youth and young adult director for the Apostleship of Prayer and as a member of the planning team for Americans going to WYD and for Magis, a gathering sponsored by Jesuits to be held in Spain the week before World Youth Day.

## **Maryland Jesuit Phillip Hurley, works to energize young people through Apostleship of Prayer and World Youth Day**

World Youth Day, says Fr. Hurley, can be profoundly moving.

The first World Youth Day provided Fr. Hurley with an oasis when he was feeling, as many young adults do, as if he was in a spiritual desert. "It was in the Rocky Mountains and people from all over the world were there," Fr. Hurley recalled. Although the words of Pope John Paul II moved him, but so did the witness of the community of



young Catholics.

“What I saw was that we are called to Jesus, less as individuals than as a community,” Fr. Hurley said. “I found myself having conversations with people about belief and faith.”

At a small gathering in a Denver church led by a group of Franciscans, a seed was planted.

“The Franciscans were so dynamic, caring and prayerful and in an instant it struck me that was how I wanted to be,” Fr. Hurley recalled. “It freaked me out. I immediately thought, I’m not worthy! I can’t do this!”

Fr. Hurley sought out a Franciscan brother who advised him to go back to college, build on his relationship with God and not worry so much.

### Discerning his next step

He returned to Baltimore to finish his studies at Loyola College (now University) and decide what his vocation was. Joining an ecumenical prayer group helped. The discussions about faith helped him focus his prayer. “I wanted to see if God had anything to do with the direction of my life,” he explained.

Should he get married and raise a family? he wondered. He was dating a member of his prayer group at the time. “Marriage and family, the goodness of all of that was very attractive,” he said. Ultimately, he realized his calling was to the priesthood — something his girlfriend helped him discern. “I attended her wedding and she was at my ordination,” Fr. Hurley said. “We are good friends.”

In 1997, he joined the Society of Jesus and began the rigorous studies that led to his ordination in 2008.

Along the way, he was able to attend several World Youth Day gatherings. He knows first-hand

how powerful they can be, and how much fun.

For the past year Fr. Hurley, 35, has been in Milwaukee, as the youth and young adult director for the American office of the Apostleship of Prayer, an international prayer group for the pope more than 150 years old. He spends his time offering programs and retreats at parishes, schools and conferences.

## World Youth Day 2011

Doesn't Spain in August 2011 sound like a good idea? Hundreds of thousands of Catholic young people will be there from every continent. Pope Benedict will be there. Phillip Hurley, SJ, is hoping lots of Americans will participate in World Youth Day Aug. 16-21, 2011, as well as Magis 2011, a Jesuit gathering held for 10 days before WYD.

Want to learn more? Visit [www.apostleshipofprayer.org/world-youthday.html](http://www.apostleshipofprayer.org/world-youthday.html) or go to Facebook to learn more about U.S. groups planning to attend: <http://bit.ly/bOnYD3>.

You can link to these pages through the province website, [www.mdsj.org](http://www.mdsj.org)





## IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

Scenes from the first Hearts on Fire event held in a Milwaukee suburb in mid-June. Fr. Hurley speaks at the podium, with band member Michael Rossman, SJ, and chats with participants during a break.

*Photos by Rory Gillespie*

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*PHILLIP HURLEY, SJ*

### **Planning for World Youth Day**

At the request of the Jesuit Conference, which oversees apostolates for Jesuits throughout the United States, Fr. Hurley is helping with the planning of the Magis, the Jesuit celebration to be held in Madrid, Spain during the week before the World Youth Day gathering in August 2011.

For the past several World Youth Days, Jesuits of the host country have organized an extended introductory program of prayer, pilgrimage, cultural immersion and service called Magis. These activities take place in the week before the WYD events. The Apostleship of Prayer will be involved with groups from the U.S. going both to Magis and World Youth Day when these spectacular events occur in the future.

An international group of some 3,000 young Catholics, most from Jesuit schools, are expected to attend Magis. They will break down into groups of 30 or so and focus on Jesuit spirituality. "Some will go on a pilgrimage," he said. "Others will be involved in social justices is-sues, focus on arts or spirituality and prayer."

Magis also will also provide friendship before the World Youth Day celebration that is expected to attract a million or more visitors.

Through Facebook and email, Fr. Hurley is still in

touch with people he met at World Youth Day celebrations in Toronto in 2002, Cologne in 2005 and Sydney in 2008.

One special memory for Fr. Hurley was a music service in Sydney. A man from Singapore played the piano, one of the singers was from Croatia, another was from Australia. Fr. Hurley and a student from Fordham University played guitars. "It was a beautiful moment, a reminder that Christ was gathering us together," Fr. Hurley said.

### **Hearts on Fire tour**

This summer Fr. Hurley and four other young Jesuit priests and seminarians are paving the way for both Magis and World Youth Day by resurrecting an old Jesuit tradition – the Jesuit Mission Band, a sort of parish revival that had been dormant since the 1960s.

The young Jesuits are targeting 18- to 35-year-olds and went to five Mid-western cities with their "Hearts On Fire" tour throughout the summer.

The first event was held in the basement of St. Monica's Church in Whitefish Bay, a Milwaukee suburb. About 60 people showed up, most having learned about it from Facebook or Fr. Hurley's webpage.

Unlike Jesuits of the past, Fr. Hurley was obliged to explain that while he and his colleagues refer to themselves as a "band of brothers," they aren't a rock band.

It's not just youthfulness that binds Hurley to his audience. The Sykesville, Md., native grew up Catholic and is grateful for the support of his family, recalling the influence of his grandmother, Patricia O'Neill Hurley, as the one who convinced him to go to that first World Youth Day in Denver. And that made all the difference.

"I had a foundation for my faith but it was not a central part of my life," Fr. Hurley said. "For me, my faith came into focus in Denver and I recognized the importance of having a community."

*Marie Rohde is a Milwaukee-based writer.*