



World Youth Day

COMMITTEE ON LAITY, MARRIAGE, FAMILY LIFE AND YOUTH

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April 25, 2013, *Feast of St. Mark*

Dear World Youth Day pilgrims and families,

The bishops of the United States are looking forward to traveling with you to the international celebration of World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro on July 23-28. Our new Holy Father, Pope Francis, is also anticipating this great event, saying, "Dear friends, I too am setting out on a journey with you, starting today, in the footsteps of Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI... Prepare well – prepare spiritually above all – in your communities, so that our gathering in Rio may be a sign of faith for the whole world." (*Vatican City, Palm Sunday, Mar. 24, 2013*)

In this time of preparation, it is also important to prepare for safety.

The bishops encourage the young pilgrims to be especially conscious of their surroundings while in Brazil. We advise all travelers to stay with their groups and to be attentive to the directions of their group leaders, World Youth Day volunteers, and the civic authorities. However, we also want to assure you that the local and international coordinators of World Youth Day have gone to great lengths to address the issue of safety.

Additional security personnel are being trained and readied for the large crowds expected to descend on Rio this summer. Federal, state and local government in Brazil and the event organizers are doing everything possible to assure the safety of World Youth Day pilgrims so that the experience may truly be prayerful and joyful.

Although we know that security risk exists in any large city, we want all the pilgrims to be aware that that the situation in Rio has changed considerably in the past few years. As *The New York Times* has reported: "*Starting in 2008, in advance of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics — Brazil is hosting both — Rio's government began an effort to wrest control from local drug gangs and install community police units (called U.P.P.'s) in its favelas. The result has been a significant decrease in crime, and an increase in tourism, as mom-and-pop restaurants, pousadas and music venues with gritty charm and unparalleled views are attracting visitors, Brazilians and foreigners alike, to the hillside communities.*"

Thank you for making this pilgrimage with the Holy Father and with millions of young Catholics from around the globe. My prayers, and the prayers of my brother bishops, go out to you as you practically and spiritually prepare for what promises to be an incredible experience of faith.

Faithfully in Christ,

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV, DD
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