

During World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal, a crowd listens at the *Praça do Comércio*. Young people from around the world gather at this square and elsewhere around the city for faith events and activities, such as musical performances.

Practical Kindness at World Youth Day

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Ella calmly greets young men and women in a bright, tiled city square. On this summer day with its unusual number of visitors, she asks a similar question each time:

“Would you guys like a bracelet?”

Ella, 17, hands out a bracelet with the name and logo of the Jesus Film Project®, a ministry of Cru®. Ezra, her 12-year-old brother, helps by giving people the same gift and by cutting red stickers, another little token of welcome, inside a tent.



Ella (left), Heather and Ezra, a family from Orlando, Florida, serve together at World Youth Day.



Heather hands out Jesus Film Project® bracelets to visitors at Praça Martim Moniz, one of Lisbon's many public squares.

At World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, bracelets, stickers and pins help Ella and Ezra introduce people to the Jesus Film Project® app. The brief connections start something — they draw people into conversations and show World Youth Day participants how they can use short films to tell others about Jesus.

Seemingly small gestures of kindness and encouragement, at a massive event, displayed God’s character among both World Youth Day participants and locals. More than 100 Agape Europe (the name of Cru in Western Europe), SHINE Europe (the high school ministry of Agape Europe), Jesus Film Project and Youth With a Mission staff members and volunteers gathered to help people know and communicate about Jesus in their daily lives. Even a short interaction mattered.



Volunteers at World Youth Day gather at the beginning of the week before fanning out to meet people in a Lisbon square. They hear from leaders and split into groups to pray. Staff members and students with Agape Europe and SHINE Europe traveled from several countries,

including Albania, Switzerland and a Ukrainian woman coming from Poland.



A group of people from Mexico creates a lively parade with music and excitement in the street.

World Youth Day gathers Catholic young people from around the world to one city about every three years.

During August 1-6, 2023, hundreds of thousands of people spent time in Lisbon for events including a pilgrimage to a

notable site and celebration of Mass. Some might seek a deeper connection with God.

Jesus Film Project's work offered partnership with Agape Europe in taking advantage of the opportunity for spiritual conversations with people from around the world.

Students and staff members involved in Agape Europe and SHINE Europe traveled from different countries to serve together in Lisbon. They introduced themselves to World Youth Day pilgrims at such places as tents for Instagram Reels, charging stations for phones, a contest tent, and a wall for writing life questions. This gave participants chances to talk with staff members and students. Each day, many conversations took place.

“People sitting down and thinking about their faith and thinking about who Christ is ... that's meaningful,” says Duarte Dias, National World Youth Day coordinator for Agape.



A guitar session breaks out in a square in Lisbon, bringing the sound of acoustic music to the bustle of walkers. Here and there, a participant in World Youth Day stands out in a crowd by carrying a guitar, even inside a cathedral.



A day at World Youth Day draws to a close with a nighttime concert.

Groups and individuals pass through the breezy square. Some tote backpacks, country flags, or even a maraca. Upbeat music blasts through speakers, in different languages, pumping the sound from a nearby stage.

Staff members and volunteers watch Jesus Film Project short films with people in a tent that provides an informational tour, and they talk about using the ministry's resources in conversations about faith. Jesus Film Project and Agape Europe partnered with Fundación Ramón

Pané, an organization that helps people share their faith, to take part in the event.



Dave Broadwell, with Jesus Film Project®, leads a training about short films for a group of World Youth Day participants. The size of groups watching one of these short films range from one or two people to a crowd of viewers overflowing onto the floor, outnumbering the chairs.



Harsim Zafra, a Cru® staff member, talks with two women near the entrance of the Jesus Film Project® tent. Angelique, his wife (far left), serves with Jesus Film Project and helped with efforts before and during World Youth Day.

Flexibility helps people make connections

“It’s a big deal!”

Ezra uses a few words to describe World Youth Day after watching YouTube videos to learn about the event at

home.

Heather, Ella and Ezra's mother, serves as a staff member with Jesus Film Project. Her husband, Binyam, also works at Cru's Orlando office. Heather's parents started following Jesus after an event when someone talked with them about Christ, and a love for missions has transferred through the generations of their family. So has a passion for cross-cultural experiences, which require adaptability and a willingness to learn.

SIDENOTE

Family Travels

Heather's family has a history of visiting new places on mission trips.

When the family initially gathers with other Jesus Film Project volunteers in a crowded hotel meeting room, they talk about why they wanted to come to World Youth Day. Ella gives an answer from her place on the floor that affirms her and Ezra's participation in the event.

"I'm on this trip because it's World Youth Day, and I'm a youth in the world," she says from her place on the floor.

"And also I enjoy being able to see different cultures and

being able to share faith within different parts of the world.”



Ezra (left), Ella and Heather climb a steep hill on their break from a volunteer shift. They adventure to new spots in the city while geocaching, a family activity in which they search for hidden objects.



Lisbon reaches high temperatures in the summer, with the heat climbing into the 90s Fahrenheit toward the end of World Youth Day.

Heather's family and others experienced World Youth Day for the first time. The temptation to feel discouraged might seem strong when conversations don't happen easily.

When Ella and Ezra don't know how to use the time, they find a way to bring people in by offering gifts. Cru staff members and volunteers remain flexible, serving alongside each other.

Little encouragements for daily life make a difference

Heather starts a conversation outside the Jesus Film Project tent with three young women. She shows the app and mentions the similarity of these films to videos on Instagram.

“The app is free,” she tells them. “All the tools are free.”

They huddle around Heather, looking down at her phone, then thank her as their conversation wraps up.



Heather (right) and Ella pray with Moses. He gives the women a gift from India.



Joanna Amaya (left) meets two young women in the subway station. While waiting for the gate to open, Joanna shows them a Jesus Film Project® short film. One reacts with tears in her eyes.

Inside the tent, a TV screen displays a chef creating a beautifully ornate dessert. Classical music floats through the air as the wordless “Delight” short film plays for a group of four young women from different countries, all studying in France.

One of them leans forward in her chair. Suddenly, splat! The little girl on the screen smashes her hand into the cake and ruins the dessert that her father, the chef, toiled over. A Jesus Film Project staff member asks questions, trying to help the friends draw spiritual conclusions. This helps people make deeper connections to the video, perhaps thinking about God as our caring Father.

SIDENOTE**[Asking Questions After Watching Short Films](#)**

A few questions help start conversations.

A young man and woman from the Czech Republic take a bracelet from Ella and then talk with staff members,

learning about the Jesus Film Project app. Ana*, the young woman, says she's thinking about using Jesus Film resources for her own growth.

"I would like to know Bible stories better," she says.



Matt Pursley (right) guides people through watching short films on iPads. Matt is a Jesus Film Project® staff member who organized the ministry's participation in World Youth Day.

Expressions of kindness bring opportunities for spiritual

reflections

One evening, Heather and her children stand in the plaza before the start of dinner, when staff members and volunteers form a line to fill plates with catered meals of savory meat or fish, vegetables and often potatoes. Ezra kindly waves to a man, who then walks up to the family.



Heather, Ella and Ezra enjoy rest at a gelato shop on the last night they volunteer at the plaza.

He asks about the pope coming. The family learns that Hassan* is not a World Youth Day participant, and he has more questions. Originally from the Middle East, Hassan follows a different religion, but he's curious about Christianity.

"I respect, I like Jesus, I love Jesus," Hassan says. "I haven't had the chance for someone to explain to me."

Hassan and Heather talk about sacrifices, and Heather explains about Jesus' sacrifice to cover sin. She shares who Jesus is: the way, the truth and the life. Heather encourages Hassan to seek God and bring Him questions.

"I think that God wants us to ask because He does not want to be far from us," Heather says.

Hassan leans in as the music in the plaza adds noise to the conversation. He holds a phone up to his ear to hear the "JESUS" film in his language.



A group plays Uno during a relaxing moment. Throughout the week, young men and women pause to sit on sidewalks in large crowds that make it difficult to navigate around them.



A side street remains quiet, hidden from the flurry of activity around the rest of the city.

Hassan returns another day and talks about the gospel with Duarte and another staff member. And Hassan gets connected to a church in Lisbon.

The plaza is located in an area with a high population of African and Asian immigrants. So some local men — many of whom came to Portugal from other countries — sit on the outskirts of the plaza, watching all of the activity.

Staff members and volunteers refuel with water in the heat and with hearty dinners. Some of them also pray for people around the plaza.



Amy, a staff member with Cru®, starts a conversation with three young women from France in a park in Lisbon's Belem neighborhood. She asks them about their expectations for World Youth Day and shows them a short film. During their spiritual conversation, the young women indicate a desire to start following Jesus.

Other steps to meet people happened at a local park, where a group traveled on public transportation packed

with passengers. On the way there, shouts and songs burst forth as men and women navigate through the streets and a crowded subway station. One group of young people in the park plays the Uno card game, while others relax.

Jesus Film Project staff members and volunteers introduce themselves to groups of people sitting on the grass or on benches, asking them where they're from, connecting personally and showing a short film. As Ella walks through the tree-dotted oasis, she meets a group of about eight young men and women in a shaded spot.



Gayle (in lavender), along with Amy (in white hat), show a Jesus Film Project® short film to a group of Portuguese volunteers helping with the

event.

She learns they're a church group from Brazil, and with a friendly demeanor, they want to take a photo. Through a bubbly young woman's translation into Portuguese, Ella tells the group about Jesus Film Project short films, and they turn their eyes to a small phone screen to watch "Delight."

They reflect on the kind reaction of the father to the daughter destroying his dessert. One man says he feels grateful for the love and patience that God has with His people.

"He loves you and He cares about you," Ella tells the group. She encourages them to talk about this truth with people around them as well.

The young woman translating and others in the group respond positively. Later they move closer to one another to pray.

Other people at World Youth Day thought of ways they could communicate about faith by using Jesus Film Project resources, like a man from Sri Lanka who wanted to share the Jesus Film Project tools with youth in his church.

Unity forms with a shared focus

Weeks after World Youth Day, Ella, Ezra and Heather reflect on what they observed.



Before attending World Youth Day, Ella (left), Heather and Ezra talked about the upcoming experience and came away with an interest to travel to the next World Youth Day in 2027 in Seoul, South Korea.

Heather recalls meeting a man in a monastery while taking a tour around Lisbon, encouraged by his perspective of the event.

“We all come together here,” he had said to her, “and Christ is the center of it all.”

Duarte also reflects on World Youth Day and its bigger scope.

“A common thread of our ministries was to make a meaningful collaboration within the different departments

within Cru or Agape,” he says, adding that the goal is to make Jesus known in the whole world.

*Names changed.

Editor's Note: To protect the privacy of the minor children named in this article, the family's last name has not been included.



World Youth Day celebrants gather in Praça Martim Moniz as the sun sets over Lisbon.

NEXT STEPS

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NEXT STEPS

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