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MEDIA RELEASE

Young deaf woman gives Pope Benedict XVI ‘her gift of deafness’

A 29 year old deaf woman from Sydney spoke of her ‘gift of deafness’ during the Evening Vigil with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI at Randwick Racecourse in Sydney last Saturday 19 July 2008.

Danni Wright, profoundly deaf, from Seven Hills, NSW was selected from all Catholic Australians to be one of the 7 young pilgrims from 7 different countries chosen to give testimonies to the Pope which focussed on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each pilgrim expressed in their native language how the gift was reflected in his or her own journey of faith.

Addressing an estimated physical audience of 223,000 people and international audience of 500 million, Danni Wright from Sydney presented in Auslan on the gift of knowledge which was interpreted into English. This is what she said:

“My name is Danni. I am from the beautiful city of Sydney! I hope you have all enjoyed your time here in my home town!

“As a young deaf person, I experience the world somewhat differently to many of my peers. Many people may think of deafness as an isolating experience - something to be pitied. Many people think that a deaf person is incapable of knowing the world and its beauty in its fullness.

“I have experienced deafness, though, as a gift - as one of the many gifts I have received from the hands of God.

“This gift of deafness has helped me to know the truth that God has created each of us with great love, that he delights in the variations between his children, and that he calls each of us on our own journey.

“Through my deafness, God has also given me a deep knowledge of what it means to be patient and attentive to those who are not considered important in the eyes of the world. I have received Christ’s patience and attentive love, and I strive to make His patience and love known to others.

“God asks of each of us ONLY what He knows we can do. Never refuse the gift that God gives to you, and know that He sends His Spirit to help us along the way!”

At the end of each testimony, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI led a prayer that asked the Holy Spirit for that particular gift. The pilgrims responded with the refrain from ‘Receive the Power.’

The testimonies of the Pilgrims participants included Wisdom by 19 year old Marie Štěpánová from Czech Republic (aged 19), Understanding by Vasin Manasurangul from Thailand (aged 24), Knowledge by Danni Wright from Sydney (aged 29), Counsel by Petar Gakovic from Serbia (aged 21), Courage - Jose Carcamo Soto from Chile (aged 30), Piety -

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Carina Broucek from Austria (aged 19) and Awe by Sean Jesudason from Sri Lanka (in Australia for four years) (aged 23).

Damian Lacey, CEO of Deaf Children Australia says: “Our belief at Deaf Children Australia is that deafness is no barrier. Danni’s words on this important occasion are an inspiration to us all, and an example of why our organisations are here and what we strive to achieve. In celebrating her deafness, she personifies our vision of ‘A life to be lived’, confident in the knowledge that she is living a full and rich life.

For young deaf people everywhere who look to World Youth Day as a symbol of their aspirations, Danni gave a promise of hope for the future. A young deaf woman - connected, empowered and achieving –is a great reinforcement of our vision for all deaf people.

In a world where people with disabilities feel increasingly invisible, it is moving to witness a young woman embrace her deafness as a life affirming experience. To celebrate her deafness before an estimated audience of 500 million makes this young woman a truly inspirational person to the many millions of deaf people around the world and indeed, to us all.

While all seven gift bearers spoke to the Pope and congregation in their native language, only Danni’s address was interpreted into English, ensuring that English speakers around the world took home her message of the ‘gift of deafness’. Online messages have repeatedly called her speech a highlight of World Youth Day.

Deaf Children Australia has been providing information, advocacy, support services and educational resources to enrich the lives of deaf and hard of hearing children and young adults for 144 years. Deaf Children Australia represents the needs of 16,000 deaf and hearing impaired children throughout Australia. As a not-for-profit organisation, their service is made possible with the support of volunteers, the community, businesses and government financial grants.

For more information on Deaf Children Australia, please call 1800 645 916 or log on to www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au. For more information about this press release or to request an interview, please call Julie Postance on 9539 5362 or jpostance@deafchildren.org.au.