



# PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

## DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

# CHAPTER 12

## SECTION 1



## WHY?

Why is youth formation a Diocesan planning priority?

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#### THERE IS AN URGENCY

In his *Address to DREs, Catechists, and Youth Ministers* given on Thursday, November 2, 2017 Bishop Shelton J. Fabre said: “A recent CARA study surveyed U.S. participants ages 15 to 25 who were raised Catholic but who no longer identify as such, as well as another of group of self-identified U.S. Catholic adults 18 and older. Nearly two-thirds of participants in the youth and young adult study reported ‘losing the faith’ between the ages of 10 and 17. **A startling number – 23% – stated that they had ceased believing the Catholic faith before the age of 10. Half of the surveyed group now self-identify as atheist, agnostic or without any religious affiliation.**”

He continued: “There is an **urgency**. The situation we are facing with our young people demands that we produce an appropriate response. We must look for new ways to engage our young people. We must find new opportunities that allow them to encounter the love of Jesus personally. We must be ever more creative so that they take steps forward and grow in that relationship. In short our efforts to reach young people in the area of catechesis must be renewed and adapted. The days of us speculating whether things should change have passed us by. The days of us merely complaining about ‘the culture’ or ‘how hard things are’ are gone.”

What is Bishop Fabre referring to? Let's take a look at the facts.

NATIONAL STATISTICS: *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*

Those raised Catholic who no longer identify as Catholic      1977 7.5 million      1997 17.3 million      2017 30 million

NATIONAL STATISTICS: *Forming Intentional Disciples* by Sherry Weddell

The 2014 Pew Research Center study "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" indicates the fastest-growing religious demographic in the United States to be "unaffiliated" (aka "nones").

- One out of every four American adults say they are not affiliated with any religious group or tradition.
- Note: In 2008, merely 10 years ago, the statistic was one in six.

The 2014 Pew Research Center study "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" further indicates the crisis of 18-29 year olds as "unaffiliated" (aka "nones").

- 39% of American adults 18-29 say they are not affiliated with any religious group or tradition
- 30% of Americans who were raised Catholic are still "practicing."
- 32% of Americans who were raised Catholic — 1/3 of all Catholic adults — no longer consider themselves Catholic.

Catholics leaving the Catholic Church for non-denominational or protestant communities

- 52% of those attending non-denominational communities are former Catholics

Why people leave the Catholic Church to be "unaffiliated" (aka "nones")

- 71% "I just gradually drifted away"
- 65% "Stopped believing in the Church's teachings."
- 42% "Don't believe in God"
- 33% "Have not found the right religion"
- 27% "Because of the sexual-abuse scandal"

The crisis with youth and young adults

- **79% of cradle Catholics are no longer Catholic by the age of 23**
- 50% of cradle Catholics ages 18-35 are no longer Catholic
- 7% of cradle Catholics ages 18-35 practice their Faith on a regular basis

WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR IN OUR DIOCESE?

To help us focus on our mission Bishop Fabre embarked upon an intentional commitment to listen. During a span of 14 months, beginning in the spring of 2015 and ending in the summer of 2016, Bishop Fabre listened to his priests and his people. Throughout this process he would often remind those he was listening to that, "You can't say you're listening unless you are open to being changed by what you heard." While he had an intuition of what he was going to hear he remained committed to being open to whatever was said. He remained open to being changed by what he heard. What he heard shaped his understanding of what God was saying to us. His understanding helped to make clear God was asking us to **focus**.

Bishop Fabre hosted 20 listening sessions in venues strategically placed throughout the diocese. Over 1,000 laity participated either in person, on paper, or on-line. Underneath the emerging themes was a plea from the laity: **focus**. Of all the themes that emerged from listening sessions these were two that specifically got his attention. First, there were explicit comments expressing the desire for better adult formation.

Second, there were explicit comments expressing the desire for better **youth formation**. We heard: “My kids don’t go to Mass anymore. Their friends don’t go to Mass anymore. Where are our youth?” We heard parents say that they want more themselves so as to better help their children. We heard hundreds reveal an ache for more. We heard that youth themselves say they are hungry to be fed. Loud and clear we heard the call to **focus**, and to **focus on our youth**.

A short time after the listening sessions concluded, the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux began a partnership with the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI). One of the resources offered to us by CLI is the *Disciple Maker Index* (DMI). The DMI is a 75 question survey known as the *Disciple Maker Index* assessing where parishioners are in the relationship with God and how, and if, the parish is helping them.

In March 2017 nearly 4,500 Houma-Thibodaux parishioners participated in the DMI. The results of the DMI clearly confirmed the call to **focus on youth formation**.

- 77% Parents responded indicating that their children were in parish-based youth formation
- 94% Parents expressed explicit or implicit belief that they as parents have a responsibility to be involved in the religious formation of their children
- 66% Parents expressed explicit or implicit concern with their lack of “strong confidence” at what is happening in our parishes regarding youth formation

Returning to his *Address to DREs, Catechists, and Youth Ministers* given on Thursday, November 2, 2017 Bishop Shelton J. Fabre said:

- “There is a lot at stake – the salvation of souls. Youth ministry, in whatever form, whether it be C.C.D. sessions or Youth Ministry retreats, is about one thing: the battle for souls and the eternal salvation of youth. Our ministry to young people is threatened by historic challenges and requires us to respond. We have to change our methods. We cannot minister in 2017 the way we did 20, 15, or 10 years ago. I, as your Bishop, can no longer in good conscience accept the words: “Well, if we only reach one person ...”. While I truly care about and rejoice in that one person, I nonetheless grieve for those we did not reach. Their souls – all of their souls – are worth fighting for. There is an urgency for us – all of us – every parish in our diocese. We must adapt. **There is an urgency.**”
- “The letters ‘C.C.D.’ initialize the words ‘Confraternity of Christian Doctrine’. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine was established 1562 for the purpose of giving religious instruction. Leading into the 16th century, the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer formed the general basis of religious instruction. Catholics had to know them by heart, and parish priests were exhorted to explain them on Sundays and festivals.”
- “Of course, we all know that the 16th century was marked with two major historical movements: the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation. It was at the Council of Trent that the Church took steps to intentionally answer questions posed by the Reformation, as well as to establish structures to catechize the faithful in the Truths of the Faith. It was there, flowing from the grace of the Council of Trent, that C.C.D. – the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine – was born.”

- **“C.C.D. is a 16th century initiative. However, 16th century structures, if they are still structured as they were at their origin, may not be relevant to 21st century problems. ... Yes, there is an urgency. Today we must re-envision how we minister to young people. We can call it whatever we want. We can still call it C.C.D. We can still call it the youth group. We call it whatever we want. I am not as concerned with what we call the ministry as I am with what we do in the ministry. “**

#### WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR FROM THE HOLY FATHER?

Pope Francis has been one of the most outspoken advocates for a change in the pastoral approach of the Church as it relates to all aspects of ministry in his document *Evangelii gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). This is where the often-quoted theme of being a missionary disciple comes from, and this theme has been adopted in a profound way for the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux as the pastoral planning process has progressed. So often the idea of being a missionary seems to be attached to the idea of being a missionary to other places that have not heard the Gospel or that need a renewed understanding or experience of the Holy Spirit. At this juncture, we are being called to also be missionaries of time, where we are bold enough to evangelize not only strange places but also generations that have no place of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, or the sacred.

With this in mind, we can hear the call of Pope Francis more clearly to “abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” (*Evangelii gaudium* no. 33)

The culture that our youth find themselves being formed in is unlike any culture that has been seen before. The generation that they belong to is arguably one of the first that can be classified as a post-Christian culture (a culture that wants the objectives and structures of Christianity without the Christ that they rightly belong to). The way that the Gospel is proclaimed often has to go beyond the traditional structures that are in place in the Church. Pope Francis continues, “Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand.” (*Evangelii gaudium* no. 105) We have to speak a language of which we are currently ignorant. We have to understand a culture of which we are currently strangers. We have to embrace a generation who are often propped up as entitled, but in reality are forgotten.

One place of hope can be found from the young people themselves, by engaging them. In October 2018, the bishops of the world will gather in Rome for the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. The preparatory document to be used by the bishops recognizes, “In pastoral activity, young people are not objects but agents. Oftentimes, society sees them as non-essential or inconvenient. The Church cannot reflect such an attitude, because all young people, without exception, have the right to be guided in life’s journey. ... The Church herself is called to learn from young people.” By way of example, the bishops invited 300 young representatives of the world’s youth to write a letter representing the input of the youth for the synod. The first two points within the document reveal how young people of the world desire authentic, real community which forms their personality and facilitates relationships with other people. This is what they desire, so how can we facilitate this connection between youth, who are sold the counterfeit of connection through social media experienced alone on a 5 inch screen?

## WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR FROM THE US BISHOPS?

The USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis has the responsibility of:

1. Encouraging and supporting efforts of evangelization and catechesis by fostering the distribution and implementation of both universal Church documents on catechesis and evangelization and also related documents and resources developed by the bishops of the United States
2. Supporting catechetical efforts in the Church in the United States by developing policies, guidelines, and resources for a bishop to use in his diocese
3. Overseeing the use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church especially in regard to the development of catechetical materials that present Church teachings authentically and completely
4. Providing consultation on evangelization and catechetical issues when requested, including advising and representing the bishops

In the past, they have contributed the following resources:

*In Support of Catechetical Ministry (2000)*

*Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age (2008)*

*Adaptation of Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age (2010)*

*Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization (2012)*

Most recently, in 2017, they released two landmark documents: *Living as Missionary Disciples* and the *National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets*. The *National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets* provide an assortment of assessment instruments to determine preparation and formation of those already engaged in various ministries of evangelization and catechesis on the parish level. In this document we read:

“Pope Francis, in the document that reflected the work of the Synod on the New Evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium*, situates the ministry of catechesis within the process of missionary discipleship.” (no. 1)

- “This is clearly a time of immense possibilities for the Catholic Church in the United States as new directions for evangelization, catechesis, and missionary activity have been identified within the process of discipleship formation. The renewal of emphasis on evangelization and catechesis within the context of the new evangelization has produced many praiseworthy initiatives and efforts in the formation of youth, adults, and children. As such, it has been a remarkable period for the reorientation and promotion of evangelization and catechesis within the universal Church.” (no. 2)
- “Before we take another step, we must acknowledge that we cannot talk about catechesis without talking about evangelization. In his apostolic exhortation, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI articulated an important principle for the renewal of catechesis when he described catechesis as a work of evangelization in the context of the mission of the Church.” (no. 3)

- “Catechists therefore need to embrace a larger role as evangelizing agents who are skilled in the process of evangelization and carefully equipped to discern the opportune moments when a person’s initial faith is ready to be deepened with catechesis. Catechists themselves need to be evangelized in an ongoing way as well. And they need to remain vigilant to build on initial acts of evangelization with a catechesis that is appropriate for each person at that stage of his or her faith journey.” (no. 4)
- “Catechists, who are the Church’s witnesses to God’s existence, message, and loving presence, enable people in all these moments to meet the living God and to form a relationship that can continue to grow through a lifetime. Their apostolic work springs from the Sacrament of Baptism and is strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation.” (no. 5)
- “After initial discernment, these baptized members of Christ’s Body, the Church, who accept a special calling from the Holy Spirit, are affirmed and commissioned by the bishop and his delegates to serve the Church through the ministry of catechist.” (no. 6)
- “In confirming their call, the Church commits itself to an ongoing covenant with catechists to support and train them as disciples called to catechize.” (no. 7)

#### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IF AND WHEN

The question is not *if* we need to do something but *when* do we need to do it. The aforementioned statistical analysis of the current state of affairs within the Catholic Church of America graphically illustrates **the urgency of now**. The historic exodus of today’s youth leaving the Church is best described as a crisis. Youth are leaving the Church for a number of reasons; there is no single answer to explain the crisis. While the crisis illustrates an **urgency**, we should be careful to not react compulsively out of fear.

Best-selling author Matthew Kelly once said: “Everything that is wrong about the Catholic Church can be fixed by everything that is right about the Catholic Church.” Of course, we know that there is nothing wrong with the Church Herself, the Sacraments, and the Bible, etc. However, there is something very wrong about the trends we see gripping the church in America. All of what we see requires us to look in our hearts. The most important question is not: “What is *wrong* with the Catholic Church?” The most important question is: “What is *right* with the Catholic Church?”

We are founded by Jesus Christ.

We have been given the very Word of God.

Every Mass we make presents the absolute real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

We stand on the shoulders of Saints.

We have weathered the storm for over two millennia and have learned from our history how to respond to the present.

Everything about that is right.

We have a Pope that has been given to us at this stage of history to confront these problems. He has called us to **focus**, to **make disciples**, and we have a moral obligation to start with the **youth** that have been entrusted to us. That’s **youth formation**. That’s a call to focus on youth formation.

The Church has echoed this call to **focus**.

The people of this diocese have asked for it.

An analysis of their needs illustrates the need for us to urgently address **youth formation**.

While we could be busy about many things, what could we focus on that would be more important than helping to stop the exodus of our youth?

**Youth formation is a diocesan planning priority, and perhaps one of the most important, and should not be seen as another option among many. Again I ask: While we could be busy about many things, what could we focus on that would be more important than helping to stop the exodus of our youth?**

Romans, chapter 10 states: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?”

We have been entrusted with a mission. Perhaps we could read Romans 10 with a reverent enhancement designed to help us appreciate the call: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not *come to know*? And how can they know Him ... unless their parish helps them?”

We have been entrusted with a mission. Now, at this stage of our history, we are called to respond. Let us do so with **focus**. Let us begin with **youth formation**.