



# PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

## DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

# CHAPTER 12

## SECTION 4



## WHAT?

### An analysis of today's youth ... from the youth themselves

To help us appreciate the reality of where today's youth are I invite us to listen to the experts: the youth themselves. They have insight into their experience of life that we adults do not have. Therefore, the remaining text within this section will be a representation of quotations from international synod on youth pre-synodal meeting.

As they say in the world of public speaking: "I now turn the floor over to ... the youth of our world."

INTERNATIONAL SYNOD ON YOUTH PRE-SYNODAL MEETING  
FINAL DOCUMENT FROM THE PRE-SYNODAL MEETING  
March 19-24, 2018

*All text below are direct quotes **from youth themselves***

### Introduction

- "It is important to note that these are the reflections of young people of the 21st century from various religious and cultural backgrounds. With this in mind, the Church should view these reflections not as an empirical analysis of any other time in the past, but rather as an expression of where we are now, where we are headed and as an indicator of what she needs to do moving forward."
- "These reflections were borne out of the meeting of more than 300 young representatives from around the world, convened in Rome March 19-24, 2018 at the inaugural Pre-Synodal Meeting of Young People and the participation of 15,000 young people engaged online through the Facebook groups."

## Part One: The Challenges and Opportunities of Young People in the World Today

### i. The Formation of Personality

- “Young people look for a sense of self by seeking communities that are supportive, uplifting, authentic and accessible: communities that empower them.”
- “The Church oftentimes appears as too severe and is often associated with excessive moralism. Sometimes, in the Church, it is hard to overcome the logic of ‘it has always been done this way’. We need a Church that is welcoming and merciful, which appreciates its roots and patrimony and which loves everyone, even those who are not following the perceived standards.”

### 4. Relationship with Technology

- “When referring to technology, one must understand the duality of its application. While modern advancements in technology have greatly improved our lives, one must be prudent with its usage. As with all things, reckless application can have negative consequences. While technology has, for some, augmented our relationships, for many others it has taken the form of an addiction, becoming a replacement for human relationship and even God. **Regardless, technology is now a permanent part of the life of young people and must be understood as such.** Paradoxically, in some countries technology and particularly internet is accessible while the most basic needs and services are still lacking.”
- “**The impact of social media in the lives of young people cannot be understated. Social media is a significant part of young people’s identity and way of life.** Digital environments have a great potential to unite people across geographical distances like never before. The exchange of information, ideals, values and common interests is now more possible. Access to online learning tools has opened up educational opportunities for young people in remote areas and has brought the world’s knowledge to one’s finger tips.”
- “**The duplicity of technology however, becomes evident when it leads to the development of certain vices.** This danger is manifested through isolation, laziness, desolation and boredom. It is evident that young people around the world are obsessively consuming media products. **Despite living in a hyper-connected world, communication among young people remains limited to those who are similar to them. There is a lack of spaces and opportunities to encounter difference.** Mass media culture still exercises a lot of influence over young people’s lives and ideals. With the advent of social media, this has led to challenges over the extent to which media companies have power over the lives of young people.”
- “Often, young people tend to separate their behavior into online and offline environments. It is necessary to offer formation to young people on how to live their digital lives. Online relationships can become inhuman. **Digital spaces blind us to the vulnerability of another human being and prevent us from our own self-reflection. Problems like pornography distort a young person’s perception of human sexuality. Technology used this way creates a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity.**”

- “Other risks include: the loss of identity linked to a misrepresentation of the person, a virtual construction of personality and the loss of grounded social presence. Furthermore, long-term risks include: the loss of memory, culture, and creativity before the immediacy of access to information and a loss of concentration linked to fragmentation. In addition, there exists a culture and dictatorship of appearances.”
  - “We offer two concrete proposals regarding technology. First, by engaging in a dialogue with young people, the Church should deepen her understanding of technology so as to assist us in discerning its usage. Moreover, the Church should view technology – particularly the internet – as a fertile place for the New Evangelization. The outcomes of these reflections should be formalized through an official Church document. Second, the Church should address the widespread crisis of pornography, including online child abuse, as well as cyber-bullying and the toll these take on our humanity.”
5. Search for Meaning in Life
- “Today, religion is no longer seen as the main stream through which a young person searches for meaning, as they often turn to other modern currents and ideologies. Scandals attributed to the Church – both real and perceived – affect the confidence of young people in the Church and in the traditional institutions for which she stands.”
  - “There is often great disagreement among young people, both within the Church and in the wider world, about some of her teachings which are especially controversial today. Examples of these include: contraception, abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation, marriage, and how the priesthood is perceived in different realities in the Church. What is important to note is that irrespective of their level of understanding of Church teaching, there is still disagreement and ongoing discussion among young people on these polemical issues. As a result, they may want the Church to change her teaching or at least to have access to a better explanation and to more formation on these questions. Even though there is internal debate, young Catholics whose convictions are in conflict with official teaching still desire to be part of the Church. Many young Catholics accept these teachings and find in them a source of joy. They desire the Church to not only hold fast to them amid unpopularity but to also proclaim them with greater depth of teaching.”
  - “Ultimately, many of us strongly want to know Jesus, yet often struggle to realize that He alone is the source of true self-discovery, for it is in a relationship with Him that the human person ultimately comes to discover him or herself. **Thus, we have found that young people want authentic witnesses – men and women who vibrantly express their faith and relationship with Jesus while encouraging others to approach, meet, and fall in love with Jesus themselves.**

## Part Two: Faith and Vocation, Discernment and Accompaniment

### 6. Young People and Jesus

- “The relationship of young people with Jesus is as varied as the number of young people on this earth. There are many young people who know and have a relationship with Jesus as their Savior and the Son of God...Others may not have such a relationship with Jesus but see Him as a moral leader and a good man. Many young people perceive Jesus as a historical figure, one of a certain time and culture, who is not relevant to their lives. Still others perceive Him as distant from the human experience, which for them is a distance perpetuated by the Church.”
- “One way to reconcile the confusions that young people have regarding who Jesus is involves a return to Scripture to understand more deeply **the person of Christ, His life, and His humanity**. Young people need to encounter the mission of Christ, not what they may perceive as an impossible moral expectation. However, they feel uncertain about how to do so. This encounter needs to be fostered in young people, which needs to be addressed by the Church.”

### 7. Faith and the Church

- “For many young people, faith has become private rather than communal, and the negative experiences that some young people have had with the Church have contributed to this. There are many young people who relate to God solely on a personal level, who are “spiritual but not religious”, or focused only on a relationship with Jesus Christ. For some young people, the Church has developed a culture which focuses heavily on members engaging with the institutional aspect of herself, not the person of Christ. Other young people view religious leaders as disconnected and more focused on administration than community-building, and still others see the Church as irrelevant. It can seem that the Church forgets that the people are the Church, not the building...Without this anchor of community support and belonging, young people can feel isolated in the face of challenges. There are many young people who do not feel the need to be part of the Church community and who find meaning to their life outside the Church.”
- “Unfortunately, there is a phenomenon in some areas of the world where young people are leaving the Church in large quantities. Understanding why is crucial in moving forward. Young people who are disconnected from or who leave the Church do so after experiencing indifference, judgment and rejection. **One could attend, participate in, and leave Mass without experiencing a sense of community or family as the Body of Christ. Christians profess a living God, but some attend Masses or belong to communities which seem dead.** Young people are attracted to the joy which should be a hallmark of our faith. **Young people express a desire to see a Church that is a living testimony to what it teaches and witnesses to authenticity on the path to holiness, which includes acknowledging mistakes and asking for forgiveness.** Young people expect leaders of the Church – ordained, religious, and lay – to be the strongest example of this. Knowing that models of faith are authentic and vulnerable allows young people to freely be authentic and vulnerable themselves. It is not to destroy the sacredness of their ministry, but so that young people might be inspired by them on the path to holiness.”

- **“On many occasions, young people have difficulty finding a space in the Church where they can actively participate and lead.** Young people interpret their experience of the Church as one where they are considered too young and inexperienced to lead or make decisions as they would only make mistakes. There is a need for trust in young people to lead and to be protagonists of their own spiritual journey. This is not just to imitate their elders, but to really take ownership of their mission and responsibility, lived out well. Movements and new communities in the Church have developed fruitful ways to not only evangelize young people, but also to empower them to be the primary ambassadors of the faith to their peers.”
- “Another common perception that many young people have is an unclear role of women in the Church. If it is difficult for young people to feel a sense of belonging and leadership in the Church, it is much more so for young women. To that end, it would be helpful for young people if the Church not only clearly stated the role of women, but also helped young people to explore and understand it more clearly.”

#### 8. The Vocational Sense of Life

- “The term “vocation” has become synonymous with the priesthood and religious life in the culture of the Church. While these are sacred calls that should be celebrated, it is important for young people to know that their vocation is by virtue of their life, and that each person has a responsibility to discern what it is that God calls them to be and to do. There is a fullness to each vocation which must be highlighted in order to open the hearts of young people to their possibilities.”
- “Young people of various beliefs see vocation as inclusive of life, love, aspiration, place in and contribution to the world, and way to make an impact. **The term vocation is not very clear to many young people;** hence there is need for greater understanding of the Christian vocation (the priesthood and religious life, lay ministry, marriage and family, role in society, etc.) and the universal call to holiness.”

#### 9. Vocational Discernment

- “Discerning one’s vocation can be a challenge, especially in light of misconceptions about the term. However, young people will rise to the challenge. Discerning one’s vocation can be an adventure along the journey of life. That being said, many young people do not know how to intentionally go about the process of discernment; **this is an opportunity for the Church to accompany them.**”
- “Many factors influence the ability of young people to discern their vocations, such as: the Church, cultural differences, demands of work, digital media, family expectations, mental health and state of mind, noise, peer pressures, political scenarios, society, technology, etc. **Spending time in silence, introspection and prayer, as well as reading the Scriptures and deepening self-knowledge are opportunities very few young people exercise. There is a need for a better introduction to these areas.** Engaging with faith-based groups, movements, and like-minded communities can also assist young people in their discernment.”

- “We recognize in particular the unique challenges faced by young women as they discern their vocation and place in the Church. Just as Mary’s “yes” to God’s call is fundamental to the Christian experience, young women today need space to give their own “yes” to their vocation. We encourage the Church to deepen its understanding of the role of women and to empower young women, both lay and consecrated, in the spirit of the Church’s love for Mary, the mother of Jesus.”

#### 10. Young People and Accompaniment

- **“Young people are looking for companions on the journey, to be embraced by faithful men and women who express the truth and allow young people to articulate their understanding of faith and their vocation. Such people do not need to be models of faith to imitate, but instead living testimonies to witness. Such a person should evangelize by their life. Whether they are familiar faces in the comfort of home, colleagues in the local community, or martyrs testifying to their faith with their very lives, there are many who could meet this expectation.”**
- “Qualities of such a mentor include: a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; is a confidant without judgement; actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; is deeply loving and self-aware; acknowledges their limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey.”
- “An especially important quality in a mentor is acknowledgement of their humanity – that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, the devastation may impact young people’s abilities to continue to engage with the Church.”
- **“Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person’s process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well...This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation.”**

### Part Three: The Church’s Formative and Pastoral Activity

#### II. The Manner of the Church

- **“Today’s young people are longing for an authentic Church.** We want to say, especially to the hierarchy of the Church, that they should be a transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community.”
- “A credible Church is one which is not afraid to allow itself be seen as vulnerable. The Church should be sincere in admitting its past and present wrongs, that it is a Church made up of persons who are capable of error and misunderstanding. The Church should condemn actions such as sexual abuse and the mismanagement of power and wealth. The Church should continue to enforce her no tolerance stance on sexual abuse within her institutions and her humility will undoubtedly raise its credibility among the world’s young people. If the Church acts in this way, then it will differentiate itself from other institutions and authorities which young people, for the most part, already mistrust.”



- “We desire that the Church spread this message through modern means of communication and expression. The young have many questions about the faith, but desire answers which are not watered down, or which utilize prefabricated formulations. We, the young Church, ask that our leaders speak in practical terms about controversial subjects such as homosexuality and gender issues, about which young people are already freely discussing without taboo. ... **An attractive Church is a relational Church.**”

#### 12. Young Leaders

- “The Church must involve young people in the decision-making process and offer them more leadership roles. These positions need to be on a parish, diocesan, national and international level. We strongly feel that we are ready to be leaders, who can grow and be taught by older members of the Church.”
- “We also strongly express a wish for a prominent creative voice. This creativity often finds itself in music, liturgy and the arts, but, at the moment this is an untapped potential, with the creative side of the Church often dominated by the older Church members.”
- “In all these aspects of Church life, young people wish to be accompanied and to be taken seriously as fully responsible members of the Church.” When we say, at Confirmation, that young people are adults in the Church, why don’t we treat them like they are?

#### 14. The Initiatives to be Reinforced

- “We long for experiences that can deepen our relationship with Jesus in the real world. Initiatives that are successful offer us an experience of God. Therefore, we respond to initiatives that offer us an understanding of the Sacraments, prayer and liturgy, in order to properly share and defend our faith in the secular world. Because of the lack of clear and attractive presentation as to what the Sacraments truly offer, some of us go through the process of receiving but undervaluing them.”
- “Some fruitful initiatives are: events such as World Youth Day; courses and programs that provide answers and formation, especially for those new to the faith; outreach ministries; youth catechisms; weekend retreats and spiritual exercises; Charismatic events, choirs and worship groups; pilgrimages; Christian sports leagues; parish or diocesan youth groups; Bible study groups; university Christian groups; different faith apps, and the immense variety of movements and associations within the Church.”
- “We respond to well-organized, larger-scale events, but also hold that not all events need to be of this scale. Small, local groups where we can express questions and share in Christian fellowship are also paramount to maintaining the faith. These smaller events in social spaces can bridge the gap between larger Church events and the parish. Gathering in these ways is especially important to those in countries less accepting of Christians.”

15. Instruments to be Used

- **“The Church must adopt a language which engages the customs and cultures of the young so that all people have the opportunity to hear the message of the Gospel.** However, we are passionate about the different expressions of the Church. Some of us have a passion for “the fire” of contemporary and charismatic movements that focus on the Holy Spirit; others are drawn towards silence, meditation and reverential traditional liturgies. All of these things are good as they help us to pray in different ways. Outside of the Church, many young people live a contented spirituality, but the Church could engage them with the right instruments.”
- “Multimedia – The internet offers the Church an unprecedented evangelical opportunity, especially with social media and online video content. As young people, we are digital natives who could lead the way. It is also a great place to encounter and engage people of other faiths and none. Pope Francis’ regular video series is a good example of the use of the internet’s evangelical potential.  
*Gap Year Experiences* – Years of service within movements and charities give young people an experience of mission and a space to discern. It also creates the opportunity for the Church to encounter non-believers and people of other faiths in the world.  
*The Arts and Beauty* – Beauty is universally acknowledged and the Church has a history of engaging and evangelizing through the arts, such as music, visual art, architecture, design etc. Young people especially respond to and enjoy being creative and expressive.  
*Adoration, Meditation and Contemplation* – We also appreciate the contrast of silence offered by the Church’s tradition of Eucharistic Adoration and contemplative prayer. It provides a space away from the constant noise of modern communication and it is here that we encounter Jesus. Silence is where we can hear the voice of God and discern His will for us. Many outside of the Church also appreciate meditation, and the Church’s rich culture of this could be a bridge to these secular but spiritual people. It can be counter-cultural, but effective.  
*Testimony* – The personal stories of the Church are effective ways of evangelizing as true personal experiences that cannot be debated. Modern Christian witnesses and the witness of the persecuted Middle Eastern Christians are particularly strong testimonies to the fullness of life found in the Church.