



# PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

## DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

# CHAPTER 12

## SECTION 6



## WHAT?

### What do we see happening within the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux?

If we rewind back to the time immediately leading up to the entrance into the new millennium, there was a drastic shift in American teen culture. The 1990s was a time of rebellion. Teen culture was codified in pop culture, the result of which was seemingly embodied by MTV. Generation X partook in higher rates of high risk behavior, but they were still feeling safe. In contrast to this, the American Church experienced a particular outpouring of grace in 1993, when World Youth Day was hosted in Denver. This brought a unity of Teenage American Catholicism as the young American Church was brought face to face with John Paul II. This established an opposition of sorts between the world behind the banner of MTV and the young Church behind the banner of John Paul II. The darkness of the culture and light of hope that seemingly embodied World Youth Day would remain in drastic opposition until the end of the decade.

In consecutive years, the psyche of the rebellious teen culture of the 1990s and the wave of grace and growth of Catholic culture met a series of events that drastically changed the way teens looked at the world around them. These 4 events have shaped the world in which our current teenagers are growing up. In 1999, the tragic school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado made teens ask: “Is my school safe?” In 2000, the fear and hysteria around Y2K begged the question: “Is our world safe?” In 2001, 9/11 leads to: “Is my country safe?” And finally in 2002, the Catholic Church scandal breaking in Boston leads teens to ask: “Is my Church safe?”

In the last 15 years, there is a drastically different world that teenagers have grown up in simply due to the circumstances of the turn into a new millennium. If we take these sociological shifts into account along with the influence of conception, proliferation of social media, the impact of technology, especially with smart phones, the accessibility of pornography, the plague of cyber bullying, and the further disintegration of the family, we can see that there are a lot of influences that have added a level of complexity to the culture teens find themselves in today.

In this 15-year timeframe, there has been a shift of sorts for youth ministry in our local diocese, where we have seen a shift from the local parish to an event-based youth ministry. In the early to mid-2000s, many parishes around the diocese had local retreats for their youth ministry, which were not necessarily mandatory for a Confirmation curriculum. There were tournaments for softball and volleyball hosted on weekends which would gather parish sponsored teams to come together to play against one another. The youth of the diocese would gather every Palm Sunday for Youth Rally, which was a celebration of the teens from all around Houma-Thibodaux, but most of the ministry for youth in the diocese was parish based. In the shift of the 2000s, these parish retreats were replaced by attending events like TEC (Teens Encounter Christ) or CLI (Christian Leadership Institute), which were being hosted by the Office of Youth Ministry. Youth Rally began to lose traction as a celebration of the local Church and Steubenville on the Bayou was seen as a celebration of the more universal Church. Parishes began to outsource their youth ministry to the events that “the diocese” was hosting.

In recent years, there has been a drastic decline in the attendance at these events (larger scale events and overnight retreat experiences) hosted by the diocese. For example, the large-scale event of Youth Rally has gone from 663 participants in 2012 to 110 in 2018 (83% decline). This was an event that pulled upwards to 1200-1500 participants in the early 2000s. Also, CLI, which has historically been the biggest overnight experience on the diocesan youth ministry calendar, has gone from 65 participants in 2012 to 26 in 2018 (60% decline). TEC retreats have been reduced from 3 a year (all with roughly 50 teens attending), to routinely canceling 1 of the 2 TECs that are scheduled each year due to lack of attendance, to now planning on only hosting one during this school year in February 2019.

What are teens saying to us?

The teens are telling us that they don't just want more events or large-scale events that are great for facilitating an encounter, but do not provide the structures to continue to grow in their faith back at home. To use some familiar language from the Formation Life Cycle (“the five”), many of these events have served the youth by offering a place to connect with peers and facilitating an encounter with Jesus Christ, but they cannot offer the ongoing accountability and accompaniment that is required for walking through the process of conversion.

Our teens want to live out their faith in an authentic way, but this formation cannot happen on a diocesan level.

**There needs to be a shift back to the parishes as the place where teenagers receive the attention, accountability, and discipling that is necessary for lasting growth to take place.**