

## **Discussion Questions**

### **USCCB *Outreach to Unaffiliated***

#### **WHO ARE THE UNAFFILIATED?**

Unaffiliated refers to those who indicate “none” when asked to identify their religious affiliation.

- 79% disaffiliate from religion before age 24
- 26% of the U.S. adult population identify as unaffiliated
- 6.5 – The number of former Catholics for every one convert to the faith
- 1 in 4 Hispanics is a former Catholic
- 13 years old – Median age when they stopped identifying as Catholic For
- 26.1 million Americans who were baptized Catholic are no longer practicing

#### **For Discussion**

1. How are we seeing these trends play out in our own dioceses or even our families?
2. Since young people make up a large percentage of the unaffiliated, how must our current methods of evangelization change in order to address this growing trend?
3. At the diocesan and parish levels, who interacts with the unaffiliated? What resources and formation do these individuals need in order to effectively invite the unaffiliated to be disciples of Christ?
4. What groups within the diocese have been successful at reaching the unaffiliated? Which of their methods can be easily adapted for other diocesan ministries?

#### **WHY ARE THEY LEAVING?**

- Almost half of the unaffiliated attribute disaffiliation to a lack of belief
- Many consider faith and religion to be incompatible with science and rational thinking
- Relativism and a culture of self-invention often result in objective truth being considered judgmental, oppressive, and intolerant
- For Hispanic Catholics, many did not receive appropriate catechesis, and most simply drifted away

#### **For Discussion**

1. What are young people’s questions about the faith that go unanswered?
2. Given that lack of belief is cited as one of the primary reasons for leaving, how do we preemptively teach on these questions and encourage an encounter with Jesus Christ?
3. What other ways can we work to prevent our current flock from disaffiliating?
4. If the foundational belief of God’s existence has been lost, where is the best point of entry in evangelization efforts?

#### **HOW CAN WE GET THEM BACK?**

The video “Outreach to the Unaffiliated” identifies five paths or starting points that reflect what subjects resonate with those who identify as unaffiliated.

1. The Path of Justice
2. The Path of Beauty
3. The Path of New Media
4. The Path of Truth
5. The Path of Parish Transformation

#### **THE PATH OF JUSTICE**

- Emphasize the Church's commitment to justice and the preferential option for the poor

- Take advantage of service opportunities to intentionally invite and engage those on the peripheries
- Build upon young people’s instinctive grasp of the importance and value of the Church's work with the hungry, the homeless, the unemployed, and the poor

### **For Discussion**

1. How can focusing on the Church’s ministry to the marginalized lead someone to see God’s Goodness
2. How can we enable others to see Christ, the Word Incarnate, prefigured in the “seeds of the Word” in our culture?
3. How can we evangelize people through their thirst for justice, concern for the poor, and care for creation?
4. What do you see replacing religion among the unaffiliated? What need is it fulfilling, and how can we attend to that authentic need?
5. How might we grow in our desire for justice and care for the poor? “I do believe in taking care of the less fortunate.”

### **THE PATH OF BEAUTY**

- As this is often the only way to reach the truly disaffiliated, highlight the Church’s 2,000-year history of art and vision of beauty
- Use imagery that conveys mystery as an invitation to engage life more deeply
- Cultivate a culture that encourages, discerns, and produces world-class stories, poetry, drama, film, and television

### **For Discussion**

1. What do dioceses need to do this (personnel, formation, resources)?
2. If we use the way of beauty as an entry point of encounter with the unaffiliated, where do we go from there? Are we prepared for the next step?
3. How can we create a culture in our parishes that values and utilizes beauty as an entry point to evangelize the unaffiliated as described by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 167?
4. What groups, communities, and individuals would be a resource for our diocese in this endeavor?

### **THE PATH OF NEW MEDIA**

- Encourage all ministries to utilize new media (especially social media) as a tool and entry point into the modern culture and to engage the disaffiliated
- Invest in and revitalize media departments as an indispensable part of our evangelization efforts in conjunction with all ministries and in support of their work
- Proactively capture the many good things that the Catholic Church does and make them visible in a way that can be noticed and appreciated

### **For Discussion**

1. Are we fully committed to spreading the Gospel with every resource available to us?
2. How do we use digital media to enhance, not replace, our current methods of evangelization and catechesis?
3. How do we evaluate our current digital presence and look for opportunities to grow in the use of digital technology?
4. How can we create a culture in our parish programs that builds on the various beautiful movies, works of art, and literature available through digital technology?

## **THE PATH OF TRUTH**

- Devote the time it takes to accompany natural inquiry, and build lasting pathways to answers
- Be responsive to and engage worldviews of the culture (often shaped by modern scientific advancements/STEM fields)
- Invest in the formation of those on the front lines: priests, deacons, DREs, youth ministers, catechists, Catholic school teachers, parents, etc.

### **For Discussion**

1. How can we integrate the questions of science with the questions of faith and enable people to see the unity of faith and reason?
2. How do we encourage Catholics to develop a deeper life of prayer as a necessary part of encountering Christ as the center of all reality?
3. How can we expose people to the teachings of the saints and great thinkers of the Catholic tradition in a way that provides insight into all areas of human life?
4. How do we bridge the gap between our faith and everyday life in modern culture?

## **THE PATH OF PARISH TRANSFORMATION**

- Foster a culture of discipleship not only in our parishes, but also in our schools, ministries, and apostolates
- Prioritize relational evangelization over programmatic evangelization
- Support and equip families to share their faith at home and in the community
- Increase outreach to those in pivotal moments in human development (youth at the age of disaffiliation, college students, before and after marriage, new parents, etc.)
- Explore opportunities for all parishioners to understand their baptismal role in sharing the Gospel and engaging the unaffiliated in their daily life

### **For Discussion**

1. What do we need to stop doing, begin doing, and continue doing in order to make our parishes true missionary societies that reach out to the unaffiliated?
2. What resources are needed for parishes to make this happen and what obstacles need to be removed from our parishes in order to proclaim the faith effectively?
3. Young people are capable of bearing a unique witness to the Gospel: how are we listening to their insights and incorporating them into the life of our parish?