Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES TO THE LINEAMENTA FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS,
XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUSTIN, TEXAS - September 2017

Introduction

Summary Part I - Diocesan course of action and methodology

In the spirit of dialogue demonstrated by Pope Francis and in response to the directive to find a “suitable manner” of involvement from the components of the particular churches, Bishop Joe Vásquez invited the faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Austin to complete a survey whose questions corresponded to specific sections of the synod preparatory document:

- The survey was made available online, in English and Spanish, through the diocesan website, commencing May 1, 2017, and ending July 31, 2017. The online survey provided different sets of questions for three distinct audiences: non-Catholic young people, Catholic young people, and priests/parents/those who know young people.

- Young adults were asked to contribute written and oral responses at in-person listening sessions with Bishops Joe Vásquez and Bishop Daniel Garcia on August 4, 2017 (in Spanish) and August 7, 2017 (in English).

- Almost 700 survey responses were submitted. Over 15% of the responses were submitted in Spanish.

- Survey responses were divided up among a task group of 20 people made of diocesan staff, parish staff, Catholic school staff, college campus ministry staff, and lay ministry leaders, most whom are young adults. Each member summarized his/her section of responses and highlighted notable themes and quotes.

- Although they are fully incorporated into the diocesan executive summary, the responses received in Spanish are summarized separately and included as an appendix to this document.
Summary Part II - General survey findings and emergent themes

Since the survey instrument was designed to gather responses of a narrative and qualitative nature, it is not possible to render an accurate quantitative analysis of the findings. Nonetheless, a review of the responses renders several emergent themes:

- The young person’s **longing for community and personal connection**. Regarding what young people ask of the Church, what attracts them to activities in and outside the Church and what makes those gatherings successful, and available means of participation (and the lack thereof)—belonging to a community and having meaningful relationships in the Church were named more than anything else. Overall, young people communicated that they are unsure where their place is in the greater family of the Church.

- A **need for faith formation** was expressed throughout, sometimes discussed as the challenge of integrating faith into daily life, sometimes in relation to the reality of living in a secular culture, and sometimes regarding the immense amounts of communication and information made possible through technology as well as untapped opportunities afforded by it. Overall, these young people shared that they are yearning for meaning in their lives and want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They are interested in learning more about both the teachings of their faith and the world around them. They ask specifically for improved homilies, parish programs and other opportunities to help them understand their faith and live it confidently in the context of their daily lives.

- The final common theme is **social issues and the Church’s role in the public square**. Social justice, serving the less fortunate, and serving the greater community were mentioned frequently, whether as opportunities that exist for them in the Church, what the Church should ask of young people, or what they ask the Church to continue doing. They want Church leaders to be more publicly vocal about the greater good and less vocal about polarizing political issues. Service and volunteer opportunities were consistently cited as an effective method of engagement for this age group.

- Both Catholic and non-Catholic young people expressed overwhelming gratitude and **support for Pope Francis’** work, ministry and example to the world.
Summary Part III - Survey findings summarized by question

2. Evaluating the Situation

a) Young People, the Church and Society

These questions refer both to young people who take part in Church programs, as well as those who do not take part or have no interest in participating.

1. In what manner does the Church listen to the lived situations of young people?

- Through formal ministry programs and sacramental experiences for youth and young adults such as youth group, young adult groups, adolescent confirmation, RCIA, marriage and infant baptism preparation.
- Through leadership opportunities at the parish and diocesan levels where young people interact with other Church leaders.
- Through members of the Church such as lay people, religious and clergy who encounter the reality of young people in the context of individual personal relationships at the family, parish and larger community levels. Many respondents maintained that most Catholics do not fully understand the reality of young people today.

2. What are the main challenges and most significant opportunities for young people in your country / countries today?

- The most common challenges cited were a secular and materialistic culture, spiritual homelessness and apathy, current information overload, polarization in politics, limited job opportunities, a shortage of role models for living faithfully, lack of purpose in life, economic inequality, financing education/educational debt, as well as sexual and substance addiction, vices and temptations.
- The most commonly cited opportunity was education. This was followed by service and volunteering, technology and social media, population diversity, the energy of the young person, and creativity to conceive new ways of meeting challenges and solving problems.

3. What kinds and places of group gatherings of youth, institutionalized or otherwise, have a major success within the Church, and why?

- Social interaction, service opportunities, young family activities, adult faith formation, “Theology on Tap” gatherings, retreats, grupo or movimiento juvenil. Many types of gatherings cited contain a social component, provide community, don’t cost a lot of money and/or provide young people a sense that they are making an impact on the world.
- Young people responded that in these gatherings, they are looking for others with similar interests and passions.
- The survey and listening session respondents communicated an existing trend of young people who approach ministry as consumers. They are looking for something that is “marketed” to them within the parish or diocesan community.
- Marriage preparation is reported by our survey respondents as a largely negative experience. Some are frustrated that the support and formation end with the wedding date and they wish for continuing marriage support and enrichment. Some cite premarital or
extramarital cohabitation as a common reality that is inconsistent with what the Church requires. Some report negative, non-welcoming experiences with parish administrative staff during the marriage preparation process. Regarding marriage preparation, one respondent asks the Church to “see it as an opportune chance for evangelization.”

- Sunday Mass is commonly cited as a “lonely” experience where connection with others is not facilitated. Catholic young people seem to understand the importance of attending Mass but report that it does nothing to engage them or welcome them to join the parish community. One respondent stated, “A new energy is required for the Church and I believe young people can lead this charge...”

4. What kinds and places of group gatherings of youth, institutionalized or otherwise, have a major success outside the Church, and why?

- Respondents cited sports and athletics, community service, charities, food and drink-based social gatherings and activities that do not require an ongoing commitment. Music concerts and festivals, professional mentoring, bible studies and small Christian communities at other churches were also mentioned, followed by recovery programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Locally, the Austin-based SXSW or other technology-focused gatherings and political activism at the State Capitol were noted.

- Young people feel that these events from the wider community and those offered by other Christian denominations are tailored more to their reality than are Catholic Church activities.

5. What do young people really ask of the Church in your country / countries today?

- Non-Catholic young people ask the Church to continue helping others.
- Young people assert that service and volunteer opportunities at the parish need to be better communicated.
- Respondents want to be taken seriously and treated with dignity, not patronized.
- They ask for the enunciation of a clear purpose—nothing watered-down. “Ask if I am willing to love as Christ loved.”
- Young people want to be knowledgeable about the culture and the secular world in which they live.
- They long for strong, authentic community with genuine relationships and to see themselves reflected in their parish’s activities and structures. (Many cited a feeling of invisibility at their parishes.) Young people want their parish pastors to be aware of them and their reality.
- They ask for spiritual formation, catechesis and guidance that help them grow in their relationship with Christ and integrate faith with their everyday lives.
- Support for young families is a key request. Many shared implicit and explicit experiences of their young children being unwelcome at their parishes. “Mass with young children is so stressful.” Childcare to assist parents to participate in other events at the parish was mentioned several times.
- They state a need for support for marriages and better pastoral care for families in crisis, as well as catechesis regarding sexuality and pastoral care for those who are struggling with questions of sexual identity.
- Young people want access to meeting space and facilities at their parishes.
● Non-Catholic young people stated that the Church should “modernize,” while Catholic young people want the Church’s public statements, teachings and homilies to present itself more clearly as counter cultural yet fully relevant to their daily lives.
● Young people overall asked that Church leaders avoid divisive political agendas and negative rhetoric. They request that Church leaders step into the world of media and be a beacon of light (“to speak the truth authentically, with actions the match her teaching”). They feel the Church is not active or vigorous enough in this public space.
● Respondents need assistance in learning to make the Church a priority in their adult lives even as they are presented with many competing options for their time and attention. They mention the need for support to prioritize Christian discipleship and evangelization.
● There was very little comment on homosexuality and gender identity from the young people that responded to the survey.

6. What possibilities for participation exist in your country / countries for young people to take part in the life of the ecclesial community?
● In survey responses, a wide range of parish ministries and events were cited. Almost everything our parishes, college campus ministry centers and diocese offer specifically for young adults was named, as well as a great variety of standard parish ministries. These include ministries such as parish youth ministries, parish young adult ministries, Ascend Emerging Leaders Program, Theology on Tap, and focused groups such as Young Catholic Professionals.
● The most common themes were service/volunteer, liturgical, and formation opportunities. Young people expressed interest in helping with tasks do not require a lot of training but in which they can make a difference. They reported to us that they want to help, they just don’t always see the opportunity.
● The Diocese of Austin sees high participation by college students at the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) Student Leadership Summit. This program encourages current involvement in student leadership but also provides formation for future parish integration.
● The Diocese of Austin has many young people working on staff at parishes and at the diocesan offices.
● Ministry formation programs are offered widely, and there are financial resources for diocesan staff to continue their theological formation and grow in their ecclesial vocations of service.
● Our ongoing Encuentro process has involved many young people in shared prayer and consultation.
● The Diocese of Austin sent many young people to the 2017 Convocation of Catholic Leaders in Orlando.
● The Diocese of Austin has made it a priority to include young people in emerging leadership opportunities as they develop.
● High school and college internships are offered at many parishes and diocesan offices.
● Young adults are invited to attend and participate in the annual Diocese of Austin Men’s and Women’s Conferences.
7. How and in what manner is contact made with young people who do not frequent Church surroundings?

- Contact with young people who do not frequent Church surroundings is mostly done by individual relationships outside of the parish boundaries in communities, schools and workplaces.
- Parish websites and bulletins can serve this purpose as well, but many parishes do not take full advantage of these opportunities.
- Little intentional effort or success was reported in this area of outreach, although there are some ministries of door-to-door evangelization in our Spanish-speaking parishes.

b) Pastoral Vocational Programs for Young People

8. How are families and communities involved in the vocational discernment of young people?

- Non-Catholic young people cited parents and schools as resources for vocational discernment.
- Priests, parents and those who know young people reported providing guidance for educational and vocational choices to young people that they know.
- The most frequent response to our survey was prayer.
- Some parents cited the practice of inviting the parish priest over for dinner.
- Our diocesan vocations office does a great deal of outreach to families to encourage them to have conversations with their children about discernment. We did receive several reports of families discouraging religious/priestly discernment.
- Young religious communities like Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, the Disciples of Jesus, and the Apostles of Interior Life assist families by creating a culture of presence of vocational discernment that reinforces conversations in families. This culture is also encouraged through the presence of seminarians assigned to parishes for a pastoral year or summer break.

9. How do schools and universities or other educational institutions (civil or ecclesial) contribute to young people’s formation in vocational discernment?

- The Diocese of Austin has a large population of college students living within its boundaries and one Catholic University in the diocese as well.
- The public elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and universities generally contribute to a young person’s formation in vocational discernment through a core curriculum of liberal arts and science courses, which exposes students to a variety of subjects.
- Colleges and universities offer career services and academic advising as well.
- Catholic schools at all levels are able to complement their academic programs with more rigorous studies in philosophy, religion and theology, as well as with faith practices such as Mass, prayer and retreats.
- The Diocese of Austin has four parishes or centers for college campus ministry that serve large public and private universities within its boundaries, as well as a campus ministry staff at the one Catholic University. These centers are staffed with one or more priest
pastor/directors, professional lay staff, religious, and missionaries from various organizations such as FOCUS and St. Paul's Outreach.

10. In what manner are you taking into account the cultural changes resulting from the development of the digital world?

- While young people surveyed cited technology and social media as both a challenge and an opportunity; priests, parents, and those who work with young people cited technology and social media only as a challenge.
- Those who know young people express frustration at the rapidly changing digital landscape.
- There is an understanding from pastors and parents that the most common way that conversations with young people are initiated is through digital media such as texting and that these media require brief and clear communications.
- Priests and lay ministry leaders seem to understand that they have an opportunity to speak to a wider audience using social media.
- Priests and lay ministry leaders understand that for many young people, the parish website is the first experience of the parish.
- Both young people and those who know young people understand that a young person’s research about Church teachings and practices is generally done on the web where they might also find misinformation.
- Lay ministry leaders shared the practice of helping parents communicate about their faith with their children by digitally sharing brief conversation starters.
- Priests, especially young priests, express a desire to present clear, to-the-point homilies, understanding that people who are interested in the main idea will follow up with research on the internet.
- Both young people and those who know young people seem to agree that technology is an opportunity to meet young people where they are.
- Those who know young people express concern that the latter lack the skills of in-person relationship building, which can impede the practice of discipleship and the development of bonds of genuine friendship and intimacy with others.

11. How can World Youth Days or other national or international events become a part of ordinary pastoral practice?

- World Youth Day or other national or international events can become part of ordinary pastoral practice by de-emphasizing the distinctiveness of the one international gathering and creating more resources for the celebration of World Youth Day to happen at the parish or diocesan level.
- The USCCB does a good job with World Youth Day in its role, but World Youth Day and other major national/international events are not similarly supported “in the marketplace” with resources from publishers and other sources. This leads to their being overlooked.
- The celebration of World Youth Day often bypasses the parish and is experienced by individual pilgrims only. It should be celebrated by whole communities analogously to Catechetical Sunday, but it is not.
- World Youth Day could be an annual opportunity for every parish to learn about, assess its outreach to, and recommit to young people.
● World Youth Day is a wonderful tradition that should evolve with the times to best serve the Church today in a sustainable, accessible, responsible way.

12. In what manner is your diocese planning experiences for the pastoral vocational program for young people?

● The Diocese of Austin offers a variety of vocational ministries for young people, including:
  ○ “Ascend” Emerging Leaders Program
  ○ Young Catholic Professionals and other young professional ministries
  ○ Austin Schoenstatt Shrine community
  ○ Diocesan Catholic Youth Conference
  ○ “Quo Vadis” retreat for high school men
  ○ Discernment Dinners for high school and adult men
  ○ Kayak Trips for adult men
  ○ “Heart of Jesus & Heart of Mary” discernment retreats for men and women respectively
  ○ “Project Andrew & Miriam” one-day discernment events
  ○ Marriage discernment programs in campus ministry centers

c) Pastoral Care Workers with Young People

13. How much time and in what manner do clergy and other formators provide for personal spiritual guidance?

● Clergy and other formators report that they spend a significant amount of time providing personal spiritual guidance while hearing confessions.
● They also reported providing other spiritual, educational, or professional guidance to young people.
● Non-clergy reported providing a significant amount of spiritual, educational, or professional guidance to young people. This included guidance for their children and other young adults whom they know.

14. What initiatives and opportunities for formation are in place for those who provide pastoral vocational guidance?

● The Diocese of Austin vocations office offers a parent session for high school retreats.
● Vocational Discernment talks to priests at gatherings and convocations.
● Presentations to youth ministers and youth ministry volunteers.
● Diocesan Catholic Youth Conference workshops on a culture of vocations.
● Vocations efforts are also supported by the Serra Club, Knights of Columbus, the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, and parents of seminarians.

15. What personal guidance is offered in seminaries?

● Regular meetings with one’s formator to discuss progress in regard to the pillars of formation.
● Regular meetings with one’s spiritual director to discuss spiritual well-being.
● If needed, counselors are available to assist with psychological well-being.
● Regular gatherings of diocesan seminarians at respective seminaries to build fraternity.
- Informal mentor pastors for seminarians.

d) Specific Questions According to Geographic Areas

AMERICA

a. How does your community care for young people who experience extreme violence (guerrilla warfare, gangs, prison, drug addiction, forced marriages) and accompany them in various ways in their life?

- Catholic Charities provides counseling and educational services for young people who experience extreme violence, as well as resources for migrants including legal, educational, counseling, immediate financial assistance, and advocacy.
- Diocese of Austin parishes who have prisons, immigration detention centers, or juvenile detention centers in their boundaries care for the young people present at these institutions.
- Various community and civil resources are available for young people who experience extreme violence.

b. What formation is offered to support the engagement of young people in society and civil life, for the common good?

- Service and volunteer opportunities are present in community charitable organizations.
- Catholic Social Teaching curriculum and mission or service work opportunities are present in high school youth ministry programs.
- Catholic high schools offer Catholic Social Teaching curriculum and mission or service work immersion opportunities.
- College campus ministry programs offer Catholic Social Teaching curriculum and mission or service work immersion opportunities.
- Parish and diocesan young adult ministry programs usually include a Catholic Social Teaching curriculum and mission or service work opportunities.
- Schools include civic education as part of their standard curriculum.
- Catholic Charities agencies provide advocacy and other educational resources.
- Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops Advocacy Day provides educational resources and an opportunity for Catholics to be involved in the state government process while advocating for just legislation.
- The South by Southwest (SXSW) Conference and Festivals now include presentations on faith at work in contemporary society.

c. In a world which is greatly secularized, what pastoral activities are most effective for continuing the journey of faith after the Sacraments of Initiation?

- The most common answer among our survey respondents was that their parish does not do this well or at all.
- Respondents noted the need for a more comprehensive approach to sacramental preparation that understands the need for evangelization among those seeking the sacraments and engages them with the parish community. Many shared experiences of being “burned out” by requirements for their children to receive a sacrament such as
adolescent confirmation. Sacramental preparation experiences should continue with the parish community’s support after the Sacraments are received. These processes should be made more positive and meaningful through the accompaniment of parish mentors.

- Parents should model the practice of faith to their children.
- Young people who responded to the survey cite gatherings of their peers as effective.
- Young people reported that service opportunities, retreats, and any activity that challenges and empowers them to evangelize others is effective.

3. Sharing Activities

1. List the main types of pastoral activity in accompaniment and vocational discernment in your present situation.

- Ascend Emerging Leaders Program
- Awakening Retreats
- Catholic Charities
- Catholic Scouting
- Catholic ATX Media and other independent Catholic bloggers
- College Campus Ministry programs
- Community First Village
- Criminal Justice Ministry
- Diocesan Catholic Youth Conference
- Diocesan Youth Softball Tournament
- Encuentro
- FOCUS
- Godstock Youth Music Festival and Retreat
- Jornadas Retreat
- Mobile Loaves and Fishes
- NET Discipleship Week (hosted in the diocese)
- Parish Adolescent and Adult Confirmation Preparation
- Parish Young Adult Ministry programs
- Parish Youth Ministry programs
- Pastoral Juvenil Hispana at the parish and diocesan levels
- Project Rachel
- Pro-life ministries
- Schoenstatt Young Professionals
- St. Vincent de Paul Society
- TEC (Together Encounter Christ) Retreats
- Theology of the Body for Teens
- Theology on Tap
- World Youth Day
- Young Catholic Professionals
- Young Life

2. Choose three activities you consider the most interesting and relevant to share with the universal Church, and present it according to the following format (no more than one page for each experience).
2.1 Ascend Emerging Leaders

a) Description: In a few sentences, roughly describe the activity. Who are the leading characters? How does the activity take place? Where? Etc.
Ascend, the Diocese of Austin’s emerging leaders program, is an initiative to identify, develop and support young leaders under the age of 40 in the diocese and the communities in its borders. Participants are challenged to consider ethics and leadership through the lens of their faith. Each annual Ascend class is empowered to make a lasting contribution by practicing applied leadership skills so that they may exercise their faith in positions of leadership in the Church as well as in their homes, communities and careers. Approximately 30 young adults are selected annually to participate in a series of retreats and evening courses based on a curriculum developed and presented by our bishops, diocesan staff and Catholic leadership experts.

b) Analysis: Evaluate the activity, even in layman’s terms, for a better understanding of the important elements: what are the goals? What is the theoretical basis? What are the most interesting insights? How have they developed? Etc.
The basis of Ascend is Pope Francis’s call in Evangelii Gaudium for self-awareness, identity found in Christ, listening, genuine relationship, conflict resolution, and evangelization. We have found that the themes of this document are faith formation masquerading as leadership and professional development, which makes it very accessible to young adults. The program began as a speaker series of Catholic leaders from the local law, medical, business, government and non-profit industries, but to avoid duplication of other young adult ministry efforts and to provide something truly unique that equips young leaders, Ascend’s unique curriculum was developed under the advisement of many of the same industry leaders. It also provides formation for our parish young adult ministry leaders, as well as other young parish and Catholic school leaders.

c) Evaluation: What are the goals? If not achieved, why? Strengths and weaknesses? What are the consequences on the social, cultural and ecclesial levels? Why and in what way is the activity important / formative? Etc.
The goal of Ascend is to intentionally create new, young leaders for the Diocese of Austin’s parishes and communities so that they may meet the new challenges our modern world brings. We hope that Ascend is a resource for young people who want to make a difference in the world. A strength of the program is our two bishops’ noticeable presence and support of the program. Other strengths include a focus on application to the young adult’s everyday experience, wide support and resources from the business community and educational leaders, as well as the energy and enthusiasm of the participants themselves. Weaknesses include the inability to create or control leadership opportunities at their parishes, as well as the geographic size of our diocese. We are only able to offer Ascend in Austin, and while we have participants who drive in from other communities, the sheer distance often makes Ascend inaccessible to several other metropolitan areas. One ecclesial success is that we have been able to utilize Ascend participants to increase the number of young adults serving on diocesan boards and committees.
2.2 Campus Ministry

a) *Description:* In a few sentences, roughly describe the activity. Who are the leading characters? How does the activity take place? Where? Etc.

The Diocese of Austin has one of the largest populations of college students among all dioceses in the US. We have four standalone campus ministry parishes or centers, who are dedicated to serving their campus communities at Baylor University, the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University and Texas State University. St. Edward’s University, a Holy Cross institution, is the one Catholic University in our diocese, and we also have several parishes who serve smaller public and private universities and colleges within their boundaries. From a diocesan perspective, each of the four campus ministry centers is staffed with at least one priest who serves full-time as the pastor or director. Each center also has professional lay staff of varying sizes who serve in ministry and administrative roles, as well as teams of missionaries from organizations like FOCUS, which provides trained missionaries at all four centers. Each center supports ministry with college students according to the culture and needs of their campus and community.

b) *Analysis:* Evaluate the activity, even in layman’s terms, for a better understanding of the important elements: what are the goals? What is the theoretical basis? What are the most interesting insights? How have they developed? Etc.

With UT Austin, Texas A&M and Texas State providing such a large public university presence, as well as Baylor, which is the largest Baptist university in the world, it is recognized that the Church must be present to the students at each of these institutions in a deliberate way that is tailored to the needs and gifts of the students at each campus. Diocesan resources are provided to subsidize the operation of the campus ministry centers, as well as support for their individual stewardship and development efforts. It is very important for each center to have the freedom to uniquely meet the needs of its students. Therefore, while the sacraments are celebrated at each location, other specific ministry efforts at one campus might look very different from another. The diocese, through the Office of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry, does not supervise the campus ministry efforts. They only advocate for, support and network together campus ministry leaders.

c) *Evaluation:* What are the goals? If not achieved, why? Strengths and weaknesses? What are the consequences on the social, cultural and ecclesial levels? Why and in what way is the activity important / formative? Etc.

The goal is to provide a faith community for all students at their respective universities. One strength is that it is widely understood that these efforts are part of the very identity of the diocese of Austin. It is difficult for any one center, however, to effectively provide outreach to and meet the needs of all of the Catholic students at their university. Each campus ministry center must work collaboratively with university administration while ministering to the diverse population of students, faculty and staff. Vocations are a strength of campus ministry in our diocese. A particular challenge of which we are aware—and that we have not been able to adequately address—is a lack of outreach to community college/non-residential college students. Each year, a majority of our diocese’s seminarians emerge from of one of these campus ministry centers in addition to many vocational discernments by young men and women to various religious orders.
2.3 Pastoral Juvenil Hispana

a) Description: In a few sentences, roughly describe the activity. Who are the leading characters? How does the activity take place? Where? Etc.
Pastoral Juvenil includes multiple efforts to shepherd or accompany young Latinos in middle school, high school, and as young adults, spanning ages 18-30. In the Latino community, young adults are usually considered as those that have never been married and have never had children. These Latino young people are the leading characters. Trained adults provide guidance and integral formation in order to empower the young people to evangelize their peers. Such efforts can take place on church grounds, but they are certainly not limited these settings. Some pastoral juvenil efforts may include choirs, matachines, quinceañera preparation, bible classes etc. Certainly one of the most typical efforts in the diocese of Austin tends to be the support of grupos juveniles, or groups of young Latinos. In these groups, young people learn about their faith in fun and engaging ways, while having the opportunity to develop a faith community that encourages each other.

b) Analysis: Evaluate the activity, even in layman’s terms, for a better understanding of the important elements: what are the goals? What is the theoretical basis? What are the most interesting insights? How have they developed? Etc.
It is important that the evangelization happens from joven to joven, because they speak the same language and they live in the same reality. A young person that has not been evangelized will more likely listen to their friend than they will listen to an older person they really do not know. In the diocese of Austin, there exist multiple parishes with pastoral juvenil efforts. Many of these parish communities may not even be aware of them or these groups are simply not formally identified as such. Other parishes may have a large population of Latino young people but may not necessarily have a ministry to attend their needs. And still other parishes may have up to eight different efforts under the same roof.

c) Evaluation: What are the goals? If not achieved, why? Strengths and weaknesses? What are the consequences on the social, cultural and ecclesial levels? Why and in what way is the activity important / formative? Etc.
When the adults working with young Latinos are properly trained with the proper resources and guidance, the young people are better prepared to discern God’s will in their life. The goal of pastoral Juvenil in the diocese of Austin is to empower and equip ministries for and with Hispanic youth and young adults at our parishes. Some of the fruits the diocese of Austin has seen as a result of this ministry are the growing vocations to priesthood, religious life, and even lay ecclesial ministry among parish and diocesan staff as well as families converting to the Catholic faith because one young person was evangelized by a peer. It is extremely important for all young people, Latino or otherwise, to have access to an integral education. Studies have shown that they are more likely to be part of a grupo juvenil than they are to attend a Catholic School. Yet, there is a shortage of financial and human resources committed to pastoral juvenil. Many of our parishes’ grupos juveniles operate without resources and without communication or relationship with their parish pastor and staff. A frequent consequence of not attending to our young Latino population in our parishes is to lose them to another community, group, or church tradition.
Appendix - Summary of Spanish survey responses

- The most mentioned challenges were addictions/temptations/vices such as alcohol, drugs and sex. These were followed by underdeveloped faith life and the lack of love, bullying and feelings of loneliness as well as the challenge of having families separated because of deportation.
- The top opportunity noted was one’s faith community, retreats and grupo juvenil, followed by education and employment/careers.
- Grupo/movimiento Juvenil and retreats were named as successful organizations within the Church. Their success factors included content geared toward young people’s experience, fun/joyful/loving environment, spiritual guidance and young people serving young people.
- The thing the young people ask of the Church is to invite them and engage them. They want the church to pay attention to them and to take them into account.
- They also want the Church to provide guidance, especially spiritual guidance and spiritual formation.
- Thirdly, they want support from the Church and that includes access to meeting space.
- They believe the Church should ask for their commitment, involvement, participation and time and challenge them to growth in faith and Christian discipleship.
- When asked what opportunities are available for them at church, grupo juvenil/ministry was the most popular, followed by mass/sacraments, retreats and activities for young people.
- Regarding their vocational support, a significant number of respondents stated that they did have family support, especially with a family that modeled spiritual life. Others mentioned how their family supported/respected their group participation and decisions. The third most popular response was that they had a welcoming community or grupo juvenil. They were encouraged by family and community to get closer to God. Others made it clear that they did not have enough support if any.

Challenges and opportunities:
- “… there is no young adult group in Spanish. There is one in English but not one in Spanish…”
- “Not having meeting space. Not having the church’s financial support…”
- “Older people do not take us seriously.”
- “Not being considered in decisions at the parish.”
- “To try to find the time needed to get involved at church groups.”
- “…sometimes they doubt how serious we are in the faith or church activity.”
- “I think in order for a grupo juvenil to have success, that parish has to assign someone to be in charge of (it cannot be a volunteer) because this way the activities would be correctly separated according to age and activity.”
- “… for the community to recognize our work and to support us since we are bringing more young people closer to church and we walk with them as they learn about their faith.”
They ask the church for:

- “They say the young are the Church’s tomorrow, the future. But we the young people are the now, the present. We cannot be the future if we are not included.”
- “To be taken into account, young people have excellent ideas and are very good with technology; perhaps that is why sometimes adult leaders reject them because they fear to be replaced; and they are not offered opportunities they are not valued as the future of the church.”
- “To support the grupo juvenil in all areas, spiritually, financially, with availability to organize events, (space). To allow us to place our energy in events or other ministries, so we all can be one! To support the evangelization by the young people.”
- “We need to take responsibility for our brothers and sisters and work towards educating all of our children the way that the Lord intended for them to be in his house. Catholic School should be more accessible to every child so that if the parents struggle or fail in educating the children, we must take action as a family community.”
- “To go out to the streets and look for young people with young people.”
- “The church does not have to be our refuge or our last option, but our company along every stage of our lives.”
- “The church sometimes pulls away from those that need her the most because of their sexual orientation or beliefs.”
- “… what advice could you give me for young marriages and what tools…?”