



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop
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Summary of the consultation regarding the 2018 Synod of Bishops

This is a summary of the consultation regarding the 2018 Synod of Bishops on young people, the faith, and vocation discernment.

All the responses offered in the consultation have been sent to the USCCB, along with this summary, to give input to the working document for the Synod.

Vocation discernment and discipleship

Vocation discernment – seeking to know God’s plan for one’s permanent state of life: dedicated single life or marriage, religious life or priesthood – is ordinarily a concern for a person who has made a personal decision to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus.

Therefore, the more effective we are at making disciples among young people (ages 18-29), the more likely they will engage in vocation discernment.

This is an important age group. It is often when people decide whether or not to live as a Catholic, or to take steps to grow in faith. It is also usually when people discern God’s call to a permanent state of life.

Jesus gave the mission of making disciples (evangelization) to all his followers, to teach his message so that all people might experience the fullness of life and joy here and in the hereafter.

This mission normally focuses on people who don’t know Jesus and the full gospel preached by his Catholic Church, and who haven’t yet decided to be his follower.

But Catholics need to be evangelized too – maybe they received the sacraments, but do not have a friendship with Jesus, or understand Church teaching well, or fully practice Catholic Faith in daily living.

And if that happens with young people, then when they leave home they might also leave the Church altogether, or leave off worshipping at Sunday Mass, or look elsewhere for something to give meaning to life, or to find answers to questions.

Special care should therefore be given to young people especially in times of transition, such as after Confirmation, high school graduation, or leaving college.

Some turn away from Jesus or the Church because of something they disagree with. But there is increasing evidence that many young people are simply choosing not to choose; they don't see the relevance, feel the need for Jesus or his Church.

It's almost like we have to start over, to be like missionaries to people who don't know Jesus. We have to attract others by our charity in service and sharing, our humility in forgiveness and worship, and by the connection we make between our belief, spirituality, religious practice, and daily life.

In this regard, there's a need for a bold gesture, for radical striving for holiness on an individual, communal, and institutional level. But what will that look like?

Action: Give due attention to teaching the teachers of faith, helping them to witness to Catholic Faith, as well as teach it. Train teachers of the faith in the process of making disciples, leading others to choose to follow Jesus, to be guided by his teachings, to pray daily an worship at Sunday Mass, and to serve the poor. Make use of catechetical materials and programs that effectively share the Good News and help in the process of making disciples.

Parents (and others) as evangelizers

The Holy Spirit ordinarily leads people to friendship with Jesus through a personal relationship with other Catholics, and through faith-related experiences.

Every member of the Church is a partner to continue the mission of Jesus in the ministries of the Church, especially evangelizing and teaching the faith to others.

The most powerful way to do this is by example: showing how helping out, giving to, sharing with, serving and sacrificing for, and living for others, after the example of Jesus, leads to a happy and fulfilled life here and in the hereafter.

With regard to young people, the best teachers of the Catholic Faith are their parents, at least when parents themselves are intentional about following Jesus and being active in the Church.

Parents might ask for, even need help from people involved in things like Catholic schools, youth ministry, events like NCYC, Totus Tuus, retreats, and service projects tied into a faith formation program.

But these other people can't substitute for parental involvement; indeed, the effectiveness of the ministries, programs, and events they are involved in rises or falls on the faith of parents practiced with the family.

Truly, the faith of parents is the strongest indicator of whether young people will choose to practice faith, mature in their faith, and engage in vocation discernment.

Action: Promote the Catholic vision of marriage and family. Provide the best resources for marriage preparation and enrichment. Ask parents what they want or need to help them share Catholic Faith with their children.

The message

While the witness of people who live lives of faith is important, so too is the content of the message they share: the goodness, truth, and beauty of the gospel of Jesus, and the joy it brings here and in the hereafter.

Everyone has to eventually make a choice about what will guide their decisions, how to give life meaning, and how to answer the big questions, such as: Is suffering futile? Is death final? Am I loved?

Some will choose to live by the principle “enjoy pleasure; avoid pain.” They may look for answers to the big questions only from what they can see or what makes sense to them.

The mission of parents and others is to propose (not impose) the teachings of Jesus and the Church, and the Christian way of life as an attractive alternative that gives life meaning and provides meaningful answers to questions.

It would be tragic if the message we passed on to young people left them with the impression that being Catholic is just about rules, rituals, and the rod of punishment, and so disregarded it as a life guide and an answer to questions.

Those things might have a role to play, but they are not the most important. Moreover, they don't attract people to follow Jesus, or to be a member of the Catholic Church, or to engage in vocational discernment.

What does? Jesus, his teaching, the prayer and worship offered by his followers, and the service of anyone in need.

With regard to young people and the content of teaching, it's important too not to dumb it down, or to shy away from the challenging teachings, especially about the human person, sexuality, marriage, family, and life issues.

With regard to young people and prayer, the practices attractive to them are those that incorporate time for silence, use of Scripture, the Rosary, group shared prayer, and most especially Eucharistic Adoration and Holy Mass.

And with regard to young people and service, these projects are formative when it is clear how they are connected to our faith and worship, and even more formative when young people are empowered to take leadership roles in these projects.

Action: In programs to teach and form young people, be sure to include familiarity with and use of both Scripture and the Catechism, understanding of how to worship at Mass and to practice Eucharistic Adoration, and projects in service to the poor.

Vocation discernment

Vocation discernment – helping young people to know God's call to a permanent state of life – is an important aspect of evangelizing and teaching young people.

This particular call is important because it affects our response to the call to holiness, helping to answer questions like, “With whom will I share my life? Who will I serve?”

It's also important because it affects our response to the call to mission, helping to identify who we witness to and teach, and how much time we give to parish ministry and community service.

Vocation discernment touches on everything in the practice of our faith, and affects us all our life long. It should therefore be better integrated into everything we do, especially our faith formation ministries, programs, and events.

Unfortunately, vocation discernment is not well known among most young people, parents, and trusted others – such as a pastor, teacher, or youth minister – who partner with parents in the faith formation of their children.

In this regard, parents and trusted others should be provided with resources related to vocation discernment. They should also understand the significant impact personal relationships, support from the parish community, and encouragement from others have on vocation discernment.

Action: Pray that young people will know and say “yes” to God’s plan for their permanent state of life. Invite them to consider their calling from God. Talk about vocation to them, and encourage them to talk to a trusted other about it. Show appreciation for what people in the various states of life do for God, others, the Church, and the community.

Conclusion

Young people, the faith, and vocation discernment – these are important topics for the future of individuals, the Church, and the world.

We need therefore to be effective in evangelizing: helping people to know, love and serve Jesus, and to discern their Divine calling to a permanent state of life.

If young people can know God’s plan for their lives and say “yes” to it, they would be able to respond better to God’s calls to holiness by their imitation of Christ.

And that in turn would inspire them to be partners to continue the mission of Jesus in the ministry of the Church, especially to spread and defend the Catholic Faith.

And all that in order to lift the world up into the Kingdom of justice and mercy, pity, peace, and love that Jesus established, making the world a different, better place.

Let us commend ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to the intercession of Mary as we carry out these important works of evangelization and vocation discernment.

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