



Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS • WWW.USCCB.ORG

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3040 • FAX 202-541-3176

A SNAPSHOT OF THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

The Future of Young Adult Ministry

Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We're Going

The USCCB Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth is grateful for the insightful contributions of pastoral and academic leaders around the United States who contributed to the ongoing conversation about the “future of young adult ministry” including the National Leadership Forum on Ministry with Young Adults in San Jose, California in November/December 2016.

Thirteen *white papers* were submitted to the Secretariat to further this important discussion and encourage possible considerations for the work of evangelization and ministry with and to young adults in their late teens, twenties, thirties. These *white papers* are enclosed here.

It should be noted that these papers are not the final word on the issue, but a beginning step. It is also worth considering that these papers may not be completely representative of the diverse and creative opinions on the topic of young adult ministry and the Church's ministry with these men and women.

These papers are not necessarily the opinion of the USCCB in this area. However, they are an excellent “snapshot” of the conversation that is already taking place among pastoral leaders on the issue of engaging with and ministering to young adults within the context of the Catholic Church in the United States. The ideas and suggestions raised here in these *white papers* can also be a good foundation from which further dialogue can take place across the country in advance of the forthcoming international Synod of Bishops on *Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment* in 2018.

The *white papers* at this point in the national conversation include:

- 1. A United Vision of Ministry for Youth and Young Adults**
Dr. Bob Rice, *Franciscan University of Steubenville*
- 2. Revisions Need in the Document: *Hijos e hijas de la luz***
Carmen María Cervantes and Walter Francisco Mena, *Instituto Fe y Vida*
- 3. Back to the Basics: Grow and Go**
Pete Burak, *id9:16 young adult ministry*
- 4. Beyond the Numbers**
Fr. Frank P. DeSiano, CSP, *Paulist Evangelization Ministries*

- 5. Connecting, Empowering, Equipping**
Fr. Nicholas Lombardo, OP, *Catholic University of America*
- 6. Becoming Intercultural and Universal (Catholic) Ministries**
Darius A. Villalobos, *Archdiocese of Chicago*
- 7. Learning to Labor in the Fields**
Tricia Bølle, *St. Francis Xavier Lay Missionary Society*
- 8. Two Pillars: What is a Fruitful Approach to Young Adult Outreach?**
Colin Nykaza, *Archdiocese of New York*
- 9. Young Adult Ministry: A Journey of Acompañamiento (Accompaniment)**
Sr. Bernadette Mota, FMA, *Diocese of Colorado Springs*
- 10. Young Adult Outreach**
Paul Morisi, *Diocese of Brooklyn*
- 11. Catholic Young Adult Ministry and the Urgent Need for Intercultural Competencies**
Gabriela Karaszewski, *Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston*
- 12. The Young Adult Effect**
Patrick Rivera, *Diocese of San Diego*
- 13. A Call to Conversation: A Look at Addressing Increased Levels of Indifference, Disconnection, Polarization, and Disengagement in Young Adult Ministry**
Diana Hancharenko, *St. Angela Merici Parish (Youngstown, Ohio)*
and Christ the Good Shepherd Parish (Campbell, Ohio)

The USCCB Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth again expresses its gratitude for the work that went into the development of these white papers, and to each of the authors for laying a foundation from which further conversation can take place.

In addition to the above pieces, the Secretariat also proposes, for the consideration of pastoral leaders in the field, the inaugural address of His Excellency, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, to the USCCB General Assembly of Bishops in Baltimore in November 2016, which offered a vision of the Universal Church's ministry with young people.

- 14. For a Church Evangelizing Young People in a Changing Society**
Most Rev. Archbishop Christophe Pierre, *Apostolic Nuncio to the United States*

A United Vision of Ministry for Youth and Young Adults

Dr. Bob Rice, Franciscan University of Steubenville

As we approach the 20th anniversary of *Sons and Daughters of the Light* and *Renewing the Vision*, I believe that both documents should be revised for a number of reasons. Since 1997, the Church has become more articulate about the New Evangelization and how to implement it. Research (such as the National Study of Youth and Religion) has given new insight into the spiritual lives of teens and young adults. The Internet and social media has radically changed society and the way we communicate with each other. Today, Latinos make up the largest group Catholic young people and it has been suggested that neither *Renewing* or *Sons and Daughters* spoke to the needs of that group.¹

Without going further into arguing *why* these documents should be revised, I would like to propose an idea as to *how* this should occur: they should be revised together, and perhaps should become one document.

The blurred lines between “youth” and “young adult”

There is a trend among sociologists to delineate three stages of growth between childhood and adulthood. “Generally speaking, early adolescence corresponded to junior high. Middle adolescence was understood to be the new high school phenomena, while late adolescence was pushed to the college years and beyond.”² Early adolescence has become commonly referred to as “tweens”. Late adolescence has been called “young adulthood” but more recently has also become known as *emerging adulthood*.³ Vatican documents, such as *The General Directory for Catechesis*

¹ “Both documents recognize the presence of different cultures in the Church and were translated into Spanish as *Renovemos la Vision* and *Hijos e Hijas de la Luz*, respectively. However, their focus continued to be on the middle class of the dominant culture, ignoring the tradition and work of *Pastoral Juvenil Hispana*, despite the efforts of the Hispanic leaders who were consulted.” National Catholic Network de Pastoral Juvenil Hispana, *Conclusions: First National Encounter for Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry* (Washington DC: USCCB, 2008), 22.

² Steven Bonner, “Understanding the Changing Adolescent” in *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 25.

described “young people” as pre-adolescents, adolescents, and young adults.⁴ The European use of the word “youth” often means what some in the US would call “young adult” (such as “World Youth Day” or the “YOUCAT”). In the Latino culture, *jóvenes* are described as single people roughly between the ages of fifteen and thirty.⁵

Steven Bonner wrote, “The lack of consensus in the literature with regard to the age that adolescence begins or ends, whether two or three stages exist, or how age corresponds to these stages is evidence enough that, at best, the landscape is constantly changing and, at worst, something is amiss.”⁶ He suggested there has been too much focus on “age and stage” and not enough on the markers that showed how a young person moved one level of development to the next.⁷

It has been argued that characteristics that used to belong to “teens” or “mid-adolescents” have now extended into “late adolescence” or “young adulthood” and that the period of “youth” has expanded. Assuming marriage age is one of the accurate indicators for “adulthood”, in 2010 the average age for marriage was 28.2 for men and 26.1 for women, the highest in recorded history.⁸ Only slightly more than half of twenty-five year olds in 2015 were financially independent.⁹ One book on the subject had a chapter titled, ‘Is Twenty-five the New Fifteen?’¹⁰

³ “The theory of emerging adulthood has been offered as a way of conceptualizing the development of today’s young people, in American society and in other industrialized societies.” Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: Understanding the New Way of Coming of Age” in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, eds. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 4.

⁴ Cf., GDC 181.

⁵ *Conclusions*, p. 19.

⁶ Bonner, “Understanding the Changing Adolescent”, 26.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 25.

⁸ ‘Median Age at First Marriage, 1890-2010’, Information Please Database <<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0005061.html>> [accessed 30 September 2015]. Other indicators of adulthood can be holding a job or achieving financial independence.

⁹ Cf. John Santrock, *Adolescence: Fifteenth Edition* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2014), 20.

¹⁰ “Adolescence was supposed to be the period during which the traits of adulthood gradually emerged. Now the emergence of these same traits was being studied, but a decade later in the life span. And it the twenties are when adulthood is supposed to be just emerging, what does that mean our teens are supposed to be doing? Have we turned the teen years into a supersize extension of childhood? And if so, what does this do to these teens’ efforts to grow up?” Joseph Allen and Claudia Worrell Allen, *Escaping the Endless Adolescence* (New York: Ballentine, 2009), 14.

In the mid-to-late 20th century, the line of demarcation in the US between “youth” and “young adult” was high school graduation. *Renewing the Vision* and *Sons and Daughters* reflected that mindset: *Renewing* was for “adolescents” and *Sons and Daughters* for those “in their late teens, twenties, and thirties; single, married, divorced, or widowed; and with or without children.”¹¹ I propose that in the present moment the line between youth and young adult has been significantly blurred and I question if it still applies.

Twenty years ago, *Sons and Daughters* began by asking, “What is a Young Adult?” This is a harder question to answer today. Since the lines have become blurred and the stages of development bleed into one another, it may be more effective to address this group as a whole instead of dividing the audience into halves.

Consequences and benefits

Sons and Daughters was a “pastoral plan” with specific advice on how to start ministry to young adults; *Renewing the Vision* was a “framework” focused on the overall vision toward ministry with adolescents. Dividing groups into “youth” and “young adults” makes sense (and is even a necessity) if one is trying to offer specific ways to reach that audience. A combined document would have to focus more on vision than on methodology (as *Renewing the Vision* did) lest the document be bogged down in endless examples on how to apply those principles in countless situations. For some, that may be too much of a loss.

However, what would be gained is a united vision on how to pastorally help a young person as they mature into adulthood. Having one document could have the positive effect of having those in youth and young adult ministry more effectively communicate and collaborate with one another. There seems to be a chasm between youth ministry and young adult ministry. Those in youth ministry fear losing a teen when he or she

¹¹ *Sons and Daughters of the Light*, 7.

graduates high school and leaves the parish, while many in young adult ministry feel like they are “starting over” with initial evangelization. A combined document could help build a bridge over that gap.

Conclusion

Though *Sons and Daughters in the Light* and *Renewing the Vision* were published within months of each other, neither document quoted the other nor does it appear that there was consultation between the writers. I believe that limited the positive impact both documents could have had.

Should it be decided that two documents are better than one, at the very least they should be written together so there is a clear shared vision of how to accompany and help a young person transition into “adulthood”, something that is the goal for both age groups but often undefined. In the US, being an “adult” is usually connected to economic independence.¹² However, as people of faith we believe our “maturity” comes from discerning and accepting our vocation—first to holiness and then to single, married, consecrated, or ordained life.

This is the journey that youth and young adults have in common and should be the heart of a unified vision for youth and young adult ministry. It is worth considering if this vision for young people might best be articulated in one document instead of two.

¹² Determining when an individual becomes an adult is difficult. In the United States, the most widely recognized marker of entry into adulthood is holding a more or less permanent, full-time job, which usually happens when an individual finishes school—high school for some, college for others, graduate or professional school for still others. However, other criteria are far from clear. Economic independence is one marker of adult status, but achieving it is often a long process.” Santrock, *Adolescence*, p. 20.

WHITE PAPER

REVISIONS NEEDED IN THE DOCUMENT

Hijos e hijas de la luz: Plan pastoral para el ministerio con jóvenes adultos

Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults

Carmen María Cervantes, EdD
Walter Francisco Mena, MA
Instituto Fe y Vida

INTRODUCTION TO THE WHITE PAPER

This white paper was developed by reading the Spanish version of the Plan, published in 1996. It has two sections:

Section 1 presents recommendations for the revision of the Plan taking into account the reality of the Hispanic/Latino population and of the pastoral models used to serve young adults in this community. These recommendations focus on major issues identified through a light reading; they do not imply a systematic and exhaustive reading.

Section 2 offers a suggested process for the revision of this Plan, based on the experience of Instituto Fe y Vida in publishing bilingual-bicultural materials from the Hispanic perspective.

SECTION 1

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REVISION OF THE PLAN

General revision

- Need to change the terminology: The Plan is not about “jóvenes adultos”, but about “adultos jóvenes.” Please refer to the *Conclusions of the First National Encuentro on Pastoral Juvenil*, for the correct use of terminology.
- Need to update papal teachings and include Pope Francis approach to *jóvenes* (single young adults) and to parents, in particular the emphasis in being missionary disciples of Jesus and being a young Church that reaches out to their peers outside the parish grounds.
- Need to update references to social communications – social media and to deal with its positive, negative, and challenging impact.
- The translation is very bad in many instances. Much attention needs to be placed in the translation process.

Dedicatoria / Dedication

- It is important to recognize not only their contributions, but the challenges that they face when trying to live their Christian faith in today's cultural environments, and also in regards to Church teachings whose principles they do not always understand well and therefore are not valued.
- Need to clarify why young people 16-18 years of age are considered young adults, when so much effort has been done in the Church to separate the groups of under and over 18, in recent years.
- Also, it should be mentioned as a challenge the education in the faith of their children, as one of the primary calls that young parents have.
- In the last paragraph, it is not only our responsibility to "announce" God's Reign, but we should strive to make it a reality in our personal life, our family, and the various social environments in which we live.

Introducción al plan pastoral / Introduction to the pastoral plan

- Need to recognize that the original dialogue with young adults took place many years ago; all of them are now mature adults. For a good updating of the Plan, it will be necessary to have new dialogues, with a cross section of young adults in the Church of today.
- In the first section of bullets:
 - Bullet 1 should focus in the invitation of young adults to have frequent encounters with Jesus and to deepen their relationship with him as missionary disciples. This focus is OK later in the document, but here it is missing.
 - Bullet 2 may be the invitation to have a better integration of young adults in the life and mission of the Church and, in the Latino approach, it should be done by young adults that are the main agents of ministry with their peers, sustained by ministers dedicated to the various specialized ministries encompassed in this Plan.
- In the second section of bullets:
 - Bullets 1 and 2 should recognize *Pastoral Juvenil* and apostolic movements, not only "university ministry".
 - Speak about *Pastoral Juvenil Hispana* as the Hispanic/Latino model of engaging in youth and young adult ministry:
 - Emphasize its focus on vocational discernment and development of one's life project in light of the Gospel.
 - Connect Latino young adult ministry through *Pastoral Juvenil* with ministry with youth and family ministry, particularly as young adults get engaged for marriage and have young families.

- Mention the large number of *jóvenes* that serve in various parish ministries, particularly in choirs and as catechists to young children, and how many of them engage in social justice activities.
- Include references to the various realities in the life of Latino young adults:
 - Immigrant and bicultural identities, which are shared by a large segment of our Church young adults, not only in the Latino community.
 - Need to be served bilingually.
 - Wide socioeconomic spectrum of Latino young adults, farmworkers, blue collar, in the service industry, students, professionals...
 - Leadership among young adult Latinos happens outside of the academic and professional worlds.
 - Statistics need to be updated.
- Suggestion: To speak about the reasons behind each of the goals to provide more meaning to them.

Primera Parte: El joven adulto / Part 1: The Young Adult

This part requires a good explanation of the concept of *joven* and young adult (*adulto joven*), in the Hispanic community, and the contrast of terminology with the mainstream culture. We suggest to review the issue 3 in the series *Perspectives on Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry*, “Pastoral Juvenil Hispana, Youth Ministry, and Young Adult Ministry: An Updated Perspective on Three Different Pastoral Realities,” published by *Fe y Vida* (2007).

1. *Desarrollar una identidad personal / Developing Personal Identity*

¶-3 Regarding ethnic identity, it is important to mention the 1.5 and the second generation. It speaks about immigrants and then, of their and fourth generation.

It speaks about a “balance between one’s ethnic group and that of the general culture.” We do not speak in these terms, but of the *mestizaje* or fusion of the culture of origin and the U.S. culture, and of intercultural relationships with people of many ethnic groups, including those of European background.

- The language and the focus of *Many Faces in God’s House* and of *Building Intercultural Competences*, need to be included.

2. *Cultivar relaciones / Developing Relationships*

La vida soltera / single life

- It is important to mention the large number of Hispanic single mothers who oftentimes do not find support in traditional Church environments.

4. *Cultivar una vida espiritual* / Developing a Spiritual Life

- There are statistics about Hispanic young adults participating in the life of the Church significantly more than mainstream young adults. This should be noted and reflected upon.
- Latino popular piety needs to be mentioned as well as how young parents seek catechesis for their children, and the various challenges that they confront and that a parish faces in this regard.

Segunda parte: *La visión de fe para los jóvenes adultos* / Part 2: Vision of Faith

El llamado a vivir en comunidad – nutrir la fe / The call to Community – Nourishing Faith

In another place, the document speaks about intentional communities where the members find affinity among themselves. In this section, it should be mentioned again and it should be recognized that young adults from Latino and other ethnic groups tend to gather in communities that share their culture and language, and that the Church should foster “unity in diversity,” among the various ethnic/intentional communities, including those formed by apostolic movements.

Tercera parte: Plan para el Ministerio / Part 3: Plan for the Ministry

A general recommendation for this section is to include a section for *pastoral juvenil* in each goal, and to take as a basis for its development *the Conclusions from the First National Encounter for Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry*.

SECTION 2

RECOMMENDED PROCESS FOR THE REVISION OF THE PLAN

To respond to the reality of the Catholic Church in the United States, the revision of this Pastoral Plan requires a complex process, which is recommended to have the following phases:

- **Phase 1: Conceptual revision**, with an emphasis at the conceptual level and include an updating of the description of the reality today and of more recent documents of the Church. It may be done in English by two cultural groups working independently because of the significant differences in the pastoral models in ministry with young adults: (a) ministers serving young adults according to the model stated in the document, which is appropriate for mainstream young adult ministry; (b) ministers serving the Hispanic community, with has two distinct models to serve young adults: *pastoral juvenil* to attend *jóvenes* (single young people 16-30 years of age), and other pastoral ministries that serve the rest of the Hispanic young adult population.
- **Phase 2: Intercultural dialogue**, with an emphasis in identifying areas of: (a) common vision, (b) complementary or enriching perspectives, and (c) distinct pastoral approaches that call for integration without assimilation, in order to have an effective ministry that responds to the entire young adult population in our Church.
- **Phase 3: First editorial revision in English**, with an emphasis in producing a first draft of the revised version of the Plan, which includes the richness of the two major approaches to ministry in our U.S. Catholic Church. The committee working on this draft should have experts from both—mainstream and Hispanic ministry.
- **Phase 4: Consultation**, with an emphasis in three areas to: (a) include ministers serving other ethnic groups, such as the African American, Vietnamese and Native American as well as specializations such as university, family, and military ministries, who may have particular perspectives to add; (b) propose amendments and corrections to the text; (c) identify texts that are confusing and require further explanation.
- **Phase 4: Translation into Spanish and consultation in Spanish**, while maintaining the English version “frozen,” with an emphasis in: (a) securing a coherent perspective from the various Hispanic/Latino ministerial specializations, and (b) identifying areas or texts that need further work.
- **Phase 5: Bilingual-bicultural editorial revision**, with an emphasis in securing that both versions say the same at the conceptual level, and are written in correct English and in correct Spanish.

Back to the Basics: Grow and Go

In a time such as this, a reasonable and prudent strategy emerges from the fundamental principles of the Christian life. Said another way, we need to go back to the basics. As baptized followers of Christ, we have all received two foundational calls: the universal call to holiness and the universal call to mission. Our invitation to holiness is rooted in the Great Commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. We need to embrace the challenge to love God and love everyone else; this is a call to 'grow'. Our growth in holiness unites us closer to God and to each other. Growth entails daily prayer, the Sacraments, the reading of Scripture, and the submission of our entire lives to the Lordship of Christ. We are His, and His Spirit initiates and brings to perfection the gift of grace we have received.

Many individual Catholics and young adult ministries eagerly embrace the call to grow. While not always comfortable, the process of holiness feels more personal and therefore more manageable and dare I say, safer. However, something is radically missing if our personal lives and communal lives do not include a radical commitment to the universal call to mission. When Jesus commanded his disciples to go make disciples of all nations, His directive extended beyond the first believers and applies to all of the faithful throughout the generations. The recent popes have emphasized this duty. "...the mission of proclaiming the word of God is the task of all of the disciples of Jesus Christ based on their baptism. No believer in Christ can feel dispensed from this responsibility..." (*Pope Benedict XVI Verbum Domini #94*) "For

each believer, as for the entire Church, the missionary task must remain foremost, for it concerns the eternal destiny of humanity and corresponds to God's mysterious and merciful plan." (*Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, #86*) This is strong language from Benedict and John Paul and their emphasis can be found in Paul VI, Francis, other popes, and too many saints to list here. Even though evangelization receives a primacy of importance, why do many young adults and young adult ministries fail to regularly engage in the mission? Why are we comfortable with growing, but we struggle to go?

While there are myriads of accurate answers to the two previous questions, I humbly offer two common reasons for a lack of evangelization among Catholic young adults. First, many young adults falsely believe they must reach a certain level of holiness or preparedness in order to publicly proclaim Jesus is Lord and invite people into a relationship with Him. A common reason for not sharing the Good News is something like this, "I don't know what to do," or "I don't feel ready." While these responses may develop out of a sincere desire to make sure all the boxes are checked before starting evangelistic work, it does not square with the ministry of Christ. Early in His time with the first disciples, Jesus empowered them and sent them to declare the presence of the kingdom of God. (Matthew 10:35) In many ways His followers were not ready, but Jesus wanted them to experience total dependence on Him while learning to cross the great divide from personal piety to public ministry. Naturally, Christ's command followed their conversion, time spent with Him, and a long list of instructions, but it is safe to assume that as they walked

down the road to start their mission, they wondered how to *actually* accomplish the task put before them.

Secondly, in order to become effective missionary disciples, each one of us needs more power. We need more love, more wisdom, more joy, and more gifts. We need to be energized, convicted, and inspired. We need our hearts broken with anguish over the lost, and we need a greater union with Christ. This is not simply about trying harder; none of this is really about us. This is why we need a game-changer. We need more of the Holy Spirit. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #74, Blessed Pope Paul VI bluntly states the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of mission. He writes, "Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit." Talk about a provocative and challenging statement from the vicar of Christ! Paul VI clearly insists the faithful rely on the action of the Holy Spirit because evangelization is pointless and fruitless without the Spirit. Pentecost launched the first evangelization, and Pentecost must continue to fuel our efforts, especially with young adults.

Growing and going is not a linear process but cyclical. We need to be always expanding our capacity to love and our union with God. Additionally, we must always be ready to give a defense for our hope and lovingly invite those around us to a salvific relationship with Jesus. Young adult ministry needs more resources, vision, strategy, and faith, but let's also go back to the basics. Let's invite everyone to grow and go.

Beyond the Numbers

A White Paper about Young Adult Ministry

Frank P. DeSiano, CSP

There hardly seems to be a week without another set of numbers about religion in general and Catholics in particular. The wonderful folks at Pew Research survey people all the time, assessing trends about many things, including religion. In the Catholic universe, CARA presents regular data about Catholics, and cohorts within the general Catholic population.

There are many paradoxical things about research into the religious lives of Young Adults. On the one hand, when one uses the category “attendance at Mass regularly,” the picture seems to be quite gloomy. A safe estimate is that only two out of ten Young Adults are involved in regular practice of a faith—whether Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or whatever. At the same time, in spite of this relative non-practice of faith, Catholics hold on to an identity which seems to endure even through relative absence at Mass on Sunday.

For us Catholics, for whom weekly attendance at Mass seems to be both the gold standard and the basic bottom line, this news is drastic. As a result, commentators can draw a rather dire picture of Catholicism among Young Adults . . . and project a dire picture into the future. The rise of the so-called “nones,” (those who answer “none” when asked about religious preference) gives us one more statistical vocabulary item to objectify and worry about. Even so, these dire pictures may be quite distortionary when it comes to describing where Young Adult Catholics are, and even more distortionary when it comes to thinking about what it means to minister to Young Adults.

The reason is simple. If “going to Mass regularly” forms the bucket into which one wants to pour Young Adult Catholics, one will miss a lot of faith activity that happens even apart from Mass. Of course one wants people to attend Mass on a regular—indeed, weekly—basis. But perhaps non-attendance at Mass is not a statement about faith so much as it is about a cultural situation in which Young Adults find themselves in the modern world. In this case, the danger is that we write off, in our minds but, even worse, in our pastoral practice, almost eighty percent of Young Adults. In our attitude toward them—they are “nones” and do not believe—we end up categorizing them outside the Church; and such attitudes run the risk of becoming self-fulfilling.

Most Young Adult Catholics believe in God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mary, the sacraments, the Mass, the Real Presence, commitment to treat others justly, and to serve those in need. So what’s with the non-attendance at Mass? Scholars like Robert Wuthnow correlate attendance at church with the whole phenomenon of “settling down”—and people settle down at least ten years later than they used to. Furthermore, adolescents and Young Adults experience puberty and the process of mating for over fifteen years of their lives. A lot of what we are seeing in terms of behavior represents the dislocation that growing up in modern society exacts on people. Of course, what better place to preserve one’s integrity and find a mate than in church? But, from a Young Adult point of view, church is where “those old people” go. Or “those married people” go.

Might a fuller approach to Young Adults gain something from the “gradualism” that Pope Francis frequently talks about? But this gradualism—whereby people come to absorb values more deeply into their lives through step-by-step experience—only works when people see themselves still connected to the community of the Church. So a pastoral direction would be this: from the side of our ministry, to continue making contact, offering connections, and building bridges with Young Adults so that they see

their connection with the Church more consistently. Rather than insisting on a solid circle that stands in the middle—“And you better be in that circle!”—we can think of rings of concentric circles, with more active Young Adults in the center, but with waves of other circles surrounding this center. This means approaching people with the assumption that they belong to the Church—and can belong even more—rather than with the assumption that they no longer belong, or belong in only a dubious way.

The pastoral working-out of this strategy would involve creating a variety of events and contact points for Young Adults, and employing communication—face to face, of course; but also multiple kinds of social and Internet contact—to generate contact and interchange between more active Young Adults and their brother-and-sister Catholics (and others!) who are less active. How interesting that certain parishes and cathedrals seem to be magnets for Young Adults . . . showing how selective Young Adults will be when they choose, and also how important peer contact is for connecting Young Adults to a faith community. And surely, if there are hundreds of Young Adults at a Mass, they will be in very different relationships with Christ and with the Church; whatever the state of the relationship, ministry can build up it to increase commitment and discipleship.

While it is tempting to define Church as the solid core of the totally committed, in reality Catholicism has functioned more as the solid core that touches a much bigger population of less-than-solid members and brings them along as that is possible. We can use categories of “discipleship” to build walls, or we can use those categories to build the bridges that are possible in a person’s life. Nicholas Lombardo, O.P., has recently written about ministry to those in their 20s/30s, a distillation of years of interaction with Young Adults ([20s/30s Ministry: A Guide for Parishes](#), Paulist Press). His book images a core circle, but it also shows how much energy can emerge from that core.

That we have necessary categories for statisticians and sociologists to do their work in one thing. That people defy categories, and leap from one to another, especially in their young years, is quite another thing. If a variety of factors have shaped the religious activity of Young Adults today, those same factors show a fluidity in life that can work as much in favor of stronger faith as it can work against it.

Connecting, Empowering, Equipping

I. SEE: Observations about young adult culture and young adult ministry

Over the years, in my conversations and ministry with young adults in their 20s and 30s, the following themes have arisen again and again:

- While many American young adults are nonreligious or religiously inactive, many others manifest deep commitment and knowledge of their faith. Moreover, many religiously inactive young adults show great openness to, and respect for, religious beliefs and religious practices. In short, there are both positive and negative indicators, and on the whole, there are many reasons for hope and encouragement in the realm of young adult ministry.
- Young adults for whom faith is central to their lives almost always feel a need to connect with like-minded young adults. They often struggle to find them in their local areas, however, especially if they have recently relocated due to work or education.
- The most effective ministers and evangelizers to young adults are typically other young adults, especially when they are active in a larger young adult Christ-centered community. Many young adults are ready and eager to take on leadership roles in young adult ministry.
- Motivated young adults frequently start ministries in their parish, only to face two problems. First, they have little idea of how to organize a ministry, or where to go for help. Second, even if they succeed in getting their ministry off the ground, the ministry tends to fizzle after 2-4 years due to leadership and membership turnover and lack of replenishment.
- Reflecting today's complex social and ecclesial situation, even mature, balanced, and well-catechized young adults often approach ministerial roles with an inadequately universal and catholic perspective, unreflectively assuming the biases of their own ecclesial background (whether from left, right, up, down, whatever).
- Catholic young adult ministry is currently in a "pre-paradigmatic" stage. While much good work has been done and continues to happen, there is little consensus about what young adult ministry should look like at either parish or diocesan level. The lack of consensus is not necessarily the result of disagreement. In fact, a great deal of agreement seems to exist on the level of principle and theory. More fundamentally, it results from a relative lack of concrete options to choose from.

II. JUDGE: Connecting, empowering, and equipping young adults should be focus

Thinking about these observations, the following seems to be the case:

- Young adults themselves are the key to Church's ministry with young adults. Yet they are often inadequately connected among themselves and with the larger Church. Furthermore, in order to be effective ministers, young adults need more support and resources from Catholic leaders, Catholic institutions, and Catholic organizations.

- At this moment in time, the best way to strengthen and enhance the Church’s ministry with young adults is by (a) connecting them with each other and the larger Church; (b) empowering them to take on leadership roles in young adult ministry and their local parishes and dioceses; and (c) equipping them with the tools and support they need.
- Given that young adult ministry is in a pre-paradigmatic stage, rather than trying to endorse a detailed vision before it exists on the ground, it makes more sense to focus on setting the stage for something to emerge organically by (a) encouraging creativity and (b) putting in place effective structures of communication and collaboration. “Unleashing” young adults—in ongoing, constructive relationship with Church leaders and existing Church structures—would give them space to figure out what young adult ministry should look like in all its particulars and hopefully bring us beyond our current pre-paradigmatic stage.

III. ACT: Action items

For the consideration of the Forum, I would like submit the following action items as ways to connect, empower, and equip young adults.

1. Encourage every diocese to sponsor diocesan-wide Pentecost Vigil Celebrations for young adults. The event would serve two main purposes. First, it would provide a positive, hopeful liturgical and social event for young adults at a time when there are few “ecclesial calendar” conflicts. Second, it would provide an opportunity for side-gatherings of young adult leaders. It could also help popularize the Pentecost Vigil more generally, both within the Church and as an ecumenical event. (Though the second biggest celebration in the early Church and reincorporated into the Roman Missal in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Pentecost Vigil remains largely unknown and has yet to be recovered by the wider Church.) For more information about this proposal, see www.pentecost20s30s.com.
2. To meet young adults’ need for Christian community and to empower them to minister to their peers, prioritize the formation of parish-based young adult ministries. Likewise, develop resources and travelling workshops to help young adult volunteers with the practical nuts and bolts of starting new ministries and maintaining existing ones.
3. When it comes to promoting models for young adult ministries, in whatever documents that might emerge from official Catholic sources, praise the following characteristics as especially conducive to vibrant ministry:
 - a. Weekly meetings: to ensure that a living community emerges and not merely a regular gathering. The principle of fundraising applies: the more you ask, the more you get. Then, in a virtuous circle, the more you get, the more young adults prioritize the ministry in their schedules and the more new members are attracted to join.
 - b. Parish (or parish-cluster) based without being limited to parishioners: to ensure connection to the larger Catholic community, and to make sure that the ministry has at least some amount of institutional support and guidance, as well as a larger ecclesial setting to which they can contribute and give back.
 - c. Leadership by a core team of young adults: to foster collaborative leadership, to ensure that responsibilities do not fall on the shoulders of one or two individuals, to

empower a wider range of young adults, and to ensure leadership continuity and thus address the problem of the short lifespan of young adult ministries. (Core teams also obviate the need for a professional young adult minister which large ministries might otherwise require.)

4. Invite every diocese to ensure that the diocesan website lists all young adult ministries active in the diocese. Ask them to check every year that every listed ministries is still active.
5. Develop national website that can be a clearinghouse for young adult resources. Invite individuals and organizations to develop resources, such as modules for discussion groups with reading materials and questions, and then post them on the website.
 - a. For example, Benedictines might prepare a series on liturgy, a diocesan family life office something on marriage, and the Jesuits something on discernment.
 - b. Welcome unsolicited submissions of every kind. Maintain a very low bar of editorial oversight in terms of what is accepted, perhaps a criterion as simple as fidelity to Church teaching, trusting that the cream will rise to the top, both to increase the site's catholicity and to minimize the workload of webmaster.
6. Develop annual 1-2 week training program for "non-professional" young adult leaders. Each diocese nominates a few young adults, and then they gather for a period of community, education, and spiritual formation. The program would be designed not merely to impart pastoral and theological knowledge, but also to provide them with an experience of the universality of the church and an opportunity to meet other young adult leaders.
 - a. The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, might be able to host such a program. (I would be happy to help facilitate the arrangements.)
 - b. Cross-culturally, some of the most effective young adult leaders have spent an extended period in a formation program that includes community, education, formation, and service. I am thinking for example of the Emmanuel Community's 9-month School of Mission program and what I have observed in China. The goal of these programs is not about forming professional lay ministers (though that often happens) but more generally about forming disciples and giving them the tools to exercise leadership in whatever form. In the United States, 1-2 weeks is probably the longest that could be sustained on any large scale, but perhaps lay movements and religious orders could be encouraged to develop 3, 6, 9, or 12 month programs.
7. Actively invite and encourage religious and priests to be involved in young adult ministry at parish, diocesan, and national levels. Young adult ministry often lacks their presence and involvement. Just as young adult ministry often involves spotting potential for leadership in young adults that they do not realize they have, so too religious and priests (and not simply the younger ones) often need to be invited to be involved before they realize their potential. Young adult ministry can be intimidating even to professional ministers with years of experience. It is particularly important to ensure that priests and religious are present during diocesan and national planning so that their perspectives can be heard.
8. Contact local contemplative orders and ask, if possible, to talk with them, in order to inform them of diocesan plans for young adult ministry and ask for their prayers. By their nature contemplative orders do not to seek out visitors, but they will greatly appreciate being contacted and invited to support a local ministry by their prayers. Their prayers will surely

- help, and depending on their charism, they may also be able to enrich the spiritual opportunities available to young adults in the area. For example, they may have facilities to allow for a small planning day retreat, or perhaps a weekend spiritual retreat.
9. Seek to connect with young adult ministries in other countries and cultures, for the sake of learning from them and sharing “best practices,” building a sense of catholicity, and possibly arranging cross-cultural exchanges.
 10. Host a large gathering/conference to surface and honor grassroots initiatives led by Catholic young adults that either (a) serve the poor and marginalized and/or (b) share the Gospel through creative forms of evangelization. Individual initiatives could be given individual booths in a kind of ministry fair, and the formal schedule could alternate between panel discussions, pastoral/theological reflections, and artistic presentations. The purpose would be to connect young adults among themselves, lift them for the wider Church to see, and hopefully give these sorts of initiatives a boost.
 11. Develop another name for “Young Adult Ministry.” Outside of ministerial circles, relatively few people understand that “Young Adult Ministry” is concerned with ministry to people in the demographic 18-39. People often assume “Young Adult Ministry” is for teenagers. Also, many adults in their 20s and 30s do not like be referred to as “young adults.” Is there a better name that would be more easily understood?

Lastly may I say that I am delighted that this Forum is happening and I look forward to hearing what comes of it. I am teaching this year in Beijing and will not be there, but I will be praying for a fruitful and Spirit-filled conversation.

Nicholas Lombardo, OP
Associate Professor
School of Theology and Religious Studies
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

Becoming Intercultural and Universal (Catholic) Ministries

Questions to be addressed by this white paper:

How can Catholic young adult ministry be more inter-culturally competent? AND How should young adults in the United States be more connected to the universal and international experiences of the Catholic Church?

Young Adult Ministry has always been at the forefront of developing new ministry trends for the Catholic Church in the United States. From its inception in the Archdiocese of Chicago 30+ years ago, YA Ministry meant to create a new paradigm for how the Church meets young adults “where they are at” and developed new practices for ministry that have helped invigorate parishes and communities throughout the country. With the changing reality of our communities and the demographics shift of our U.S. Catholic population, one could argue that right now YA ministry has an opportunity to once again help to shift the paradigm of engaging the diverse cultural reality of the United States and help us develop a more global understanding of the “universal” Catholic Church.

I have most recently been reflecting on the issues of culture and the catholic/universal understanding of church after World Youth Day Krakow, which affirmed the importance of these international experiences to offer insights on how we help young adults engage different cultures as well as help us better understand our call to encounter Christ in others as Catholics. We can make YA Ministry more interculturally competent by having young adults, and those that minister to them, experience other cultures, like we do in WYD pilgrimages. We can also take advantage of experiences like WYD, pilgrimages, mission trips, and other moments of encountering the other to help young adults connect to the universal and international experience of being Catholic.

First is the opportunity for encounter. In entering into adulthood, many young adults have either begun or have had the experience of navigating a world with people that are different from themselves. Whether it's going to college, moving for a new job, or just being thrust into the reality of adulthood, young adults have had the experience of meeting others from a diversity of backgrounds, cultures, races, political views, etc. However, that experience is often done in a neutral or safe context for them. Going to another country not only forces you to encounter people that are different from you, but also encounter places, societies, and cultures that are different than your own. This can often help young adults rethink their understanding of themselves and their world. Encountering people in our own safe spaces is different than the experience of encountering a person where they are at.

When I traveled to Rome in 2010 for the Tenth International Youth Forum, I was shook to my core to have real experiences of the differences between myself and young adults from other countries. I come from a diverse background, grew up in a large city, went to a diverse high school and college; but the conversations and sharing that took place in Rome helped to redefine for me what it meant to be Catholic. I no longer looked at my faith through the eyes of a person born and raised in the United States. I witnessed how diverse and rich our global Catholic community truly is. I also realized how much of my understanding of the Catholic faith tradition was informed by my U.S. culture. The same kinds of experiences have happened when I traveled to Madrid in 2011 for World Youth Day and to Krakow this

past summer. The encounter changed me. The lesson I learned was that the best way to dialogue with and learn from another culture is to experience it. These experiences help us to better comprehend the universal nature of being Catholic and the gift of our intercultural tradition.

Encounter is important and essential in the faith life of a person, especially a young adult. As Pope Benedict XVI says in *Deus Caritas Est*, “[b]eing a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” And we can learn much from the Encounter with other cultures. As ministers, when we begin to experience what others are doing to engage young adults in the life of the Church, we can begin to see ways that we incorporate those models into our own ministry.

In the past three years, as the Director of Young Adult Ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago, I was privileged to observe and engage the ministry models that have been prevalent in Hispanic young adult communities, or *Pastoral Juvenil*. Many of these ministry models are based on lay movements that started in South and Latin America. An emphasis for these models includes small faith sharing communities for deeper engagement in one’s community and one’s faith. When looking at what Millennials here in the U.S. are attracted to in the Church and what they are looking for at a personal level, the deep and meaningful relationships that these small communities foster and the opportunity for an authentic witness can have great success in engaging this generation: “We need to take seriously the Franciscan—Pope Francis, not St. Francis—epistemology that starts with the lived experiences of people” (The Catholic Millennial: 21 Questions for Christopher J. Hale, [HERE](#)). As we engaged more YA Ministry leaders into dialogue with each other, and in their own lived experiences, we saw a genuine interest from different cultural communities, including the Anglo, Black, and Polish communities, to explore the ministry models of the *Pastoral Juvenil*, sometimes creating great opportunities for sharing resources and collaboration. We also experienced great success with the formation models of the Maryknolls, who, using the pedagogy of *Aparecida*, provided a way to help young adults reflect on their call to missionary discipleship within the context of their own lives and cultural context.

This is all to say that when given an opportunity for sharing and learning from one another’s cultural gifts, we can develop new skills and new ways to engage young adults. I believe that this encounter with the other needs to be intentional and consistent. I was blessed to be able to develop a diverse team in my ministry that brought individuals with different talents and backgrounds together to work collaboratively in the Young Adult Ministry Office. Though diversity of cultures was not a deciding factor when choosing a team member, what that diversity allowed us to do, as an Office, was to engage many of the culturally diverse communities in a way that had not been tried or successful before. It allowed for collaboration and dialogue that began to create really diverse initiatives, both diverse in the individuals working in them as well as the perspectives they brought to the collaboration. Our goal was to be a ministry office for ALL young adult communities in the Archdiocese, and that meant recognizing and engaging all our diversity; whether that is cultural, racial, language, geographical, stages of life, and more. That comprehensive understanding of our diversity and making sure no community felt “left out” from the work of our office began to bring young adult leaders together, which in turn led to young adult communities working together.

Based on these experiences and learnings, we can make our ministry to young adults more intercultural competent and connected to the international experiences of the Catholic Church. First, we can encourage young adults to participate in these international experiences like WYD, canonization pilgrimages, mission trips, etc. These experiences need to be supplemented with good spiritual and catechetical formation before and after. The preparation for these experiences should help open their hearts and minds to the experience of encountering others and helping them see Christ in the others. The follow up should help them process the experience, reflect on what they learned, and reflect on how they will incorporate that experience into their own faith lives and their outward living of that as missionary disciples, or as disciples with an outward orientation to be missionary.

Second, as ministry leaders, we should actively engage in conversations with leaders from other cultural communities. We should share ideas, engage in experiences that help us understand their culture and their processes. And we need to create spaces where the conversation between diverse ministers and ministries can happen. These spaces should include the opportunity for dialogue but also a chance to reflect and critique or own practices and see where we may benefit from incorporating other's practices and models into our own. They should also intentionally explore opportunities for collaboration between diverse groups. The spaces can be created on a local (diocesan), regional, and national level. They should also consider other forms of diversity, like geography (urban, suburban, and rural) or community context (parish, campuses, and lay movements).

Finally, we have a very opportune moment to delve deeply into intercultural competence with the *Quinto Encuentro* process happening right now at the national level. This process, though coming from Hispanic Catholic community in the U.S. and steeped in the culture and language of Hispanic people, can be an opportunity for dialogue and sharing among young adults. Our experience in Chicago in doing our own Multicultural *Encuentro* in 2013 showed that the processes of *Encuentro* can work with diverse cultures and can provide a way for different groups to have similar conversations that converge into a larger conversation that can help pastoral leaders better understand diverse needs at a diocesan level. Though the Multicultural *Encuentro* process had little follow up because of changes within the diocesan structures, the foundation it created was one that helped shape the next phase of YA Ministry in Chicago that we are still benefiting from today. (To learn more about the Multicultural *Encuentro* process of Chicago, see [HERE](#).) With the *Quinto Encuentro* process happening in many of our dioceses now, YA Ministry leaders should see on how we can adapt the process for the wider young adult Catholic communities in their dioceses as well as how they can engage the Hispanic Catholic leadership to dialogue and collaborate with them on this process.

We have a wonderful opportunity as the Catholic Church in the U.S. to be a place for young adults to encounter the "other" and learn that truth that we are all Sons and Daughters of God. In our current political and social climate, I think it must be a priority of our Church leaders to find ways that we can encourage young adults to see Christ in others, especially those that are different. International experiences of Church will help invite young adults to seek that deeper sense of universal, or "catholic", identity. We need to provide the tools for these experiences to be fruitful, but we must also engage in dialogue with the diversity in our local communities as well. The experiences with cultural diversity in

our local context can be an opportunity to transform our ministries and our communities by learning from the gifts our different cultures have to share.

Learning to Labor in the Fields: Building on Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Evangelization Among Young Adults

**By Tricia Bølle
St. Francis Xavier Lay Missionary Society**

In today's Catholic world, we often speak in terms of the "new evangelization," and yet most Catholics – young adults included – barely know where to begin when it comes to even the *most basic forms* of evangelization. If we are to have a comprehensive discussion on the "new evangelization" for young adults, it is important to first look at how we might approach evangelization in its purest sense to assist the physical and spiritual growth of our young adult communities and to build a more sustainable future for the Church. Likewise, in the increasingly culturally diverse society in which we live, it's important that evangelization also be approached from a cross-cultural perspective that highlights the beauty of the diversity found within the universal Church both at home and abroad.

At a presentation on evangelization given in 2014 to the largest active young adult community in Northern California, the question was posed as to how one might be able to go about sharing their faith in the workplace. To which one young man responded, "If I start passing out Bibles in my office, I'm going to get in serious trouble with my boss!"¹

With no one offering to challenge that perception, it seems that in a diverse group of fifty young adult Catholics, evangelization – the very work to which every baptized Christian has been called by Christ Himself – is the mere handing out of sacred Scripture. If that, then, is the general understanding of most young adult Catholics, it is of little wonder the Church seems to be growing so slowly in the West. It also, perhaps, suggests a greater issue at stake: that among many young adults there exists a great lack of understanding of their role in the mission of the Church and the proper stewardship of that precious gift of Faith that they have been given.

Forming a Personal Relationship with Christ

What then are we to do? How should we approach a situation in which much of the Body of Christ is unaware of how they are called to pursue their Christian role to participate in the primary mission of the Church? Moreover, in a country as culturally diverse as the United States, how can young adults hope to reach out to the millions of non-Christian young adults studying and working in the US. from different ethnic backgrounds?

Among young adults, the first priority is to encourage a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus Christ, genuine acceptance of His unconditional love, and discernment of their unique calling in Christ to participate in His mission of salvation. Without these elements present, evangelization cannot effectively occur. This should be the goal of any young adult ministry program. For one cannot give what one does not have. The paths to achieve this are varied, but most often should begin with deep prayer and faith study, as these allow for a meaningful personal relationship with God to develop.

As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI so passionately says, “Dear brothers and sisters, this is true for every Christian: faith is first and foremost a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, it is having an experience of his closeness, his friendship and his love. It is in this way that we learn to know him ever better, to love him and to follow him more and more.” – Pope Benedict XVI (Oct. 21, 2009).

With this first and foremost foundational element of our faith set forth – a deep, personal relationship with Christ – young adults can then progress toward the next important relationship for evangelization: forming a relationship with the other.

Forming a Relationship With the Other

Evangelization begins with relationship. It is not merely the passing out of Scripture texts, nor is it simply the realm of priests and sisters. Rather, it is the duty of every baptized Christian to share the gift of faith received from the Holy Spirit. In learning how to share one’s faith with another child of God, requires the Christian to first internally be assured of his or her own relationship with God, His love for all His children, basic understanding of the faith, and trust in the Holy Spirit to bless their engagement with one another. In this way, the Christian might effectively be able to extend an invitation of joy and peace to the other, and help the other realize the *imago Dei* within him or herself.

Yet in Western society, there is a concern among many Christians of the increased political correctness of society and concern with overstepping and creating uncomfortable situations on topics of faith with others who, the Christian fears, may not be so accepting. Yet, such perceived obstacles can be overcome through possessing a strong faith in God and His providence. Moreover, we’ve found that one place to more easily start on the path to evangelization is actually within cross-cultural communities, where the need is great and where there tends to be greater openness and reception to the Gospel of our Risen Lord when a humble and respectful, culturally-sensitive approach is integrated into one’s efforts.

Cross-Cultural Outreach on College Campuses and Social Environments

Working with Catholic college students and young adults to learn how to do cross-cultural evangelization allows them to develop the interpersonal skills necessary to be more effective evangelists in any environment. Furthermore, there is an incredible opportunity unlike any we've seen in decades of a major influx of young adult immigrants coming to study or work in the US from predominantly non-Christian cultures. Therein presents a great opportunity that, at the moment, is being largely lost among young adult Catholics in the U.S. to labor for the salvation of souls in our own backyard. In so doing, it will draw not only the other child of God, but also the Catholic Christian evangelist themselves, into a deeper, more meaningful relationship with Christ and understanding of the Christian faith (which is, again, the goal of any good young adult ministry).

So where can one start?

Currently, there are over 250,000 Chinese international students on US campuses... but virtually no outreach by Catholic faith communities. And yet many Chinese are curious about the Christian faith. Where will they find welcome and understanding?

Cross-Cultural Evangelization to Asian College Students and Young Professionals

Last year alone, over a quarter million Chinese students were studying at American colleges and universities - most from mainland China - where the majority will spend a minimum of four years before returning to Asia. Countless more are working in various jobs as young professionals. Most have had little to no exposure to the Gospel prior to arriving on Western shores. Many will be curious about the Christian faith and look for an opportunity to learn more about Jesus Christ. Yet who will help them on their journey of discovery?

Currently, there is virtually no Catholic outreach effort focusing on sharing the life and love of Jesus Christ with these international students and young professionals.² For most young Chinese, if their desire to learn about the Christian faith is strong enough, they will have to make a concerted effort on their own to find a church. And what will they encounter when they arrive? Who will be there to greet them and explain the faith, Jesus Christ, the liturgy, the Eucharist, the life of the Church to them?

Thus, 4-7 years later, many of these educated young adults will return to Asia only slightly more informed of the Christian faith in the sense that it continues to permeate American society. A few, who made friends with active Christians or who were persistent in seeking out the faith on their own, may

have journeyed a little farther. And when they return home, what chance will they then have of encountering Christ? In reality, only a small percentage of these international students will be received into the Body of Christ while they are here. But only a very few. How can we better utilize this opportunity to share our faith with others, particularly these young adults from Asia, and thus encourage the spread of our faith in other countries and cultures?

Thus we have an incredible opportunity on our doorstep for Catholic young adults to begin to share their faith with the young Chinese students and professionals. The same elements that exist for evangelization in Western society and the new evangelization are present here as well, but presented in a way that will seem more obvious and even natural to a young adult who desires to build a relationship with the other.

Questions that may seem awkward outside of a young adult social mixer, will be more socially acceptable in a cross-cultural context, where genuine curiosity about the other's cultural background and personal story can lead to building the essential groundwork to form a relationship and share in one another's lives over coffee, tea or a meal. In that space, the Holy Spirit can begin to more efficaciously work on the receptive hearts and minds of all those involved, and allow the seeds of faith to be planted.

It's important also, for the cross-cultural evangelist to seek out the presence of nearby Asian Catholic communities or mission organizations that serve in Asia to educate oneself further about the cultural dynamic that exists and to access Chinese language resources to assist with the cultivation of faith in the individual concerned. This will also give the person with whom the faith is being shared an opportunity to choose a faith community where they will feel most comfortable growing in their faith and, ultimately, receiving the sacraments of initiation into the Church.

This approach of relationship building, faith sharing and cultural awareness can be applied in any evangelical context for the purpose of sharing the love of Jesus Christ to those living outside of the Church, and providing them with friendship, support, and resources during their time in the United States. It will also help young adult communities to likewise grow in their own faith and relationship with Christ in order to become more effective evangelists, and will help build up a Church filled with more empowered, evangelically-minded young adults with a greater appreciation for the diverse cultural experience of the Body of Christ throughout the world.

¹ "Be Ready to Give an Account of Your Hope – Evangelization in Post-Modern Society" presentation given by Tricia Bølle at St. Dominic's Catholic Church, San Francisco, October 23, 2014.

² "Cross-Cultural Campus Outreach to Chinese College Students" presentation by Br. Gregory Liu, OP at St. Albert's Priory, Oakland, August 2, 2014.

The question we would like to answer is: “What is a fruitful approach for young adult outreach?”

Two Pillars

For the Archdiocese of New York, the mission is two-fold: to help bring young adult Catholics to encounter Jesus Christ as well as help them connect with each other. We do this through bringing them the sacraments, community, and apostolic works and through connecting them with resources, events, volunteer opportunities, and likeminded peers, while simultaneously developing new initiatives in order to build the future of the Church.

Two of our initiatives are the Love and Life Encountered Program and the You Did It To Me Apostolic Work Program.

Love and Life Encountered and You Did It To Me Apostolic Works Programs

Many are familiar with the passage in Matthew, when Christ says to Peter “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...” (Matthew 16:18). Many do not know that when Jesus said this to Peter they were historically standing on a massive rock. In this rock, is a huge pit and at the bottom of the pit, is the beginning of the largest spring that flows into the Jordan River. This is considered by many the beginning of the Jordan River, which is scripturally interesting because of the imagery of the river of life that we see in Revelation: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city” (Revelation 22:1).

There are two seas connected to the Jordan River- the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of life and is surrounded by plentiful vegetation. The Dead Sea is literally dead. There is no life within it or around it. Scientifically, the only reason why the Sea of Galilee is filled with life and the Dead Sea is dead is because the Sea of Galilee *receives* of the Jordan River and *gives* of the Jordan River. The Dead Sea just *receives*.

This is a great analogy of love. In order to be fully alive, we need to *receive* God’s love and *give* God’s love. As we can see in our consumeristic culture, if we just receive but do not give of ourselves, the culture turns into, as St. Pope John Paul II phrased, a “culture of death.” As we see in the Dead Sea.

We set up opportunities through our Love and Life Encountered programs for young adults to receive God’s life and love and we give opportunities for young adults to give of themselves through our You Did It To Me Apostolic Work Program. By doing this, we hope to transform

this world and our Archdiocese from a culture of death into a culture of life, like the Sea of Galilee, we must encourage young Catholics to *receive* God's love, and then *give* God's love through service.

Within these two programs, we have a four category strategy.

Four Category Strategy for Young Adult Outreach

For the sake of structure and consistency in our outreach, and by using "the law of gradualness," we have taken our two pillars (connecting young adults with God; connecting young adults with each other) and our two programs (Love and Life Encountered and You Did It To Me) and have applied a structure made up of four categories of young adults that we have identified. These four categories are *Disciple*, *Friend*, *Acquaintance*, and *Seeker*, and we hope to create programming for each of these groups.

[It is worth noting, we are also taking into consideration the inner life of the spiritual journey. As you know the Church refers to these three stages as purgative, illuminative, and unitive; but, in reality they are not three distinct stages, but three aspects of the same way. Analogously we recognize that though we refer to the four categories, in reality they are four aspects of the same way- leading young adults to union with God. Also, just like in the spiritual journey, these categories are not necessarily meant to be followed in a linear order. By example, we recognize some people may start at a "Disciple" event, and still very much grow from a "Seeker" event.]

First and foremost, we are in the job of making saints and disciples. So our first category is *Disciple*. We make sure to provide programs that connect young adults to the sacraments, such as Young Adult Masses, confession opportunities, and Holy Hours with Adoration. This will help our end goal of assisting young adults to have a full encounter with God and to grow in their relationship with Him.

The second category, *Friend*, is focused on connecting young adults to catechetical opportunities that we hope will help launch them into a disciple. We provide programming like Theology on Taps, book clubs, Bible studies, Catholic Undergrounds, or any programming that helps a young adult learn more about their relationship with God and the sacraments.

The third category is *Acquaintance*. This category is focused on young adults who are not quite ready to get involved with young adult groups or church programs. We hope this category opens the door for their first steps into the life of the Church by challenging and inviting them out of their broader more secular way of living. These events are volunteer opportunities, church holiday parties (Mardi Gras or St. Patrick's Day for example), the Tim Tebow special needs prom, and other programming that gets their foot through the door (but is not too "churchy").

The fourth category is *Seeker*. This category is focused on young adults who are away from the sacraments and uncatechized. This programming is broader in nature with a secular appeal that will help to get the Seekers in contact with good, faithful young adults. For example, sports programming, jazz nights, movie screenings, pub crawls, galas, parties, and concerts.

Love and Invitation

Love and *Invitation* are the backbone of each category of our programming. We recognize that the most important part of our job is to *love* each young adult “where they are at” and to invite them into a deeper relationship with God. And by way of *invitation*, we hope to invite young adults along their way up to union with God. We also hope that we have developed a system that will attract young adults who are far from God and by using the “law of gradualness” lead them to become a disciple.

By two brief examples (though there are many more), we can see this system already working:

Catherine*, who is a practicing Protestant has become good friends with us through Jazz Night (Seeker event). After months, we invited her to the Tim Tebow Special Needs Prom (Acquaintance event) and she had a very good experience. Seeing that she wanted to encounter more, we invited her to Catholic Underground (Friend event) and she had a powerful experience with the Eucharist. Knowing this, we then invited her to the Young Adult Mass (Disciple event). She is now on the brink of becoming Catholic and we are continuing to help her with this. Catherine is a great example of the law of gradualness and the system of invitation we have in place working. If we did not have the Jazz (Seeker) event we would have never met Catherine.

Secondly we have Mercedes*. Mercedes had been living with her boyfriend who treated her poorly. After some urging from her mother, she attended our Love and Responsibility Series (Friend event). The series was shocking but freeing to her. She broke up with her boyfriend, but needed new friends. She began attending Jazz nights (Seeker event) regularly as well as other parties thrown by Catholics involved in our events. After some time, she became very involved in our catechetical book club (Friend event). After growing in relationships and trust in the Church, she began attending the Young Adult Masses and went to confession (Disciple event). She now volunteers each month on the welcome team for the Young Adult Mass as well as helps to lead the book club weekly. She even attends daily Mass on her lunch breaks despite a demanding job in the fashion industry. Mercedes again is a great example of the system and categories all working together.

All of this is easily accessed through the many resources the Office of Young Adult Outreach provides, such as our website, phone app, social networks, and team of coordinators.

*Name Changed

Sr. Bernadette Mota, FMA
Diocese of Colorado Springs.
Director of Young Adult Ministry

Young Adult Ministry: A Journey of Acompañamiento (Accompaniment)

With the increased levels of indifference, disconnection, polarization and disengagement among those in their 20's and 30's, what should be the response for ministry for and with young adults? We ask ourselves, why is it that that nearly 80% of cradle Catholics are no longer Catholic by the age of 23 (Forming Intentional Disciples p. 33). Just watch primetime television, listen to the radio, surf the internet, read a pop culture magazine or view billboards on the roadside and it's no wonder why there is such confusion. Though we are aware of the many negative influences which provoke a crisis of meaning for young adults today, we are also witnesses of a youth culture that is searching for truth, authenticity and beauty in life.

In *Caritas in Veritate* we read that “Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is” (no. 78). Even with the drama and division our society is experiencing, we know that God is writing a new page in the heart of His young people. The Church herself, in the person of Pope Francis, is expressing a positive and encouraging vision of young people. In Pope Francis' World Youth Day welcome address in Krakow, he encouraged the youth “to find fulfilment, to gain new strength, there is a way. It is not a thing or an object, but a person, and he is alive. His name is Jesus Christ.” In response to our ministry with and for young adults, one of the important questions to ask ourselves is how are we accompanying and empowering our young people in this true encounter with Christ?

Our US Catholic practice continues to operate on the presumption that although most Catholics teens “take a leave of absence” after Confirmation, they will find their way back when they are ready to get married and more so when they have children to be baptised. Looking at the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the average age for marriage in 1996 was 27.1 for men and 24.8 for females has increased to 29.7 for males and 27.8 for females in 2015. Furthermore, 49% of young adults ages 18-40 were married in 1996 and in 2010 that number dropped to 38% (Mark Gray, “Exclusive Analysis: National Catholic Marriage Rate Plummets” Our Sunday Visitor, June 26 2011.) This is clear evidence that young adults are waiting longer for marriage and therefore have more “in-between time” in terms of sacramental life, if they so choose to even be married in the Catholic Church at all.

There is no “cookie cutter” plan on how to reach every young adult, but being a Salesian Sister I have found that St. John Bosco's “Preventive System” is most effective in reaching young

people from various cultures, socio-economic status and educational backgrounds. The principles of this system are based on reason, religion, and above all, love. It consists of making the teachings and principles of our faith known and then being present to guide them on the path of being good Christians and honest citizens in a holistic way. This in turn cultivates attitudes of optimism, respect, and kindness which are expressions of the Father's merciful love.

Programs are important in young adult ministry; but cultivating genuine relationships, having a sense of belonging, and letting them know that they are loved by someone bigger (God) are the essentials. Our Church needs to make a conscious effort to accompany young adults as they go beyond themselves, beyond the comforts and emotions offered by our secular culture to be able to commit themselves to God's plan for them. I would like to emphasise the word **acompañamiento** (accompaniment) here because young adults need to be accepted and loved for who they are, but they also need guidance, support systems and people who hold them accountable. The joy of having met Christ spurs the desire to grow in knowledge of faith, to serve in mission and to become evangelizers in the world.

Being a young adult myself, I have come to a deep love for all young people and in a special way for young adults. It was during my college years that I actually began to discover the beauty of our Catholic faith and come to the realization that giving myself completely to God was worth it. Through my experience at World Youth Day in Canada in 2002, I felt a strong calling to a deeper life in Christ. The logical thing for me to do was to give a year of service as a lay missionary working for the Church, but God had other plans. It was through the profound daily experience of prayer, community life, service in mission and patient encouragement of those who were accompanying me that I had a gradual conversion. So much so that I entered religious life at the age of 25 and made my final vows as a Salesian Sister in 2015. I have had the blessing of serving in various capacities in youth and young adult ministry in California, Illinois, Texas and Colorado. In the diverse places I have served, I find that young adults are often seeking the same thing: a true meaning in life, genuine happiness and profound love. This can only be lived out in the concrete circumstances of one's daily life, the place where God is always present and ready to meet us. I am not saying that all young adults should be religious or priests, although I pray more will answer the call, but I am convinced that all young adults are called to a radical life of holiness. "Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love." (Lumen Fidei, no. 53).

Following an encounter with Christ, how do we empower young adults to take ownership and encourage them to share the Good News with their peers and in the world? I propose that it is necessary to begin with relationships (small groups), participate and collaborate with the

“bigger” (parishes and diocese) and embrace the “more’ (universal Church). In addition, those in leadership roles in the Church need to be able to spend time with young adults to be able to accompany them. Young adults themselves can and should be the leaders in their own ministry, but the Church ministers and lay leaders need to be able to foster real experiences of human love with them that lighten the burdens of daily life and lift them up from the ground as Christ did in the Gospels (Jn 8:11).

“For the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” (Evangelii Nuntiandi no. 19). The sacraments are the channels of divine mercy, and Mary is the surest way for the grace and the mercy of God. Any pastoral activity without reference to the presence of Mary would be a recipe for failure. Therefore as we live today and plan for the future, let us cultivate authentic relationships, let us accompany and empower young adults, let us preach the Gospel with our lives and be rooted in the sacraments as we entrust our young adults in our Church to Mary, our mother and our help.

White Paper on Young Adult Outreach
Paul Morisi, Coordinator of Adolescent and Young Adult Faith Formation
The Diocese of Brooklyn School of Evangelization and Office of Faith Formation

Outreach to young adults, those in their twenties and thirties, is crucial if we, as a Church, are not only going to grow in the Third Millennium, but also going to continue to maintain relevancy in the secular culture. Without this unique generation, we will cease to be the missionary Church that we have been called to be since our establishment two thousand years ago. Here we will examine how to welcome young adults into active participation in the parish as well as integrate this group into the ministries of the parish life.

We are seeing less and less local leadership being taken on by adults in their twenties and thirties. In many ways this can be attributed to a lack of engagement of those in that age bracket. As we look to meet the needs of the young adult community, we have to take a critical look at to how we plan our outreach. We need to keep in mind that Young Adults, especially in urban areas, are continuing their education and working to maintain a standard of living. Millennials are a digital, mobile, and diverse generation unlike any we in the Church have seen before. Instead of turning away from this generation, we need to empower our existing leaders to go out and meet these young adults where they are¹.

In addition, mentorship is a huge piece of successful young adult ministry. This mentorship not only allows for the young people to learn from the experience of those already in leadership roles in the parish, but it also allows for intergenerational ministry to take place².

When we are trying to attract Millennials into participation in our Church we want to look at four key components:

- 1) Service: Many young people are attracted to opportunities to help others both inside and outside the parish. With today's digital world, we are more of a global community and there are more opportunities to get involved.
- 2) Spirituality: There are opportunities to encounter the Divine. We can see this in liturgies and retreats geared toward those in their twenties and thirties.
- 3) Seriousness: Gatherings and events can be more than just reasons to get together. Stimulating and intellectual conversations will provide a foundation for those who are looking to deepen their faith life.
- 4) Social: There are opportunities to come together in fellowship. This is a component that is sometimes overlooked but it is where a lot of the relationships for the ministry take place.

¹ Mike Hayes, *Googling God* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2007), 26-27.

² John C. Cusick and Katherine F. DeVries, *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2001), 50.

When we are able to effectively incorporate these four components, Young Adults will be more engaged in what we as Church are offering them. It shows a commitment to them and to their desire to connect³. Many events for young adults will have one or two of these components at most. When we are able to incorporate all four components, we can more effectively conduct young adult ministry that will attract a variety of people. It is like casting a large net.

Often time in parish life, programs are seen to be stagnant, with a loss for new ideas. We can attribute this to a lack of young adults in positions of leadership on the parish level. To overcome this obstacle we need a direct personal invitation. Young Adults can easily become anonymous parishioners or even worse, become the parish hoppers that make no ties to a parish community⁴. If we are able to change our local parish culture into becoming not only more welcoming but also more empowering of new leadership, we will see a drastic change in how we as Church can be effective. Our parishes, if they can engage young adults, will be able to utilize their unique talents (such as: ability to connect with their contemporaries, use of new technologies to promote the gospel, bringing fresh ideas to the faith community) to enhance the vibrancy of the faith community. If we do not lead and mentor young adults into leadership positions parish programs will not continue to grow.

At times parishes miss opportunities for encounter with Millennials. Think about holidays like Christmas, Easter, Ash Wednesday, or Palm Sunday to name a few; or when a family comes together for baptism, marriage, or even a funeral, we can look at these as opportunities for encounter⁵. How often do young adults walk through the parish doors for these moments and they are thrown away? There needs to be an important push to use these moments to show them that the Church is there for their need, that they are loved. This means that parishes must think in advance about how and what they are going to invite young adults to participate in. This requires a significant level of intentional planning for discipleship.

It is paramount that we as Church leaders encourage local leadership to engage young adults into the life-blood of the parish. Young Adult Ministry is more than forming a group that meets periodically in the church basement. We need to facilitate a culture that integrates this generation into active participation in their parishes. It is when we can successfully accomplish this task that we will see the full potential of our parishes.

³ John C. Cusick and Katherine F. DeVries, *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2001), 50-51.

⁴ Mike Hayes, *Googling God* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2007), 12-13.

⁵ Mike Hayes, *Googling God* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2007), 27-30.

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1. John C. Cusick and Katherine F. DeVries, *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2001.
2. Mike Hayes, *Googling God*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2007.

Catholic Young Adult Ministry and the Urgent Need for Intercultural Competencies

By Gabriela Karaszewski, M.S., M.A.

We, Catholics in the United States find ourselves at a decisive moment in our shared history amidst profound demographic shifts as the numbers of Hispanics, Asians, Africans, Caribbean people, and many other communities of non-European origin are on the rise. According to statistics from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) in 2010, 54% of all the Catholics in the United States were Non-Hispanic White, 38% Hispanic/Latino, 3% were Black or African American, 4% Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native.¹ A more recent report from 2016 by Hosffman Ospino indicates that “more than 40% of all Catholics in the country are Hispanic and 60% of Catholics under the age of 18 are Hispanic. Of these, more than 90% were born in the United States.”² The future of the Catholic Church in the U.S. is dramatically being reshaped by Hispanic youth who are poised to become the majority of US Catholics in less than 30 years.³ Yet, Hispanic youth receive much less ministerial attention than other groups in the Church.⁴ Only 9% of Lay Ecclesial Ministers are Hispanic.⁵ In order to ensure intercultural competency in Catholic young adult ministry, we must address this demographic reality.

A mere acknowledgment of the existence of a variety of cultures, however, is not enough. The concept of spirituality of communion, as outlined in *Novo Millennio Inuente*, can be used as a guiding principle for young adult ministry as it continues to faithfully proclaim the gospel while reflecting “the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.”⁶ Before any programmatic course of action is taken, it is essential to promote a spirituality of communion that leads to sincerely see our brother and sisters in faith as “those who are part of me” and recognize that their gifts are also “a gift for me.”⁷

Following ‘Pope Francis’ lead, we are called to live a “theology of encounter.” This encounter is not only with Christ, it is encountering Christ in our fellow brothers and sisters, regardless of their culture. It means to get to know each other, to encounter each other and to see “their joys and sufferings” as my joys and sufferings. We might come from different cultures, like different music and have very diverse life styles, but we all have one faith. This is where we need to start, to encounter each other, it is a slow process, not a quick fix. But in this process we develop “deep and genuine” and long lasting friendships which build the Body of Christ, with many members but one Body.⁷

Establishing such an ethos is not an easy task. As the Director of Young Adult and Campus Ministry in an Archdiocese in which the Catholic population is more than 69% Hispanic, I have experienced firsthand the complex realities of young adult groups of various ethnicities and backgrounds. Because of their various needs and ways in which they express their faith, as evident in the format of their gatherings, the length and content of their meetings, as well as the manner in which they select their leadership and program events, these groups rarely interact with one other. On the one hand, such lack of interaction limits the steps towards a more unified diocesan ministry. On the other, one needs to understand that having certain level of

¹ Mark Gray, Mary Gautier, and Thomas Gaunt, SJ, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate “Statistics on Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States”, 2010.

² Hosffman Ospino, Ph.D., and Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill, Ph.D., “Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church, A Summary Report of Findings from the National Survey of Catholic Schools Serving Hispanic Families” (2016). 5.

³ Ken Johnson-Mondragon, “Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry,” in *Hispanic Ministry in the 21st Century*. Edited by Hosffman Ospino (Miami, FL: Convivium, 2010), 104.

⁴ Ibid. 110-111.

⁵ Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate “Fact Sheet Hispanic Catholics in the US”.

⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 40: AAS 93 (2001), 295.

⁷ Ibid. #43

independence (e.g., linguistic, cultural) is what allows these groups to thrive. Hence the conundrum that young adult minister in a multicultural church must face every day.

In 2013, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston hosted its first “Young Adult Day,” an annual event ever since. The purpose of this day is to celebrate the wealth of experiences that all Catholic young adults contribute to the life of our Archdiocese. We gather together on this day to pray, grow, and build community. The Mass and prayer services are bilingual (English and Spanish), tough keynote addresses and workshops are offered in both languages, allowing individuals to come together as a single community for worship and yet receive formation in the language in which they feel most comfortable. As a result of this eye-opening experience for many of our young adults, bridges have been built among young adult groups of different languages and new friendships were forged. Additionally, for bilingual/bicultural young adults who belong to a young adult group constituted by only English or Spanish-speaking individuals, this event introduced them to previously unknown opportunities for retreats, events, and formation opportunities in either language, rather than those advertised just in the one language of the group they have chosen to attend.

This broadened reach offers an important take-away for shared or multicultural parishes, which are increasingly becoming the norm in many places.⁸ Multicultural or Shared parishes are faith communities in which worship and ministerial services are offered in more than one language, and intentionally serve more than one racial or cultural group. The majority of these parishes are shared by two or more distinct cultural/ethnic communities. In the 33% of parishes in the U.S. that celebrate Mass in a language other than English,⁹ events are often advertised in a single language. Announcing events bilingually empowers family members and friends, who often inform and encourage young adults to attend events, to access and pass on information they would not have otherwise.

According to research collected and published by Instituto Fe y Vida, 61% of Hispanic young adult leaders speak at least as much Spanish as they do English.¹⁰ We must allow and empower these bicultural/bilingual Hispanic young adults to become “Gente Puente”, bridge people across cultures. Special attention should be given to identifying bilingual and/or bicultural young adults and nurturing them in their growth as leaders in their parish communities.

Such an endeavor can be modeled according to what Hispanic young adult ministry calls *Pastoral de Conjunto*, which is often translated into English as “collaborative ministry.” *Pastoral de Conjunto* it is much more than a methodology or a mere ministerial strategy. It is a way of being community, not just a group of people, working together to achieve something greater while living a spirituality of communion. This ministerial approach has borne much fruit in Hispanic young adult ministry efforts (*Pastoral Juvenil Hispana*). The entire Catholic community in the United States can learn a lot from it.

If we truly want our young adult ministers to develop intercultural competences, that is the capacity to communicate and the capacity to work across cultural boundaries, they must have access to trainings on understanding diversity, culture, intercultural communication and on fostering integration rather than assimilation in church settings.¹¹ The Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers (BICM) training offered by USCCB should be advertised and offered to young adult ministers at the parish and diocesan level. Given the demographic changes currently transforming large sectors of the U.S. Catholic experience, this type of education is urgent for young adult ministers currently serving in shared or multicultural

⁸ Jaime Soto Chair, Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, September 15, 2011 <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/intercultural-competencies/introduction-and-foreword.cfm>

⁹ “US Catholic Parishes Grow in Size and Diversity,” CARA Report 16:3, Winter 2011.

¹⁰ Carmen Cervantes and Ken Johnson-Mondragon “Perspectivas: Hispanic Ministry” (1995) 123

¹¹ 5 Intercultural competencies modules USCCB <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/intercultural-competencies/>

parishes, and everyone else holding ministerial positions in these communities either as hired staff or volunteers.

The Committee on Cultural Diversity developed a very helpful resource called *Best Practices for Shared Parishes: So That They May All Be One*. This guide is the result of various levels of consultation with pastors that have experienced some success in terms of ecclesial integration and inclusion among their culturally diverse parishioners.¹² Not only should this document form part of a young adult leader's collection of resources, but this bilingual resource could be used to open a discussion among young adult leaders.

Finally, Young Adult Ministers from all cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds in the United States should engage in the four-year process of the Fifth National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry (2017-2020), a priority initiative of the USCCB. One of the aims of the V Encuentro is to reflect on how Catholics can better reach out, engage, and affirm Hispanic Catholic youth and young adults. One million leaders, 175 Dioceses, 42 organizations, 13 ecclesial movements, and more than 5,000 parishes will be part of this process. This is a great opportunity for the entire Church.

There are a variety of approaches that we can take in order to better equip pastoral leaders working with young adult Catholics with the capacity to communicate and work across cultural boundaries. By cultivating of a spirituality of communion and allowing that spirituality to be the guiding concept, these concrete proposals can go a long way in fostering intercultural competence within young adult ministry:

1. Young adult ministers should create a share pastoral initiatives around the "Theology of Encounter" and practice encounter in our daily lives
2. Create opportunities for young adults of every background to come together for meaningful experiences of prayer, worship, service, and formation
3. Advertise young adult events in all the languages used within a parish or diocese
4. Identify and empower existing bilingual bicultural leaders as bridge-builders
5. Enable people of every language to participate in parish and diocesan cultural celebrations and feasts
6. Embrace the Pastoral de Conjunto approach to foster collaboration and a common sense of being one church
7. Make trainings such as the Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers (BICM) offered by USCCB widely accessible
8. Offer webinars and open discussions on the *Best Practices for Shared Parishes: So That They May All Be One* book developed by USCCB, as well as other resources on multicultural ministry, with particular attention to the Hispanic Catholic experience mindful that 60% of Catholics younger than 18 are Hispanic.
9. Take an active role in the process of the Fifth National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry. More information about the V Encuentro: <http://vencuentro.org/>

With this in mind, we can rightly affirm the giftedness of young adults of every cultural, racial and ethnic background, fully aware that "When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity...It is [the Spirit] who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony."¹³

¹² Best Practices for Shared Parishes. So They May All Be One. USCCB. Pub. No. 7-389.

¹³Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 117.

The Young Adult Effect
Patrick C. Rivera, Director
Office for Young Adult Ministry
Diocese of San Diego, California
November 6, 2016

A Leader for Young Adult Ministry

In the summer of 2015 the Diocese of San Diego created its first full-time Director of the Office for Young Adult Ministry position. This new diocesan assignment was primarily due to the recent installment of Bishop Robert McElroy. During his April 15, 2015 installation mass Bishop McElroy made it a point to place young adult ministry as a cornerstone under his new leadership. In his words:

I would hope that as a hallmark of the work of the church in the next five years, we will be especially dedicated to building bridges to the young adults, understanding that the church can often seem distant or uninterested in their lives. These bridges must reach out to young adults at our universities, to those who grow our food, to the young adults who defend our freedom through military service, to those who work long hours in the vibrant but often exhausting jobs which propel our local economy, and to those who are still struggling to find their place in the world. These bridges to our young adult communities must speak piercingly of the personal love of God, of the joy of the gospel and of the fulfillment which comes from genuine missionary discipleship.

Bishop McElroy's desire to reach young adults was further stated in an announcement written to the clergy before their annual Priestly Convocation (September 2015). He noted young adult ministry specifically as being one area of concern within the diocese needing immediate attention along with the lack of priestly vocations, the closing of Catholic schools, and the need for better communication and media outreach. Regarding young adults, he stated:

This is not a San Diego problem. This is not a California problem. This is a pastoral problem of profound proportions across the whole of our nation. It is, in my view, the most important challenge facing us in the life of the church, for if we do not find ways to reengage with the millennial generation, the life of the church will atrophy in critical ways.

Young adult ministry is the lynchpin in resolving every other area of concern within the church. If the church wins the hearts of the young adult population by creating ways to bring them back into the faith than it will reap a harvest of men properly discerning the vocation to the priesthood and religious life; it will encounter couples eager to send their children to Catholic schools where they will be taught by a new generation of faithful young adult teachers; and, it will have a media and communications outreach accessed and advanced by young adults who arguably know it better than any generation before them.

What follows is how the Diocese of San Diego implements diocesan, regional, and parish models of young adult evangelization. They are not perfect, but they have been tested with excellent results.

Approaching the Culture of Young Adulthood

Young adult ministry as it stands today is a new endeavor, and a young adult leader must understand their ministry efforts to first derive from a need to actualize something where it previously does not exist. This "putting of flesh to prayer" is a charism and kerygmatic trait noticeable within the vibrancy of the faith here in the United States. Part of the church's

dilemma regarding young adult outreach is a failed undertaking of barehanded evangelization. When dealing with issues of cultural norms that contrast church teaching it is proposed that instead of fighting the culture, young adult leaders seek to use the culture as a vessel to bring the Gospel truths into.

It is far easier to illuminate the beauty of the faith by incarnationally evangelizing (1 Thess. 2:8) dialogically those young adults of often different moral and social norms than the faith, as opposed to presenting a monological world of top down initiated commands. Christ becoming man is proof that the monological manner of teaching does not order itself properly within young adult hearts. As John 1:5 proclaims, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Most biblical scholars state the Twelve Apostles as being within the ages of young adulthood, and Jesus Christ as man came to be *the light* to those young adults in the flesh.

Life-Stages and a New Approach

Each diocese typically already has a handful of parish based young adult ministry groups which often fall into one of two categories.

1. College aged ministry branched off and leading the youth or confirmation program;
2. Recent college graduates living with other individuals of the same life-stage.

Indicative of these groups, both experience very small retention rates. Within a few years, the young adults move on to other locations due to career choices, vocation discernment, need for further spiritual growth, or the ending of the post-college social experience.

If this is young adult ministry within the church, how then is the church reaching the young adult that is not a recent college graduate? How is it reaching the married young adult, or the young adult couple with children? Their life experiences do not transfer over when attending these groups, nor do they desire a singles based approach to their personal spiritual growth. Young adults approach spirituality differently than other ministry subjects. They approach it on a situational basis, or in "Life-Stages".

The typical young adult ministry attempts a one size fits all approach to capture all adults from the ages of 18-39 years old. This approach fails to recognize that an individual passes through a number of life stages during this time period resulting in different secular and, to some extent, spiritual needs. There can be inherent social barriers between members of different stages that cause alienation and result in lower young adult ministry involvement.

It is imperative to identify individual Life-Stages and the specific needs of each, thereby opening channels for feeding the spirituality of the person. Recognizing individuals will not always neatly fit into this pattern, the stages identified are: 1.) Transitional, age 18-23; 2.) Single, graduation-marriage; 3.) Married; and, 4.) Parenting. Meeting the needs of young adults within each of these Life-Stages creates a welcoming environment which transcends to the building of relationships and growing of faith in community. It is also recommended that specific attention and coordination be given for individuals transitioning from one stage to another to ensure they do not drop off from future involvement.

Potential Needs of Each Life-Stage

1. *Transitional*: faith support; connection to home parish; an urgency to belong; a need to be reached before vocational, college or additional career pursuits; support for what issues they are facing and will face; friendships with Catholics of their age.
2. *Single*: connections with Catholic young adults; faith support; urgency to belong; professional networking opportunities; romantic relationships; safe place to be themselves; vocational discernment support; service to others.
3. *Married*: connections with married couples, building of long-term relationships; faith support; marriage support both spiritually and psychologically.
4. *Parenthood*: connections with married couples, building of long-term relationships; faith support; marriage support both spiritually and psychologically; long-term relationship building for their children; events that are family friendly; a foundation for passing the faith to their children; father events and support; mother events and support; spirituality of being a parent.

The long-term goal is to have Life-Stage programming at each parish. Recognizing that this is not realistic to implement at once, initiating a phased approach is key. This phased approach starts with the diocesan office on a large scale, regions or deaneries on a local scale, and ends with efforts on the parish level. Regarding parish outreach, one of the setbacks experienced by diocesan young adult leaders is the misunderstanding that they exist to create, sustain, and lead young adult groups at every parish. While this is derived from a need, it is an impossible concept.

With the three phases of implementation, here is how leaders can fulfill that need with young adult parish based ministry being the end goal.

- Phase 1 Diocesan:
 - Hold diocesan events for each Life-Stage on a yearly basis with the goal of two a year per Life-Stage. The bulk of current events include the Singles Life-Stage, meaning only three additional events for the first year are necessary (Transitional, Married, and Parenting).
- Phase 2 Regional:
 - Establish Life-Stage programming at parishes that have existing active young adult ministries. Encourage other nearby parishes to collaborate with these ministries, providing access to this programming for their parishioners. The goal is to have regionally (deanery) based, life-stage programming within a 20-minute radius of any parish.
- Phase 3 Parish:
 - Parishes should assess their ability to implement their own programming as participation and interest from their parishioners grows through these nearby regionally (deanery) based ministries. If applicable, parishes should seek leaders from regional hubs and activity to bring into serving the church professionally by leading young adult groups at home parish as volunteers or paid staff members.

Shaping Parish Life Culture

The parish life culture currently is not young adult inclusive. Based on a perceived unreliability of young adults, trust issues remain between parish leadership and young adults who desire to get involved. Long-lasting positions within various service roles of the parish, which have been occupied by older individuals are not available to young adults, making entry into the parish life and liturgy more difficult. Mindful of these realities, young adult leaders must become committed to finding ways for young adults to engage in the life of their home parish. This includes increased young adult registration at each parish by providing open doors to those who seek to serve the parish in liturgical, spiritual, and service-oriented missions.

To implement the Life-Stages model young adult ministry needs to be rebirthed at the parish level with proper vision casting. Since young adults are transient they will more likely choose a place where they can be spiritually fed than their local home parish. Spiritual and communal growth are superior to parish proximity. When young adults flock to few parishes in a diocese where they are fed with opportunities amongst other fellow young adults in larger numbers, it does serve part of the mission of young adult ministry. However, it separates many young adults from their home parish where they regularly attend mass. Furthermore, these few parishes with larger young adult involvement are based solely upon one Life-Stage, e.g. *singles*. Those young adults within that Life-Stage are less inclined to join the life of their home parish once they transition to another Life-Stage.

Parishes need to make the participation of current active young adults more visible as a means to encourage others within the 18-39 year age range feel more compelled to get involved in the parish life. This method builds trust between parish leadership and the young adults in their community as well as creates a more vibrant environment at the parish. Having paid young adult coordinators at each parish is a goal. It is necessary to increase the professional aspects of the ministry by creating a certificate from coursework through diocesan institute or catechetical offices. Every office that is ministry based offers such certificates for the laity, but none offer young adult specific certification for those seeking to serve. This initiative offers more *gravitas* to the ministry which in turn gives confidence to pastors seeking young adult coordinators, and finally offers an increased number of young adult ministers serving in the mass. Pastors are also encouraged to create a mandated percentage of weekend liturgical roles to be served by the young adults participating in parish life.

Taking it one step further, the Diocese of San Diego has begun to work within a framework where each parish has a committed young adult “delegate” to promote young adult activity in the life of their parish. This serves to maintain communication between the diocesan young adult office and efforts on a parish level. It also adds the benefit of allowing parishes to work together to serve young adults based on their resource availability while not “losing” young adult attendance to nearby parishes. The delegate system saves neighboring parishes from having similar events and the unnecessary spending of financial resources.

In aiding parish and regional involvement, young adult leaders should use the current resources made available through diocesan offices for Marriage and Family Life to engage young adults attending Pre-Cana, Engaged Encounter, Evenings for the Engaged, Baptismal Preparation, and other opportunities. Attendance at such events, when coupled with speaking on behalf of young

adult ministry, highlights the benefits of involvement in the parish, and presents the most upcoming diocesan events for consideration. Hosting Engaged Encounter or Pre-Cana reunion gatherings where local young adult leaders present themselves and pass out promotional material as well as contact information to these new couples will help create a married young adult dynamic that previously might be nonexistent.

Levels of Investment

Suffice to assume that Jesus did not come to earth with the hope of establishing a glorified “Party Planning Committee”. Why do young adult offices and outreach seem to be one? Having large group events offers a good opportunity for community building, but if young adult ministry outreach is structured with that at the core than it is no wonder old wine skins are bursting. Placing intentionality behind events puts new wine (young adults) into new wine skins.

There are three “Levels of Investment” to be used as a point of reference for young adults. These were first considered through communication with Colin Nykaza of the Archdiocese of New York where his outreach offered something similar. What follows is an adaption and simplified model of his outreach which is used as part of the Life-Stages implementation to better fit the needs of San Diego.

Three Levels of Investment

1. Seeker:
 - a. Young Adults who desire little commitment and only attend an event if it is not too “Jesus” oriented or “church-like”.
2. Nominal:
 - a. Young Adults who make up the bulk of the church today; and attend mass sparingly, but often have friends that are faithful participants.
3. Disciple:
 - a. Young Adults who are weekly or daily communicants seeking to grow in their faith; they are our leaders and are already in our pews.

Pursuant of the life-stages model, every event must be under a life-stage, and said event must be within one of the three levels of investment. This does not mean only certain life-stages may attend events, but it offers a system for reaching young adults in partitions. Using the Singles Life-Stage as an example, the Diocese of San Diego offers three annual retreats (co-ed, male, and female) for the Disciple’s growth; four Theology On Tap series (four evenings per series for a total of twelve evenings) for the Nominal’s growth; and two gala’s a year (Christmas and Summer) for the Seeker’s spiritual growth.

As a young adult moves from the first level of investment to the third (Seeker to Disciple) they are offered more opportunities for growth. It is easy for a Disciple to attend any young adult event, and be spiritually and socially fed. However, it is not easy for a Seeker to attend events catered more to their Disciple or Nominal peer. It is only by the “grace of accompaniment” that one can make that next step. In using this model, young adult leaders are merely offering them a vessel to do so.

This model transfers easily into parish life. Parishes that understand the demography of their young adult laity will offer three to four weekly opportunities for young adults to enter the parish life; (i.e. bible studies, athletic games, dinners, and adoration with—or without—praise and worship music) and all of these opportunities will transfer into one level of investment and reach any life-stage. Setting this as a framework for diocesan offices will help pastors better understand the urgency in equipping their parish with paid young adult coordinators. This is too large of a task to be run solely by volunteers. A part-time employee of no more than twenty hours a week can accomplish this with surprisingly quick results.

Moving Forward: Ripening of the Harvest

At the start of the New Year the Diocese of San Diego will be expanding from one full-time director and part-time administrative assistant to two full-time directors and one full-time administrative assistant. The harvest is ripening, and help is greatly needed. Within less than a year and a half both young adult involvement and attendance across the diocese has increased. In July of 2015 there were only five young adult groups in San Diego, and three of them were active. An active young adult group is defined as having more than twenty members that meet two or more times weekly. To date we have twenty-three active young adult groups. Parallel to this growth is the professional aspect within the ministry. Where there previously existed only one parish with a part-time employed young adult coordinator, today there are twelve; and, two of those are full-time hourly exempt employees, with job titles as unique as the ministry they serve.

We have had within the church two decades of excellent youth ministry programming. We have set large amounts of energy aside for reaching this particular portion of our church. Yet, we have failed in offering something to follow that effort. Young adult ministry does not have one single sacrament built around it, but it can—and does—involve every sacrament within the Catholic Church. If we want to know what it means to “flip the switch” on our history of *sacramentalizing young adults before they have been evangelized*, we need look no further than the young adults within our parish, region, or diocese. Are they engaged? Are they active in our parish life? Are they in our pews? Are they even in our church parking lots? Whatever their status, that status is our Young Adult Effect.

**A Call to Conversation: A Look at Addressing Increased Levels of Indifference,
Disconnection, Polarization, and Disengagement in Young Adult Ministry**

Diana Hancharenko

**Young Adult Minister, St. Angela Merici Parish: Youngstown, Ohio
Young Adult Minister & Pastoral Associate of Evangelization, Christ the Good Shepherd
Parish: Campbell, Ohio**

Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio

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There are a large and discouraging number of young adults, who are not active in the Catholic Church. There are young adults who are disconnected, those who are disengaged, and/or those who are disenfranchised when it comes to the Church. The reasons are many and complex, and it might be tempting to simplify, stereotype, and/or dismiss young adults as hopeless and unchanging. It seems many in the Church have become comfortable with the divide of those who get it and those who do not, but this is not where the Church can stay. The Church is called to be hopeful and persistent in the task of welcoming in or welcoming back young adults, even though it may seem overwhelming and like a lost cause. This is not a time for desolation, but a time for recalibration. There is much to be hopeful about because there are discussions that have not yet happened. We are called to listen deeply and have conversations with young adults, most especially those who have fallen away. While outreach to young adults who are on the margins or who are estranged from the Church will require tremendous and careful efforts, especially through personal interaction, there are still many possibilities for connection.

Catholicism is seeing a decrease in the number of those who identify with the faith; and the "nones" (those not identifying with a religious group) are overtaking the religious arena¹. While some may choose to accept this as a reality that cannot be changed, and decide to only tailor young adult ministry for those who are already invested in their faith, this is not solely how the Church is called to act. We should not let statistics be an excuse to stay comfortable. Asking the question of why the disconnect and figuring out what is really going on has the potential to offer tremendous hope and insight in how best to approach this issue. The Church must start asking these difficult questions and accompany young adults through their complicated and unclear answers.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls for person-to-person² sharing of the Gospel, where the first step includes listening to the heartfelt needs of others. Pope Francis references the importance of the experience of being listened to and understood as a connection to God's love with each individual we encounter. The Holy Father then encourages listening to the Holy Spirit to best figure out how to communicate with each individual. This model of conversation and dialogue is critical to ministry with and for young adults to help show the Church's relevance to individuals, heal wounds, and demonstrate welcome and acceptance in God's people.

In my ministry, after years of planning various activities and experiences for young adults and letting that count as the primary approach to young adult ministry, it became clear to my colleagues and me that this was not the only avenue to pursue in what is typically emphasized as an event-based ministry. While events are integral and can bear good fruit, they seem incomplete in the scope of the larger mission of outreach and evangelization. Numbers at young adult events can become stagnant, and despite valiant and creative efforts in advertising and outreach, very few new young adults connect to the quality offerings. For me, it became essential to figure out why. A new way was needed to truly reach and connect with young adults and welcome them to journey in the Church.

The call to conversation and deep listening is clear. This approach asks young adults who are disconnected to articulate their reason for disconnection in a way that is not accusatory or

¹ "America's Changing Religious Landscape." Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (2015)

²*Evangelii Gaudium* par. 127-129

condemning, but in a way that is respectful and gentle³. Inactive Catholic or formerly Catholic young adults are everywhere and accessible, if the Church only chooses to reach out personally and lovingly. It was decided that, as a representative of the Church, I would reach out individually to these young adults in an ongoing effort. With some help and guidance, a method for conversation was decided upon. I began by approaching individuals on a list of local young adults who are either inactive or formerly Catholic. One individual meeting at a time is scheduled in a relaxed setting (e.g. at a restaurant for lunch, coffee at a café, or an in-home visit). Each conversation is personal and free flowing, but three main questions are used to offer some direction and structure. These questions are designed to be broad so that unique individual responses can come through, and so that the person inquiring can ask for more information using careful discretion. The information collected from each dialogue is documented, synthesized, and shared with interested leadership with the permission of the young adult participant. Together, then, the process is evaluated and further direction can be given to best welcome in and evangelize.

The heart of the conversation is the three questions.⁴ The first question asks the young adult to share positive associations and experiences in the Church. I find these responses to be remarkable! It is wonderful to see young adults enthusiastically share joy and recall memories of and connections to the Church that may not have been thought of for quite some time. They share stories of meaningful service projects or mission trips, retreats, enjoyable experiences in Catholic schools, family faith traditions and devotions, and feeling part of a community. This information immediately offers helpful gateways for connection for each individual.

The second question asks the young adult to share negative associations and experiences, as hindrances to feeling part of the Church and why they may not be participating. A significant revelation from the responses to this question is the strong perception of judgment by and hypocrisy amongst those currently active in the Church. Every participant so far, with whom I asked this question, shared this perception. One can conclude that apparent judgment is a huge factor in a young adult's avoidance of the Church—a factor that deserves further reflection. In answering this second question some also express that they did not feel they would be welcome with their varied life experiences and personal brokenness. Many believe their lives and efforts simply do not, nor ever could, measure up to their perception of Church standards, due to their various “unusual” circumstances. In the end, many young adults feel hurt and alienated by the Church, stemming from negative impressions of Church teachings and practices or from negative experiences with individuals. This question reveals the need for the Church to show deep care and concern for young adults and to help them deal with their negative experience.

The third question asks the young adult what can be done to bring them back to the Church. These answers vary, but show great hope and possibility. Encouragingly, the young adults expressed the desire for the Church to be a place where they can safely journey and have the space, without judgment, to figure out how to live a life of faith in the midst of their questions, doubts, and struggles. They show some desire to reconnect with the Church and are open to discovering or being presented with a way back. Most seem skeptical they would

³ *Evangelii Gaudium* par. 129

⁴ In what follows, I am sharing the approach and results of work developed. “Conversations with Young Adults.” Personal Interviews. 2016.

really be welcomed back and accepted as they are, without going through a fast and major conversion to be more like their perception of a stereotypical Church person. Even though skepticism is expressed, no one states that the door is closed forever or that there is not anything that can be done. This question reveals the need to explore ways to expand the center of Church life to include those on the margins.

In an immediate reaction to being asked these questions, many of the young adults commented on how surprised they were that they were being asked them, because they did not think that anyone wanted to hear about their experience or that anyone cared if they were part of the Church or not. Many of the young adults expressed that they would now revisit their current view of the Church and take another look. Prior to these encounters, they did not see a need or hear a call to reassess their position.

Taking the approach of conversation truly extends ministry efforts with young adults. It should be noted, however, that this is not a silver-bullet solution to young adult ministry that miraculously bridges the gaps of disconnection and creates a great increase in numbers at events instantly. As Pope Francis states, "This is always a slow process and at times we can be overly fearful. But if we allow doubts and fears to dampen our courage, instead of being creative we will remain comfortable and make no progress whatsoever⁵." This approach is an essential step in moving the process forward. It is beginning to open gateways that seemed to be closed before to both parties. It has extended interactions beyond the lunches, cups of coffee, or visits that initially started the dialogue. Nearly all of the young adults in this process have followed up with additional questions or comments. Many of the young adults have attended a parish function when they may not have otherwise, prior to the conversation. Moreover, these questions are an important tool to empower and encourage others, not just parish or diocesan staff, to begin the process of welcoming.

The call to conversation and deep listening requires an intentional effort. The responses from these discussions would not have allowed for such profound insights without making sure the tone of the conversation took on the spirit of curiosity and care, rather than judgment or hostility. Although there is fear of confrontation and of heated discussion, especially from those who seem to be most against the Church, the tone of each discussion must always remain civil and open, even when there is disagreement. Attitude affects everything. Being curious without being argumentative or arrogant allows for the space to gain trust and to see the Church in a new light. Young adult ministry through conversation invites the Holy Spirit to guide the discussion, reactions, and to discover appropriate next steps. This spiritual guidance allows us to check our expectations and to both advance and be patient with the process. Open to the Holy Spirit, the conversation leads to a space where stereotypes can begin to be broken down on both sides.

In the Church, we challenge ourselves to better use technological advancements for communication. While tools such as smart phones and social media can assist in spreading the Gospel and serve as convenient means of relaying information, nothing can replace a person-to-person meeting to get to the heart of another and their experiences. As representatives of the Church, and as anyone who cares for young adults, we must answer the call to conversation and journey forward together.

⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium* par. 129

ADDRESS TO THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

His Excellency Most Rev. Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States
Delivered on Monday, November 14, 2016 – Baltimore, Maryland



For a Church Evangelizing Young People in a Changing Society

Your Eminences, Your Excellency, Archbishop Kurtz, my Brother Archbishops and Bishops, Monsignor Bransfield and staff of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Allow me to begin by expressing to you a word of sincere gratitude for the warm welcome I have been receiving during my short time here in the United States. I am thankful to all those bishops whose dioceses I have been pleased to visit for various occasions since our June meeting. The kind invitation and gracious hospitality that I have enjoyed in your local churches for so many particular gatherings has shown forth a great spirit among the many faithful. As the Holy Father's personal representative in this country, I assure you of his continual communion with all of you through his prayers and support for all of your efforts as you carry out the invaluable mission entrusted to you. The visit of His Holiness to this country a little over a year ago has left a great impression upon the Church in America, and the experience of this Jubilee Year of Mercy has provided numerous opportunities for a renewal and rejuvenation of faith.

From the beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Francis noted that:

...mercy changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful father who is so patient.... This mercy is beautiful. (*Angelus Address*, 17 March 2013)

Mercy is the "key" to understanding the Holy Father and his path for the Church. Mercy is not an abstract idea but an experience of being looked upon and forgiven -of knowing the "caress" of God. Everyone here has experienced this special closeness of God in some way, at some particular time. It is this that the Holy Father wishes us to share, by word and deed, with the Church and the whole world.

May I add that throughout the Year of Mercy, following the very long process which has led to the recent national election, I honestly think that mercy is what this country needs to heal the wounds of division after a polarizing campaign. Many Americans have personally reached out to me to voice their frustration with what has been happening. As Catholics and shepherds, we need to give witness to hope, to carry on through the coming days, so that we can truly be "one nation, under God."

At the conclusion of the Year of Mercy, we listen again to the reason for this Jubilee Year:

How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst! (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 5)

I wish to highlight the words "go out" and "tenderness of God." Pope Francis knows that we must preach the Gospel joyfully to everyone, even to those at the peripheries. In doing so, people will

experience the tenderness and closeness of God through the Church. The Church goes out. She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her door; rather, she looks for, gathers, cares for, and makes them feel loved, showing forth "the tenderness of God."

The Holy Father desires that each person experience mercy. With a pastor's heart, he realized that families, struggling to live and hand on the faith, first need to experience this mercy daily. The family is the first place where we should receive mercy and learn to show mercy; where we say, "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you."

That is why recently two Synods were called to assure families that God is close to them in moments of joy and sorrow and that the Church is near, accompanying them on this pilgrimage of faith, where each domestic church can show solidarity with and charity toward other families, especially struggling ones. *Amoris Laetitia* is an exhortation to the Church to show forth the Merciful Face of the Father to men and women, husbands and wives, to the elderly and to our children.

The Holy Father now directs our attention to young people.

The theme for the next Synod was just announced: *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*. They too must know God's mercy. Two key words emanating from the exhortation (*Amoris Laetitia*) are 'accompaniment' and 'discernment'. Young people need to be accompanied in discerning their path in life, but this accompaniment presupposes welcoming them to better integrate them into the life of the Church. It is this that I wish to explore more deeply with you.

At the outset, we must ask ourselves: What is it that young people have to offer to the Church? Young people are young people. They bring with them energy, creativity, sensitivity, and generosity of spirit. Many are eager to serve. Still others are willing to take risks for a better future. There is a temptation to think that we only need to teach them.

The upcoming Synod and the preparation for it provide a window for us to learn from young people, to listen to them, to be with them, and to help them discover God's plan for them.

Our presence will remind them that they matter; that they are part of the family; that they belong. Rejecting the throwaway culture, we will give them reason to hope by assuring them that we are on the journey with them.

The accompaniment begins with us. Pope Francis reminds us that "the Church does not exist to condemn people but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God's mercy." (*The Name of God is Mercy*, an interview with Andrea Tornielli, p. 52) The Holy Father uses the image of the Church as a field hospital to describe the Church. She is a mobile unit, offering first aid and urgent care to those in need, going out to the young to bring about this encounter with God's mercy.

Many adults lament that young people are not in the pews. If they are not in our churches, why are they not there? The then-Cardinal Bergoglio diagnosed the problem stating:

I would say that the gravely serious thing that all this is expressing is a lack of a personal encounter with God, of an authentic religious experience. ... I believe that one has to recover the religious act as a movement towards an encounter with Jesus Christ. (s. Rubin-F. Ambrogetti, *El Jesuita*, Bs. As., 2010, 80-81.)

But we, the Church, have to seek them out to provide the occasion, the environment, and the moment that allows for this encounter. Do young people have a sense of being sought out, welcomed and appreciated enough that they can have this encounter with Jesus Christ through the Church? We know that youth are critical to the life of the Church, and that it is becoming increasingly difficult to transmit the faith to young people in a changing environment and in a Church in which very often they do not have a profound sense of belonging, even if they have the desire to belong. Our youth find themselves at the "peripheries" of both the Church and society. We must go out to them.

But who are these young people? Only those who are part of our organizations, parish youth groups, and Catholic schools? Or all youth? It's a good question! It's also very hard to answer as young people are diverse and constantly changing. Not only are they changing, but so is our culture. We are living in a period of profound transition, of a silent cultural revolution, which affects us all. It is an invisible process or movement, happening almost by inertia. It is not so much a movement in space as of the mind, an existential exodus, a cultural change, and cognitive migration. In a changing environment, it is we who must be "On the move", open to real conversion, a true metanoia of mind and heart, so that we may be authentic witnesses to Jesus, becoming real instruments of encounter for our youth.

A new language, new methods, and a new missionary ardor is necessary so that each young person may experience tangibly the mercy of God. Our methods of evangelization require a profound reconsideration to see whether they are effectively communicating the authentic Christian experience - with closeness, simplicity, warmth and transparency.

What are some characteristics of young people at this moment in history in which we wish to share the joy of the Gospel? I realize, of course, that it is not my intention at this point to make a sociological or psychological study of youth, but just to offer to you for your consideration some subjective impressions of them. Perhaps there are young people might disagree somewhat with these ideas and think otherwise.

To begin, young people generally tend to place everything in the present moment. Many young people are affected by a sense of being in constant flux and are unable to make a permanent choice. In a period of change, for some, there is only one certainty- the present moment.

Furthermore, young people want to affirm their own person, while resisting uniformity of education and social pressures. They want to have confidence in themselves, to rid themselves of self-doubts and fears of emotional commitment; nevertheless, they also feel a need to be supported, to accept life, and to pursue their future.

Young people want to separate themselves from the control of parents as they look to the future. At the same time, they want community or to be part of a group, shown through their obsession with "brand name" products, or even tattoos and piercings. These things give them a mark of identity. This is their way of expressing their desire to belong, because they want to belong.

Another characteristic of young people today is prolonged adolescence. Certainly, young people have a steady intake of modern media which unfortunately is causing them to lose contact with reality and which fosters dependency upon virtual realities. This phenomenon is growing through the universe of video games and the internet, which predispose young people to live in the "imaginary" world without contact with reality.

As a result, young people have modified their language and ways of communicating. They write only with difficulty. They have changed their way of showing their feelings and interiority, using instant messaging to express themselves with abbreviated words, signs, and likes. Virtual closeness with people is easier, but it is often superficial and can impede people from looking at each other with their own eyes, making personal encounters more difficult. For a young person who has been conditioned by this culture, it is not easy to suddenly undertake the difficult task of building one's future or considering one's call in life.

To commit oneself to serious vocational discernment, one has to have a proper understanding of the human person. What role can the Church play in guiding young people in this process of discernment? In general, young people are open, available and generous. They want authentic relationships and seek the truth, but very often when asked to look into their interior lives, they focus only on feelings and emotions. While many are disposed to commit themselves to great causes and to show generosity and solidarity, these same young people often lack a true spiritual foundation. Our parents truly want their children to be happy, but occasionally without teaching them the richness of the Catholic Faith. Many young people are not allergic to the truths of the faith or to the Church, but they simply don't know anything or know very little about the faith.

Still, when we think of massive spiritual events on a grand scale, like World Youth Day, the majority of young people who participate - even if their practice of the faith varies - generally show a joy for living. Their concerns center on peace, gentleness, cooperation, and openness. Their attitudes invite us to have faith and confidence not only in them but also in their peers. It will be they who carry out a true, silent spiritual revolution.

We have been describing young people and their relationship to the Church. If we are to help young people discern God's plan for their lives, we might ask: what are they looking for?

They are looking to be heard. Earlier I mentioned the idea of accompaniment, which implies going to them and being with them. To this, we add listening to them. Listening is an important element of discernment. Pope Francis said:

I think that in the pastoral ministry of the Church many beautiful things are being done, many beautiful things... But there is one thing that we must do more, even the priests, even the lay people, but above all the priests must do more: the apostolate of listening: to listen! (*Incontro del Santo Padre con i partecipanti al convegno per persone disabili*, 11 giugno 2016)

That fact that we go to them to listen is an acknowledgment of their existence as true members of the Church. It is an important dimension of affirming their dignity. Young people have a strong need to be heard, to be recognized as persons, and to receive a personal response. In this dialogue, young people learn to journey in faith with others.

Young people seek bonds. They want to be part of a relevant group to overcome loneliness and isolation. In an individualistic society, the young have a desire for community. Some want to belong but ask, "Do I fit in here? What is my place or role in this Church?" That to which we belong defines our cultural expression. If we do not experience this sense of belonging to the Church, our cultural expression will be determined by something else.

Also, young people seek a response to the question of identity. Today they no longer have an awareness of their identity, of belonging to a particular history, tradition, or community. In general, the

young aspire to make their entrance on to the stage of life, but they need the help of a cultural, religious, and moral tradition so that they can discover the path that leads to authentic fulfillment in Christ.

What then must the Church do? In effect, the whole Church and each of its members must decide to go to and walk with our young people: to each and everyone, from an awareness of carrying out a prophetic task. The most important thing that a young person needs to feel saved by Christ is to experience His love and mercy directly. This is different from simply saying, "You are saved."

Being Christian is a result of an encounter with the person of Christ who gives direction to life and who gives life a new horizon. This new horizon is what we call hope. This hope evokes a sense of wonder, which implies a constant discovery of themselves in Christ and Christ in them. It is for this reason, Pope Francis encourages us to propose Jesus Christ. He says:

It is Jesus Christ who continually renews in me this hope, it is He who continually renews my outlook. It is He who awakens in me, in each one of us, the wonder of enjoying, the charm of dreaming, the delight of working together. It is he who continually invites me to conversion of heart. Yes, my friends, I say this because in Jesus I have found the one who is able to bring out the best in me... (*Address of His Holiness in the Meeting with Young People*, Morelia, Mexico, 16 February 2016.)

Living in this hope in Jesus Christ, young people discover their dreams, but we must remind them that God too has a plan and dreams for them. Pope Francis asked, "Have you ever thought: The Lord dreams of me? He thinks of me? I am in his mind, in the heart of the Lord? The Lord is able to change my life?" (*Homily at Domus Sanctae Martae*, 16 March 2015.)

When a young person experiences the joy of the encounter with Jesus and has the grace to be taken with, or even fascinated by, these questions, in his heart he can no longer close himself to the horizon of a vocation - whether as a priest, religious, married or single person.

No doubt that the upcoming Synod, with the cooperation of bishops from all over the world, will provide further and deeper insights. However, from this very moment we are encouraged, as the Pope constantly reminds us, to be a truly outgoing, missionary Church, shining brightly like a star leading young people on their journey to encounter the True light. The Church must be a strong voice in this world, especially for the young, and echo the words of the Merciful Father to the elder son, "You are with me always and everything I have is yours." (Luke 15:31)