

Forward Together In Christ Summary: Youth Edition

CATECHESIS

The most interesting observation about the youth reflections on catechesis is how closely linked the adolescent understanding of catechesis is with hospitality. For these young people, learning about the faith means prioritizing good, healthy and trust-filled relationships with reliable, faithful people. For these young people, many named leaders in faith as: priests of their local parish, parish ministers, youth ministers, chaplaincy leaders and peers. To understand the needs within catechesis from these young people, is to know that their opinions are rooted in a deep desire and need for relationship and accompaniment.

A few common themes arose from the consultations:

Consistent Pastoral Presence in the Lives of Young People:

Those consulted felt a great need for pastoral leaders to be present and active in the daily life of young people including classroom visits, sports activities, mission trips and retreats.

More Time to “Get Away” with God:

The busy life of the teenager is overburdened and overstressed. Young people need more time for spiritual enrichment including Bible Study, retreats, teaching Masses, and tools to foster a healthy prayer life. Interestingly enough, the majority of responses desire these resources to be made available *offline*, rather than through digital media. With that said, some still did express that social media is an effective and engaging platform for catechesis and evangelization.

Authentic Mentors:

Young people need authentic witnesses who “walk the talk”. Many expressed the need for people to lean on when they are tackling the tough questions about faith and discipleship, of whom they will receive honest answers in a spirit of love and respect. When it comes to the qualities of an authentic mentor, the characteristics most regularly named were: patient, merciful, loving, trustworthy and visible.

Catechesis in Action:

Those consulted have shared that their greatest lessons about the faith have come from putting their beliefs into practice. Hands on learning is of utmost importance for these young people, and they see the joy of the Gospel alive particularly in the corporal works of mercy. Many have spoken about these opportunities as one of the very few ways where they can feel involved, engaged and valued in the life of the Church. By making a difference, they make space for others like them who look to belong to the Catholic community.

Forward Together in Christ
YOUTH RESPONSES

COMMUNICATION

Common themes in the responses are:

- Greater use of a variety of social media to communicate with young people.
- Presence of priests before and after Masses for getting to know names of young people, inquire about their lives
- Social opportunities after Sunday Masses (e.g., coffee Sunday type gatherings)
- Encourage youth involvement with volunteer opportunities
- Bring together youth from different parishes – for Masses and social gatherings
- Acknowledge that the same model does not work for all parishes
- Consider a Diocesan Youth Advisory Group to hear the voices of youth
- Priests need to explain more critical issues facing the Church
- Bishop to communicate more often using social media
- Develop email distribution lists to communicate with parishioners

HOSPITALITY AND OUTREACH SUMMARY

YOUTH

FORWARD TOGETHER IN CHRIST

The feedback from the high school students is somewhat similar to the adult feedback. They are versed in key words such as marginalized, reaching out, diversity, equity work, and acceptance. They expressed more awareness of global outreach than the adults and were more cognoscente of LGBTQ... sensitivities.

The summary is categorized under Welcoming; Outreach; Programs and Structure.

WELCOMING

A strong sense that welcoming means a non-judgemental, inclusive stance. A sense that we are all sinners called to teach the faith with gentleness. Recommendations to proclaim without sounding 'preachy and not to make people feel guilty. Showing youth that they should not be judgmental to the less fortunate. Living the Golden Rule. Creating a welcoming environment at church with well trained greeters. Having activities such as refreshments after mass, community dinners, dances, carnivals. Encouraging personal responsibility to bring others to mass and inviting people who have left the church. Being aware of diversity ("spreading diversity") and affirming/showcasing the various cultures in our parishes. Of special note about diversity is sensitivity towards LGBTQ... persons. One interesting statement was; "welcoming even if it goes against the teachings of the church." Mention was made of church accessibility i.e. keeping churches open and interestingly – having spaces outside the church where people can pray – prayer gardens. The 'Come Home This Christmas' program of the diocese was acknowledged.

OUTREACH

The words 'reaching out' and 'support' were used a lot – reaching out to those who can't get to church; to non-Catholics who want to be Catholic; to those who don't have access to Catholic education; to young adults. Supporting the marginalized. Having communication structures that let the less fortunate tell the church what they need. Having support groups at church. There is a sense of volunteerism among the high school students (hopefully that translates into their community service hour obligations). There is a good awareness of structures that already exist and the need to promote them such as re-habilitation centres and the Good Shepherd services that the church can co-opt with. Awareness of global needs and the organizations like Development and Peace that can be worked with. In general, there was an offering of different social needs and programs to help others such as food banks and warming centres; 'Halloween for hunger'; child care; youth programs – sports; volunteering in long term care and hospice; and collecting 'period' products to give to women's shelters. There was an ecological theme to their ideas of outreach with ideas of picking up garbage and ecological volunteer work.

One student emphasized catechesis and was sensitive to reaching out without denying what we believe in. Emphasizing inclusion in the church with the principle of being transformed and sanctified – we are flawed with the goal to grow. Making sure Catholics are well catechized with an interesting way about it – ‘having tables of people to de-bunk misunderstandings of the Catechism’!

PROGRAMS

It seems that the students were referencing their knowledge and experience of school programs. They referenced the DREAMS program. They speak of youth programs and programs to help communities secure clean drinking water. They have an awareness of global outreach programs as well and the need to advertise them. It seems that they enjoyed their discussion at the Cathedral and think that there should be more discussion events concerning the church. One interesting idea of combining social programs with catechesis – ‘a soup kitchen with a side of catechesis’. There was mention of fundraising.

STRUCTURE

Structure means infrastructure in our buildings and our liturgies. There was an eclectic list of ideas such as: gender neutral bathrooms; using social media and electronic outdoor signs; using surveys to see what is needed; having a directory of parish and community social services and resources; church shuttle buses; having sign language at masses and questions of – ‘can women be priests?’ and ‘can a transgender male be a priest?’

Forward Together in Christ Summary Report - Youth

How do we Engage Laity in the Ministry, Mission and Maintenance of the Parish?

The young people had very similar responses to the adult groups who responded to this topic. The overall theme continued to be a sense of belonging and being connected to the parish through its members.

Engagement with Parish Community

- Church should be active and visible in community events to build relationship and perhaps draw some to the faith through those relationships.
- Encourage families to become involved, as they will bring their children with them. But don't be afraid to engage young people to bring their parents.
- Promote involvement by directly asking people, including youth, instead of just a general request; this was seen as essential and another way to build community.
- There was a feeling that coffee Sundays are a way to draw people into relationship and the number attending these events increases over time, thus developing more connections within the parish.
- Develop times when people can meet each other and the priest for informal gatherings rather than the formal ones that are Mass.
- Make churches more accessible so those in wheelchairs are part of the congregation and not off to the side somewhere.
- Have the old and young share their knowledge with each other to help them learn about other age groups.

Youth Groups

The youth believe these do matter, as they are a way to form relationships with others in the parish. Thoughts on this are:

- Youth love to engage in social outreach so have youth events for youth to engage in this type of activity
- Have religious camps for youth with fun activities such as crafts etc., but also teach about the faith.
- Announce youth group meetings/events/activities during school announcements to reach more youth and/or use school social media accounts where more youth are connected.
- Have community events for all that include youth and have some that are specific to youth.
- Food is a great draw for youth; have food and/or snacks as part of the invitation to events.
- Engage all youth (attending or not) in fun activities, do not lead with you need to go to Church; fun activities will draw youth in and develop the all-important relationships that will potentially bring them to church.
- Teach how the culture and faith fit together and are important in their lives.

Evangelization

- Consider a similar concept like Children's liturgy but for teens, so they could discuss the Gospel at their level and meet others from the parish at the same time. Perhaps right after Mass as some felt they should not leave Mass.
- Provide materials (for different age groups) on the faith that children and youth could take home, work on and bring in for a treat of some kind when they complete it. Candy is a good enticement!
- Teens should be invited to take part in the various ministries within the Mass.
- Homilies need to connect to the lives of the people so they can live out their faith.
- Acknowledge the truths in other religions, but explain why it is important to connect to the Catholic faith.
- Teach about the Mass so people are educated on what they are doing.
- Consider a youth Mass.

Priests

- Need to connect with parishioners on a more personal level.
- Be present before and after Mass.
- Show up at parish events.
- Connect with students to come to the school and have casual interaction – sit in the cafeteria, greet students who come into the school office or library.
- Ensure good music ministry as it draws people to Mass.
- When changes are made, explain why since the Church is supposed to belong to the parishioners as well.
- Provide a format or way to give feedback to the priest.

Being transparent is important:

- Let people know where the collection goes and, if necessary why; it may increase donations
- Have pizza with the priest days to share ideas/concepts and to get to know each other.

The youth felt that the priest is the essential element within a parish and they can build the community aspect people desire by connecting to their parishioners in real ways.

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LITURGY - YOUTH

LITURGICAL CATECHESIS

Students expressed a desire to understand liturgical actions better. They want to know "what" and "why". They recognize that most students at school Masses do not know the Mass and require help. They were optimistic that teaching would help, but despite the lack of knowledge, there was a hope not to cancel school Masses.

HOMILIES

Students want homilies that relate to their lives, are interactive and modern, and connect the readings to their lives. They want relatable homilies that speak to their challenges, including controversial issues.

MUSIC

Music for school Mass should include hymns students know and relate to them. Students also expressed a desire for Youth Choirs. There were a few suggestions to add new music.

WORSHIP AIDS/SCREENS

There were several suggestions for using screens in liturgies to project hymns and responses. However, the general tone was to help increase active participation in the liturgy.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LITURGY

Students recognize that many peers do not attend Mass or know the liturgy. There was a sense of hopefulness that other areas could result in more active liturgical worship.

ARS CELEBRANDI

Generally, students want priests to joyfully celebrate Mass instead of saying Mass.

MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

Students want to participate in ministerial roles (e.g. servers, etc.)

MASS TIMES/DEVOTIONS

A few suggested liturgies outside of Mass.

PRIEST'S PIETY/PASTORAL CARE

Students seek unity with the church and with the pastors. They look forward to participating in the greater community.

Forward Together in Christ - Youth

School Religion Classes: *General feedback is quality of education is poor and not engaging:*

- Many teachers are not qualified and/or interested in teaching religion. Those teaching religion in Catholic schools should be highly qualified, practicing their faith and encouraging the faith among the students. Few are witnesses to the faith.
- Often teachers avoid or refuse to answer questions or lead discussions about faith in religion classes. The curriculum is being presented but is not engaging, thought provoking or interactive. *[this was a common thread]*
- The material is often boring, does not link faith with the current reality of students.
- The material is being taught but there is no effort to “develop” or “strengthen” the faith. There is no encouragement to practice the faith.
- The presence of non-Catholic students in the class can be challenging as they are starting with no knowledge or experience of the faith. Some express the thought that those who are non-Catholic must have to learn about Catholicism without exception.
- Religious pluralism is being spread in the schools.

School Masses, Liturgies & Clergy Presence: *General feedback is lack of reverence, understanding and participation and lack of relationships with clergy:*

- Masses and liturgies are often an excuse to sign out, with little active participation or interest in the celebration. Sometimes there is disrespect which makes others uncomfortable.
- Students are herded into the gym – it does not feel faithful or encourage participation. Mass in church is much better and respectful.
- Priest must enjoy celebrating mass with students and not rush in and out with little contact or interaction with the student body.
- Masses should be more “fun” and not a chore. The priest can teach and make it fun and even use games. *[yes, in the mass]*
- Give out snacks after mass to encourage attendance and socializing after for discussion with priest.
- There is a perception that students do not understand the mass and are not engaged due to this lack of understanding.

- Student roles are not encouraged and/or students not well encouraged, trained or prepared to be lectors, EMHC.
- There is a need and desire for greater clergy presence in the school and in classes.
- Guest speakers about the faith should be offered in the schools (priests, Bishops other Catholics who are witness to the faith).
- Priests and parishes should be inviting students to come to mass at church and do things to make it interesting and make them feel welcome.

Other:

- There is a difference between tolerance and agreeing with an issue that conflicts with the teachings of the faith.
- Acceptance does not have to mean agreement (with reference to the Pride Flag used as an example).
- We should not be disrespectful of choices, nor should we affirm sinful choices that are leading students “down the wrong path”.
- We are too quiet about our faith and not willing to express it openly.