



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12 YOUTH FORMATION



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CHAPTER 12

SECTION 1



WHY?

Why is youth formation a Diocesan planning priority?

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THERE IS AN URGENCY

In his *Address to DREs, Catechists, and Youth Ministers* given on Thursday, November 2, 2017 Bishop Shelton J. Fabre said: “A recent CARA study surveyed U.S. participants ages 15 to 25 who were raised Catholic but who no longer identify as such, as well as another of group of self-identified U.S. Catholic adults 18 and older. Nearly two-thirds of participants in the youth and young adult study reported ‘losing the faith’ between the ages of 10 and 17. **A startling number – 23% – stated that they had ceased believing the Catholic faith before the age of 10. Half of the surveyed group now self-identify as atheist, agnostic or without any religious affiliation.**”

He continued: “There is an **urgency**. The situation we are facing with our young people demands that we produce an appropriate response. We must look for new ways to engage our young people. We must find new opportunities that allow them to encounter the love of Jesus personally. We must be ever more creative so that they take steps forward and grow in that relationship. In short our efforts to reach young people in the area of catechesis must be renewed and adapted. The days of us speculating whether things should change have passed us by. The days of us merely complaining about ‘the culture’ or ‘how hard things are’ are gone.”

What is Bishop Fabre referring to? Let's take a look at the facts.

NATIONAL STATISTICS: *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*

Those raised Catholic who no longer identify as Catholic 1977 7.5 million 1997 17.3 million 2017 30 million

NATIONAL STATISTICS: *Forming Intentional Disciples* by Sherry Weddell

The 2014 Pew Research Center study "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" indicates the fastest-growing religious demographic in the United States to be "unaffiliated" (aka "nones").

- One out of every four American adults say they are not affiliated with any religious group or tradition.
- Note: In 2008, merely 10 years ago, the statistic was one in six.

The 2014 Pew Research Center study "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" further indicates the crisis of 18-29 year olds as "unaffiliated" (aka "nones").

- 39% of American adults 18-29 say they are not affiliated with any religious group or tradition
- 30% of Americans who were raised Catholic are still "practicing."
- 32% of Americans who were raised Catholic — 1/3 of all Catholic adults — no longer consider themselves Catholic.

Catholics leaving the Catholic Church for non-denominational or protestant communities

- 52% of those attending non-denominational communities are former Catholics

Why people leave the Catholic Church to be "unaffiliated" (aka "nones")

- 71% "I just gradually drifted away"
- 65% "Stopped believing in the Church's teachings."
- 42% "Don't believe in God"
- 33% "Have not found the right religion"
- 27% "Because of the sexual-abuse scandal"

The crisis with youth and young adults

- **79% of cradle Catholics are no longer Catholic by the age of 23**
- 50% of cradle Catholics ages 18-35 are no longer Catholic
- 7% of cradle Catholics ages 18-35 practice their Faith on a regular basis

WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR IN OUR DIOCESE?

To help us focus on our mission Bishop Fabre embarked upon an intentional commitment to listen. During a span of 14 months, beginning in the spring of 2015 and ending in the summer of 2016, Bishop Fabre listened to his priests and his people. Throughout this process he would often remind those he was listening to that, "You can't say you're listening unless you are open to being changed by what you heard." While he had an intuition of what he was going to hear he remained committed to being open to whatever was said. He remained open to being changed by what he heard. What he heard shaped his understanding of what God was saying to us. His understanding helped to make clear God was asking us to **focus**.

Bishop Fabre hosted 20 listening sessions in venues strategically placed throughout the diocese. Over 1,000 laity participated either in person, on paper, or on-line. Underneath the emerging themes was a plea from the laity: **focus**. Of all the themes that emerged from listening sessions these were two that specifically got his attention. First, there were explicit comments expressing the desire for better adult formation.

Second, there were explicit comments expressing the desire for better **youth formation**. We heard: “My kids don’t go to Mass anymore. Their friends don’t go to Mass anymore. Where are our youth?” We heard parents say that they want more themselves so as to better help their children. We heard hundreds reveal an ache for more. We heard that youth themselves say they are hungry to be fed. Loud and clear we heard the call to **focus**, and to **focus on our youth**.

A short time after the listening sessions concluded, the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux began a partnership with the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI). One of the resources offered to us by CLI is the *Disciple Maker Index* (DMI). The DMI is a 75 question survey known as the *Disciple Maker Index* assessing where parishioners are in the relationship with God and how, and if, the parish is helping them.

In March 2017 nearly 4,500 Houma-Thibodaux parishioners participated in the DMI. The results of the DMI clearly confirmed the call to **focus on youth formation**.

- 77% Parents responded indicating that their children were in parish-based youth formation
- 94% Parents expressed explicit or implicit belief that they as parents have a responsibility to be involved in the religious formation of their children
- 66% Parents expressed explicit or implicit concern with their lack of “strong confidence” at what is happening in our parishes regarding youth formation

Returning to his *Address to DREs, Catechists, and Youth Ministers* given on Thursday, November 2, 2017 Bishop Shelton J. Fabre said:

- “There is a lot at stake – the salvation of souls. Youth ministry, in whatever form, whether it be C.C.D. sessions or Youth Ministry retreats, is about one thing: the battle for souls and the eternal salvation of youth. Our ministry to young people is threatened by historic challenges and requires us to respond. We have to change our methods. We cannot minister in 2017 the way we did 20, 15, or 10 years ago. I, as your Bishop, can no longer in good conscience accept the words: “Well, if we only reach one person ...”. While I truly care about and rejoice in that one person, I nonetheless grieve for those we did not reach. Their souls – all of their souls – are worth fighting for. There is an urgency for us – all of us – every parish in our diocese. We must adapt. **There is an urgency.**”
- “The letters ‘C.C.D.’ initialize the words ‘Confraternity of Christian Doctrine’. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine was established 1562 for the purpose of giving religious instruction. Leading into the 16th century, the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer formed the general basis of religious instruction. Catholics had to know them by heart, and parish priests were exhorted to explain them on Sundays and festivals.”
- “Of course, we all know that the 16th century was marked with two major historical movements: the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation. It was at the Council of Trent that the Church took steps to intentionally answer questions posed by the Reformation, as well as to establish structures to catechize the faithful in the Truths of the Faith. It was there, flowing from the grace of the Council of Trent, that C.C.D. – the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine – was born.”

- **“C.C.D. is a 16th century initiative. However, 16th century structures, if they are still structured as they were at their origin, may not be relevant to 21st century problems. ... Yes, there is an urgency. Today we must re-envision how we minister to young people. We can call it whatever we want. We can still call it C.C.D. We can still call it the youth group. We call it whatever we want. I am not as concerned with what we call the ministry as I am with what we do in the ministry. “**

WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR FROM THE HOLY FATHER?

Pope Francis has been one of the most outspoken advocates for a change in the pastoral approach of the Church as it relates to all aspects of ministry in his document *Evangelii gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). This is where the often-quoted theme of being a missionary disciple comes from, and this theme has been adopted in a profound way for the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux as the pastoral planning process has progressed. So often the idea of being a missionary seems to be attached to the idea of being a missionary to other places that have not heard the Gospel or that need a renewed understanding or experience of the Holy Spirit. At this juncture, we are being called to also be missionaries of time, where we are bold enough to evangelize not only strange places but also generations that have no place of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, or the sacred.

With this in mind, we can hear the call of Pope Francis more clearly to “abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” (*Evangelii gaudium* no. 33)

The culture that our youth find themselves being formed in is unlike any culture that has been seen before. The generation that they belong to is arguably one of the first that can be classified as a post-Christian culture (a culture that wants the objectives and structures of Christianity without the Christ that they rightly belong to). The way that the Gospel is proclaimed often has to go beyond the traditional structures that are in place in the Church. Pope Francis continues, “Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand.” (*Evangelii gaudium* no. 105) We have to speak a language of which we are currently ignorant. We have to understand a culture of which we are currently strangers. We have to embrace a generation who are often propped up as entitled, but in reality are forgotten.

One place of hope can be found from the young people themselves, by engaging them. In October 2018, the bishops of the world will gather in Rome for the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. The preparatory document to be used by the bishops recognizes, “In pastoral activity, young people are not objects but agents. Oftentimes, society sees them as non-essential or inconvenient. The Church cannot reflect such an attitude, because all young people, without exception, have the right to be guided in life’s journey. ... The Church herself is called to learn from young people.” By way of example, the bishops invited 300 young representatives of the world’s youth to write a letter representing the input of the youth for the synod. The first two points within the document reveal how young people of the world desire authentic, real community which forms their personality and facilitates relationships with other people. This is what they desire, so how can we facilitate this connection between youth, who are sold the counterfeit of connection through social media experienced alone on a 5 inch screen?

WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR FROM THE US BISHOPS?

The USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis has the responsibility of:

1. Encouraging and supporting efforts of evangelization and catechesis by fostering the distribution and implementation of both universal Church documents on catechesis and evangelization and also related documents and resources developed by the bishops of the United States
2. Supporting catechetical efforts in the Church in the United States by developing policies, guidelines, and resources for a bishop to use in his diocese
3. Overseeing the use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church especially in regard to the development of catechetical materials that present Church teachings authentically and completely
4. Providing consultation on evangelization and catechetical issues when requested, including advising and representing the bishops

In the past, they have contributed the following resources:

In Support of Catechetical Ministry (2000)

Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age (2008)

Adaptation of Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age (2010)

Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization (2012)

Most recently, in 2017, they released two landmark documents: *Living as Missionary Disciples* and the *National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets*. The *National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets* provide an assortment of assessment instruments to determine preparation and formation of those already engaged in various ministries of evangelization and catechesis on the parish level. In this document we read:

“Pope Francis, in the document that reflected the work of the Synod on the New Evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium*, situates the ministry of catechesis within the process of missionary discipleship.” (no. 1)

- “This is clearly a time of immense possibilities for the Catholic Church in the United States as new directions for evangelization, catechesis, and missionary activity have been identified within the process of discipleship formation. The renewal of emphasis on evangelization and catechesis within the context of the new evangelization has produced many praiseworthy initiatives and efforts in the formation of youth, adults, and children. As such, it has been a remarkable period for the reorientation and promotion of evangelization and catechesis within the universal Church.” (no. 2)
- “Before we take another step, we must acknowledge that we cannot talk about catechesis without talking about evangelization. In his apostolic exhortation, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI articulated an important principle for the renewal of catechesis when he described catechesis as a work of evangelization in the context of the mission of the Church.” (no. 3)

- “Catechists therefore need to embrace a larger role as evangelizing agents who are skilled in the process of evangelization and carefully equipped to discern the opportune moments when a person’s initial faith is ready to be deepened with catechesis. Catechists themselves need to be evangelized in an ongoing way as well. And they need to remain vigilant to build on initial acts of evangelization with a catechesis that is appropriate for each person at that stage of his or her faith journey.” (no. 4)
- “Catechists, who are the Church’s witnesses to God’s existence, message, and loving presence, enable people in all these moments to meet the living God and to form a relationship that can continue to grow through a lifetime. Their apostolic work springs from the Sacrament of Baptism and is strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation.” (no. 5)
- “After initial discernment, these baptized members of Christ’s Body, the Church, who accept a special calling from the Holy Spirit, are affirmed and commissioned by the bishop and his delegates to serve the Church through the ministry of catechist.” (no. 6)
- “In confirming their call, the Church commits itself to an ongoing covenant with catechists to support and train them as disciples called to catechize.” (no. 7)

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IF AND WHEN

The question is not *if* we need to do something but *when* do we need to do it. The aforementioned statistical analysis of the current state of affairs within the Catholic Church of America graphically illustrates **the urgency of now**. The historic exodus of today’s youth leaving the Church is best described as a crisis. Youth are leaving the Church for a number of reasons; there is no single answer to explain the crisis. While the crisis illustrates an **urgency**, we should be careful to not react compulsively out of fear.

Best-selling author Matthew Kelly once said: “Everything that is wrong about the Catholic Church can be fixed by everything that is right about the Catholic Church.” Of course, we know that there is nothing wrong with the Church Herself, the Sacraments, and the Bible, etc. However, there is something very wrong about the trends we see gripping the church in America. All of what we see requires us to look in our hearts. The most important question is not: “What is *wrong* with the Catholic Church?” The most important question is: “What is *right* with the Catholic Church?”

We are founded by Jesus Christ.

We have been given the very Word of God.

Every Mass we make presents the absolute real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

We stand on the shoulders of Saints.

We have weathered the storm for over two millennia and have learned from our history how to respond to the present.

Everything about that is right.

We have a Pope that has been given to us at this stage of history to confront these problems. He has called us to **focus**, to **make disciples**, and we have a moral obligation to start with the **youth** that have been entrusted to us. That’s **youth formation**. That’s a call to focus on youth formation.

The Church has echoed this call to **focus**.

The people of this diocese have asked for it.

An analysis of their needs illustrates the need for us to urgently address **youth formation**.

While we could be busy about many things, what could we focus on that would be more important than helping to stop the exodus of our youth?

Youth formation is a diocesan planning priority, and perhaps one of the most important, and should not be seen as another option among many. Again I ask: While we could be busy about many things, what could we focus on that would be more important than helping to stop the exodus of our youth?

Romans, chapter 10 states: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?”

We have been entrusted with a mission. Perhaps we could read Romans 10 with a reverent enhancement designed to help us appreciate the call: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not *come to know*? And how can they know Him ... unless their parish helps them?”

We have been entrusted with a mission. Now, at this stage of our history, we are called to respond. Let us do so with **focus**. Let us begin with **youth formation**.



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CHAPTER 12 SECTION 2



WHY?

Bishop Shelton Fabre's vision for youth formation



ADDRESS TO DREs, CATECHISTS, AND YOUTH MINISTERS

given by

MOST REVEREND SHELTON J. FABRE

Thursday, November 2, 2017



Good morning and thank you for your presence here today. I would like to structure my reflections offered here into three sections:

Section one: The urgency of Evangelization

Section two: C.C.D. through the lens of *Joy of the Gospel* and *Living as Missionary Disciples*

Section three: Practical implications moving forward

In this presentation I want to share my vision for youth formation within our strategic plan. As you hear my heart this morning, remember I am casting a vision. Today, we may not leave with all the questions answered or the details finalized. However, today we will leave with a direction; with a vision that will guide all as we move forward into the future.

Let us begin by admitting what is at stake, namely the salvation of souls. As Bishop ... as a priest ... as one who is a spiritual father ... I have a great love for our youth. As a Bishop and spiritual father to all the young people of our diocese, I have a deep personal longing for their true happiness and eternal salvation. I want us to be grounded in the reality that ultimately any vision for C.C.D., any vision for youth ministry, and any changes to the structures that evangelize our youth are all oriented to one end: the salvation of souls. We are here today for one reason and one reason only: the salvation of every soul that is entrusted to us. We are here because both classic categories called “C.C.D.” or “Youth Ministry” exist for one reason, and one reason only: the salvation of every young person and their being offered the opportunity to flourish to their full potential, becoming the saints they were created to be. If we are to appreciate the vision that God is calling forth in our diocese we must hear a new vision through the ears of what’s at stake: there is an urgency in our mission because there is an urgency regarding salvation. I repeat, there is an urgency in our ministry to young people.

I think we can all agree that we are facing new and very real challenges in our culture. I think that the case can be made to support the fact that in the present age secularization has more of an influence on our youth than does the Gospel. There is a rapid acceleration of the use and influence of technology. There is more and more of a rejection of a common moral code held by community as a whole. There are complex issues within family. All of this is impacting our young people. We notice an atrophy in their attention span, difficulties in their ability to communicate in healthy ways, a real poverty of deep and meaningful relationships, as well as confusion over many foundational beliefs such as what it means to be human, what it means to be created male and female, and what is true love. Today’s youth are being raised in a culture bombarding them with exposure to many “isms”, each of which offers false promises of fulfillment only to leave us empty and searching for more. Some of these ‘isms’ are: narcissism, consumerism, and relativism, to name only a few.

A recent CARA study surveyed U.S. participants ages 15 to 25 who were raised Catholic but who no longer identify as such, as well as another of group of self-identified U.S. Catholic adults 18 and older. Nearly two-thirds of participants in the youth and young adult study reported “losing the faith” between the ages of 10 and 17. A startling number – 23% – stated that they had ceased believing the Catholic faith before the age of 10. Half of the surveyed group now self-identify as atheist, agnostic or without any religious affiliation.

As I said, there is an urgency. The situation we are facing with our young people demands that we produce an appropriate response. We must look for new ways to engage our young people. We must find new opportunities that allow them to encounter the love of Jesus personally. We must be ever more creative so that they take steps forward and grow in that relationship. In short, our efforts to reach young people in the area of catechesis must be renewed and adapted. The days of us speculating whether things should change have passed us by. The days of us merely complaining about “the culture” or “how hard things are” are gone.

There is an urgency. We must help our young people discover the meaning of life. This means we must find ways to present the timeless Gospel message – the authentic, unchanging, fully Orthodox Truths of the Catholic Church. But, we must find new methods for presenting this Gospel message. We must present the message in such a way that allows our youth to see the Gospel within their real-life circumstances. We must discover ways that allow them to be excited about the richness of our Catholic faith. Yes ... there is an urgency. In a certain sense, we need to “learn their language” so that we can then speak it back to them. And, we need to grow in our capacity to truly listen to them and their needs. In his landmark Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Evangelii gaudium*, also known as *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis writes:

“Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand.” (1)

In summary, there is a lot at stake – the salvation of souls. Youth ministry, in whatever form, whether it be C.C.D. session or Youth Ministry retreats, is about one thing: the battle for the souls and the eternal salvation of youth. Our ministry to young people is threatened by historic challenges and requires us to respond. We have to change our methods. We cannot minister in 2017 the way we did 20, 15, or 10 years ago. I, as your Bishop, can no longer in good conscience accept the words: “Well, if we only reach one person ...”. While I truly care about and rejoice in that one person, I nonetheless grieve for those we did not reach. Their souls – all of their souls – are worth fighting for. There is an urgency for us – all of us – every parish in our diocese. We must adapt. There is an urgency.

The reform of C.C.D. will only be understood if we together embrace a vision that is being given to us by God through the gift of our Holy Father Pope Francis and the response from our U.S. Bishops. Therefore, I would like to cast a new vision for C.C.D., a new vision that is best understood through the lens of two historic documents: Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Joy of the Gospel* and the U.S. Bishop’s document *Living as Missionary Disciples*. To appreciate these two documents, let us begin by coming to a greater understanding the mind and heart of our Holy Father Pope Francis, attempting to appreciate his understanding of evangelization. Understanding the mind of Pope Francis will help us understand why the author of *Joy of the Gospel* wrote as he did.

In a conversation with some representatives of the Lutheran Evangelical church in Rome on November 15, 2015, a young boy named Julius asked Pope Francis this question: “What do you enjoy most about being pope?” The Pope’s very personal and simple reply is worth sharing with you. He said:

“The answer is simple. What I enjoy most is being a parish priest, a pastor. I don’t like paperwork. I don’t like those jobs. What do I enjoy most? Parish work. Once, when I was rector of the theology faculty, I was also priest of the parish that was next to the faculty, and you know, I loved teaching the children their catechism and doing a Mass with the children on Sundays. ... I like being pope in a parish-priest way.”

Francis continued:

“Being pope means being a bishop, being a parish priest, a pastor. If a pope doesn’t behave like a bishop, a parish priest, a pastor he may be a very intelligent, very important person and have a lot of influence in society, but I think he won’t be happy in his heart.”

From the Holy Father's reply to Julius' question, we must admit that this Pope likes "being pope in a parish-priest way" or you might say he enjoys "being a pastor." In fact, few of us can forget his homily at his first Chrism Mass on March 28, 2013, only two weeks after his election as the Vicar of Christ. It was during that homily that he painted a picture for us all: priests are called to be pastors "with the smell of the sheep." Simply put: Francis talks like a pastor. He thinks like a pastor. He leads like a pastor.

Therefore, we must first appreciate how Pope Francis is a pastor, and second we appreciate is that he is a Jesuit. Jorge Mario Bergoglio entered the Society of Jesus in 1958 at the age of 21 years old. He took first vows in 1960, was ordained a priest in 1969, and professed final vows in 1973. Worth noting, Fr. Pedro Arrupe was Superior General of the Society of Jesus from 1965 to 1983. The most influential years of Pope Francis' Jesuit imagination came under the tenure of Fr. Pedro Arrupe. Arrupe's mind influenced Francis' mind just as much as Ignatius' mind influenced the young Jorge Mario Bergoglio. In 1976 Fr. Pedro Arrupe was at the high point of service as Superior General of the Jesuits. He was invited to the 41st International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia and asked to deliver a keynote address to Catholic educators from the across the country. Fr. Arrupe's keynote was distinctly Jesuit: urging Catholics to fall in love with God. Following the speech, Fr. Arrupe fielded questions from the crowd and one of the participant listeners passively remarked: "Falling in love. That's great. Now give me something practical." To this comment, Fr. Arrupe spontaneously replied:

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

At the heart of Arrupe's vision is encounter, relationship, falling in love with God in such a way that one's life changes. This is distinctly Ignatian. This is distinctly Jesuit. This is the perspective that formed the mind of Pope Francis when he was a young Jesuit.

Pope Francis is a Jesuit, and, as such, at the heart of his mind is a call for every person to encounter God in a life-changing way. To Pope Francis, the word "encounter" means more than "meeting". Encounter means "encounter with God"; it means "life-changing encounter with God." Encounter means "relationship with God." It is central how Pope Francis views Christianity and evangelization. It's all about encounter.

Pope Francis – he is a pastor, he is a Jesuit, and he is one who bold in addressing what needs to be reformed. He has taken bold steps in reform of the Vatican. He has taken bold steps to refocus the priesthood on the ministry of service. He is challenging us to be urgent in our response to reforming the structures of evangelization to youth and in this regard C.C.D. stands as most prominent.

Pope Francis – he is a pastor, he is a Jesuit, and he is one who is bold in addressing what needs to be reformed. These understandings of his mind now help us appreciate his landmark Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Joy of the Gospel*. It is the clarion call from the Church regarding the future of parish life and evangelization. The Joy of the Gospel is a very bold document. Permit me to allow Pope Francis himself to address us as we listen directly to his own words:

“I am aware that nowadays documents do not arouse the same interest as in the past and that they are quickly forgotten. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has programmatic significance and important consequences. I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.” (2)

Again, Pope Francis writes:

“I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: ‘All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion.’” (3)

Still ... the Holy Father urges us:

“To make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform. ... Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization.” (4)

And, finally we read:

“Here I have chosen to present some guidelines which can encourage and guide the whole Church in a new phase of evangelization, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality. All of them help give shape to a definite style of evangelization which I ask you to adopt in every activity which you undertake.” (5)

Joy of the Gospel reflects the mind of Pope Francis, specifically the three attributes mentioned a few moments ago. First it sounds like a pastor; it’s written from a parish priest to parish priests and those who minister in parishes. Second, the central theme of *Joy of the Gospel* places an emphasis on the disciple having an encounter with Jesus Christ. In fact, *Joy of the Gospel* couches all evangelization through the lens of encounter. Third, *Joy of the Gospel* is bold and carries with it an urgency.

Responding directly to the Holy Father's vision for evangelization, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops through the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis produced in March of 2017 a document entitled *Living as Missionary Disciples*. Inspired by Pope Francis we bishops echo the urgency for reform and the need for renewal within all structures of evangelization. A few quotes from *Living as Missionary Disciples* can help us appreciate the mandate:

“One of the great challenges facing the Church in this generation is to foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church's mission ... This will require creativity in adapting to changed situations, carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions, which have served us well, but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of our life.” (6)

The U.S. Bishops also published an accompaniment to *Living as Missionary Disciples* entitled National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets. There we read:

“This is clearly a time of immense possibilities for the Catholic Church in the United States as new directions for evangelization, catechesis, and missionary activity have been identified within the process of discipleship formation. The renewal of emphasis on evangelization and catechesis within the context of the new evangelization has produced many praiseworthy initiatives and efforts in the formation of youth, adults, and children. As such, it has been a remarkable period for the reorientation and promotion of evangelization and catechesis within the universal Church.” (7)

“Before we take another step, we must acknowledge that we cannot talk about catechesis without talking about evangelization. In his apostolic exhortation, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI articulated an important principle for the renewal of catechesis when he described catechesis as a work of evangelization in the context of the mission of the Church.” (8)

“Catechists therefore need to embrace a larger role as evangelizing agents who are skilled in the process of evangelization and carefully equipped to discern the opportune moments when a person's initial faith is ready to be deepened with catechesis. Catechists themselves need to be evangelized in an ongoing way as well. And they need to remain vigilant to build on initial acts of evangelization with a catechesis that is appropriate for each person at that stage of his or her faith journey.” (9)

Prayerful reflection upon the mind of Pope Francis, the call of *Joy of the Gospel*, and the mandate from *Living as Missionary Disciples* reveals obvious implications for us in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux. Specifically, there are obvious implications for anyone ministering within what we know as “C.C.D.” However, before we discuss these implications, let me remind us of the history of what we have come to know as C.C.D.

The letters “C.C.D.” initialize the words “Confraternity of Christian Doctrine”. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine was established 1562 for the purpose of giving religious instruction. Leading into the 16th century, the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer formed the general basis of religious instruction. Catholics had to know them by heart, and parish priests were exhorted to explain them on Sundays and festivals.

Of course, we all know that the 16th century was marked with two major historical movements: the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation. It was at the Council of Trent that the Church took steps to intentionally answer questions posed by the Reformation, as well as to establish structures to catechize the faithful in the Truths of the Faith. It was there, flowing from the grace of the Council of Trent, that C.C.D. – the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine – was born.

It is important to note two specific things regarding C.C.D. Number one: C.C.D. was established as a direct response to the needs of the day. The Holy Father, and the Bishops with him, recognized that the Church was facing a crisis. In response to the signs of the times, the Holy Spirit led the Church to adapt – to change – and thus respond to what was needed. Number two: C.C.D. was established for a very specific purpose: intellectual formation. The needs of the day stemmed from the confusion introduced by the Protestant Reformation. C.C.D. was a response from the Church to intellectual formation, for this is where the needs were.

C.C.D. is a 16th century initiative. However, 16th century structures, if they are still structured as they were at their origin, may not be relevant to 21st century problems. I again echo the words of Pope Francis:

“Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures.” (10)

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization.” (11)

Yes, there is an urgency. Today we must re-envision how we minister to young people. We can call it whatever we want. We can still call it C.C.D. We can still call it the youth group. We call it whatever we want. I am not as concerned with what we call the ministry as I am with what we do in the ministry. What we do – what we must do – is form disciples. Again, the U.S. Bishop urge us:

“This is clearly a time of immense possibilities for the Catholic Church in the United States as new directions for evangelization, catechesis, and missionary activity have been identified within the process of discipleship formation.” (12)

There are three specific aspects of a renewed vision for C.C.D. that I would like to emphasize. Number one ... we must form the whole person, not merely the mind. When C.C.D. was established in the 16th century it had as its aim a specific call to intellectual formation. While we must have solid intellectual formation, we must also admit that there is an urgency for more. I repeat, we do need and must have solid intellectual formation. I do not want catechesis that lacks the fullness of Truth, or formation that is not comprehensive. What I am saying is that only merely lecturing or presenting theological concepts is proving to no longer work. The Holy Father is urging us to more. The U.S. Bishops are urging us to more. I, as your Bishop, am urging us to more. As we present authentic theological content, we must present this Truth in such a way that it is connected to the real lives of the students.

Number two, the aim of C.C.D. is living in a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, not merely the transmission of theological content. In other words, the goal of C.C.D. cannot be “we covered the material.” Instead, the goal of C.C.D. must be “we presented the material AND the students themselves made connections between the material and their relationship with God.” Again, the U.S. Bishop urge us:

“Before we take another step, we must acknowledge that we cannot talk about catechesis without talking about evangelization.” (13)

Number three, we must become experts in the students as well as the content. In the formation of a young person, it is vitally important that we not merely know the content, but that we know the student. To get to know the student means we are intentional about doing so. We must become more familiar with what they experience on a day to day basis. We must become intentionally aware of where each student truly finds themselves on their journey of faith. We must start from this awareness in order to then help each young person take the next step in their relationship with God.

Therefore, there are three specific aspects of a renewed vision for C.C.D. We must form the whole person, not merely the mind. We must foster a living in a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, not merely the transmit theological content. We must become experts in the students. And, we must do so now. There is an urgency.

As Fr. Mark Toups reviewed with you last month, we must grow in our understanding of the process of forming disciples. If forming disciples is “what” we do in C.C.D. must become familiar with “how” we do it. There is a process for forming disciples and we must become experts in the process. We must all grow in our ability to meet our young people exactly where they are and be confident in determining what their own personal next step with God might be. Then we must accompany them through a process – a clearly articulated process. The process of disciple formation is articulated simply in five words: Connect ... encounter ... conversion ... grow ... mission.

Very quickly, I would like to briefly comment on each of these.

Connect. This initial movement within formation is for a young person to “connect” with people committed to their growth. “Connect” has particular implications for our youth. I believe our youth particularly suffer today from a lack of real connection. Today’s youth are growing up in a world where people may know a lot of “information” about them as can be read on Facebook, Twitter, or dozens of other social media apps. However, few people really “know” them. Young people today not only deeply long for true friendships, connections and a sense of belonging with their peers, but they also long for this with adults. We must seek to help young people connect not only with their peers but also with adults who are invested in their well-being and willing to journey with them through their faith journey.

Sometimes the journey of accompaniment with a young person can be a slow process that takes much patience and love. We must learn how to accompany young people with steadiness, compassion, and perseverance. For some, we will need to take time to build a foundation of trust before they will be ready to seek a deeper encounter with Christ. For others, who have already come to know the love of God deeply and are desiring to grow in holiness, we must help them to grow in these deeper ways. No matter where a young person is, this element of “connect” facilitates accompaniment which is necessary for all other pieces of the process of formation.

Encounter. Pope Francis is merely the latest to speak of the centrality of encounter with God as the energy that fuels the formation process. Our ministry with today’s youth must lead them Jesus, to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Conversion. To stay in relationship with God requires conversion. Formation must help our young people orient their life, with Jesus at the center. As we accompany our youth we teach them to say “no” so that to they are able to say “yes” more fully to God.

Grow. Formation must help today’s youth mature as disciples by learning more about the Truths of the Church, by participating in the Sacraments, by learning out how to pray and live a life of virtue.

Mission. Finally, we must help our young people learn about the spiritual gifts God has given; discovering their “charisms” and learning how to respond to God’s call in their life.

To succeed in response to God’s call we must embrace a new vision for C.C.D. As has already been stated previously, Pope Francis has said: “I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization.”¹⁴ Therefore, there are practical implications to a new vision for C.C.D. Today, I would like to highlight five adjustments that are necessary if we are to respond to God’s call.

First, we must rethink what kind of team works with C.C.D. In order to move forward with a reformed model of youth formation, we will need to re-think the kind of team works with our youth. What is needed are young adults, adults and even our elderly, who have the capacity and desire to be in relationship with our young people. We need teams of adults who are willing to take the time to be involved in the lives of our youth: not merely concerned with what they are doing when they come to us on a Monday night, but rather taking the time to know the day to day victories, challenges and concerns that happen in the life of each young person. We cannot attempt to present the Gospel in a way that is relevant and applicable to the lives of our young people if we ourselves are not familiar with the lives of our young people.

In many ways, I am reminded of Saint Paul, who would study the ways of life, the habits, and even the idols of the communities to which he was sent. Only then, in love, was he able to present to them the life-giving message of Jesus Christ. Another important element we must consider is our need for adults who are willing to live as disciples themselves. The U.S. Bishop's remind us:

“Catechists themselves need to be evangelized in an ongoing way as well.” (15)

We need men and women who are willing to grow in their own faith journey and are able to give witness to what God is doing in their lives. We need men and women who are willing to pass along what they have been given to grow in relationship. Now please note well. I need you to us trust God's desire to provide each of our parishes with adults who are able to walk with our young people. I ask you to begin to pray for this. As Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 9 verse 37: “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few, so ask the master of the harvest to send out more laborers for the harvest.” We must ask, and we must trust He will respond.

Second, we must move forward with an emphasis on bearing fruit. The U.S. Bishops have urged us:

“The parish must be concerned with bearing fruit throughout the discipleship process. This shift in focus ensures that attention is directed toward pruning what is ineffective so that new life and fruit can occur. Throughout Scripture, the metaphor of fruit is used many different times and in many ways in reference to mission. Jesus commands the disciples to “go and bear fruit that will remain” (John 15:16).” (16)

This emphasis on bearing fruit is also our emphasis as we move forward. In other words, we must begin to assess all of our efforts based on whether or not we see good fruit in our own lives and in the lives of our young people. We must make an honest and on-going assessment of every aspect of our C.C.D. program and ask: What is bearing long lasting fruit? What is not bearing fruit? Last month, Fr. Mark Toups reviewed with you the nine characteristics of a mature disciple. These nine characteristics are in a sense, the result of a life lived in communion with Christ. We must commit to this focus of bearing fruit. In fact, all of us must ask this question. “Is there fruit in my life?” “Am I growing as a missionary disciple?” I, your Bishop, must ask this of myself. You must ask this. Your team of adult volunteers must ask this. And, we must begin to ask the questions: Do we see good fruit in the lives of our young people?

Are they growing as disciples of Jesus Christ? Is what we are spending our time and energy on bearing fruit?

Third, I predict that you will eventually feel the tension of time. In other words, what do we spend our time on: content or discussion? The model of C.C.D. most of us have been used to was one that focused on content alone, with the entire time of our C.C.D. sessions spent presenting content. To simply present content without the material making an impact, or being seen as relevant, will not bear fruit. We must evaluate the way in which we present the content.

We need time to connect with the youth, meeting them “where they are”, making a space for their questions and for discussion. This will all take up time within our meeting with them. We will need time to help them learn how to express themselves and have a conversation with each other and adults. To take time to teach them the disciplines necessary to make Jesus a part of their daily life, will take time. We will need time “on Monday night” for this to happen. There will be a tension there between the content and the time needed for other essential components of youth formation. This is a tension worth pressing into. It will be good for us to ask: who is getting our “time”. In other words, are we giving all the time to the content, or are we leaving adequate space within C.C.D. for application and discussion?

Fourth, we may need to “shrink the classroom.” There will be a need for us to reduce the size of our classes in order to have more individual attention to our youth. We will need a smaller ratio of young people to adult volunteers. This will allow us to build better relationships with the young people and meet their individual needs more accurately.

Fifth, we will need a different pedagogy and different classroom resources. We are continuing our research to identify the best resources available to assist you with implementing this vision for formation. This will be coming to you. I promise you, you are not alone. I reiterate ... we are in this together. We will help you with resources. However, I need you to first understand the “why” of this new vision, which I have outlined today and for which was highlighted over your past two meetings as well. This is where we all need to be right now. Resources are coming. However, if we do not understand why we are heading where we are headed, then the practical resources will not be able to aid us in the best way possible.

I have great trust in our ability to work together and creatively discover new ways of engaging and forming our youth. I want to offer you my sincere thanks for the time and energy, the hope and resources that you bring to our efforts to catechize our young people. You offer the very precious gift of your time in this effort, and I am truly grateful to you for this priceless gift that you give to the Church and our youth. I know that the Lord in his love will reward you for your generosity.

In conclusion, let me offer a few words of encouragement. I know that the task we face is a daunting one. However, we never face any challenge alone. I am confident that God will supply us with the assistance of the Holy Spirit as we proceed forward – together – assisting one another, and assisted by the Holy Spirit. Thank you.

ENDNOTES

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| 1 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 105 | 10 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 105 |
| 2 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 25 | 11 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 33 |
| 3 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 27 | 12 | <i>National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets</i> , Introduction pg. i |
| 4 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 33 | 13 | <i>National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets</i> , Introduction pg. iii |
| 5 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 17 | 14 | <i>Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)</i> , no. 33 |
| 6 | <i>Living as Missionary Disciples</i> , pg. 20 | 15 | <i>Living as Missionary Disciples</i> , Introduction Pg. iv. |
| 7 | <i>National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets</i> , Introduction pg. i | 16 | <i>Living as Missionary Disciples</i> , Pg. 21 |
| 8 | <i>National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets</i> , Introduction pg. iii | | |
| 9 | <i>National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets</i> , Introduction pg. iv | | |



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12

SECTION 3



WHY?

Why do we need to change? What do we need to change?

There is a **crisis**. There is a crisis **in the Catholic Church**. There is a crisis in the Catholic Church **regarding the unprecedented exodus of youth**.

Crisis.

There is a **crisis**.

Crisis requires a response. Crisis requires **change**. As we attempt to learn more about how to change and what needs to be changed with youth formation we would do well to look to other formation systems within the Church. What can they teach us? How can we adapt within the Church using the lessons learned from other formation within the Church.

LEARNING FROM SEMINARY FORMATION

What can CCD learn from the seminary? Saint John Paul II wrote: “The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity.” Anything designated to be “one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity” is important.

Since the writing of *Pastores dabo vobis* in 1992 seminary formation has focused on four dimensions. “The seminary and its programs foster the formation of future priests by attending specifically to their human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation—the four pillars of priestly formation developed in *Pastores dabo vobis*. These pillars of formation and their finality give specificity to formation in seminaries as well as a sense of the integrated wholeness of the different dimensions of formation.” (*Program for Priestly Formation no. 70*)

In an ideal world, every man who is to be formed as a priest experiences a deep personal appropriation of grace within all four aspects of his life: the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. Seminaries are better than ever, they are doing a better job attempting to prepare men for the reality of the priesthood. For many reasons the difficulties of formation parallel the changes in culture and family which produce the men going into the seminary. While each man is called to attend to all four pillars of priestly formation, rarely do we see it done perfectly. The mere demands of the intellectual formation often receive the majority of his time. Seminaries after all are not only houses of formation they are also graduate schools of theology. Men receive academic grades. They graduated with a diploma. Like it or not, most of his time is spent studying. Even the best seminaries with the best faculties must admit that while the vision of Saint John Paul II was for balanced formation within four dimensions, the system simply isn't designed to support that vision.

The Church has experienced the presence of priests who were well-formed as well as those who are non-integrated. We have all felt the effects of what happens when a person focuses on only one of the dimensions, intellectual formation, and neglects the other important aspects of his life. Intellectual formation is one of four pillars. It is important, but people deserve more. What is true for seminary formation is true with youth formation.

The US Bishops have not released a comprehensive vision on youth formation which addresses both the traditional structures of "CCD" and "youth ministry". The 1997 document *Renewing the Vision*, now 21 years old, is the last definitive statement from the USCCB regarding youth formation. The 2017 document from USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis entitled *Living as Missionary Disciples* is an extensive outline for parish renewal specifically aimed at formation of all parishioners of all ages. The accompaniment to that document is entitled the *National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets*. It is a very important, and yet very practical, resource designed to both evaluate and strengthen the traditional structure known as "CCD".

The same struggles that we see plaguing seminary formation are the same struggles gripping "CCD" and fueling the exodus of today's youth. Seminary formation is designed to address the whole person; however, in reality most seminarians primarily receive intellectual formation with the remaining dimensions rarely appropriated with the same intensity. CCD was never designed to address the whole person. Its history reveals that it was purely a response to intellectual formation. CCD, as mentioned earlier, was a 16th century solution to 16th century problems. The rapidly changing culture forming today's youth needs more than a 16th century approach.

To put it simply: today's youth need more than mere intellectual formation. There is a crisis within youth culture and we simply need more than just intellectual formation. The truths of the Church must be applied with the reality of one's life. We must continue to provide solid orthodox teaching. We must continue to provide theological content, but must do so within a more holistic approach.

LEARNING FROM RCIA

While seminary formation is an essential aspect within the mission of the church, RCIA stands alongside seminary formation, not only in the importance, but more so in its history. The Church has been focused on initiating the lay faithful into the fullness of the faith since the very dawn of Christianity. You may say that Christian initiation is the oldest ministry in the Church. Christian initiation formation has changed throughout the seasons within our 2,000-year history. RCIA has much to teach us about formation.

If you ask pastors to honestly share with you various griefs of their heart I am sure that you will discover that many pastors carry a sadness when they consider the number of people brought into the Church through the Easter Vigil only to be absent from the Church less than two years later. There are many reasons why we do not see newly initiated Catholics thriving in their faith long after that historic night. One reason among many is because of the way with which we walked with them in preparation for that historic night.

The exact text from the book entitled *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* gives pastors and parishes age old wisdom in how they should approach the formation of those in RCIA. RCIA, in its most authentic form, is not based off a calendar per se. It's not about the number of classes or "boxes to check off." RCIA is about a person, Jesus Christ. RCIA is about people, real people who are engaging with the person of Jesus. RCIA is about the heart, the mind and the will all being formed in one harmonious movement of the Holy Spirit. RCIA has always been open to the Spirit. The aim is not to "get to the Easter Vigil" as if that were some accomplishment or end of ministry. No, RCIA is about discernment. We discern: "Where is this person in relation to their readiness to take another step forward?"

In fact, there are rites that mark the journey of RCIA. There is the Rite of Acceptance, Rite of Enrollment, etc. Throughout RCIA there are thresholds that tell where parishioners are on the journey. Each threshold is an indication of what's happening in people's hearts. These thresholds measure the movement of God in a person's life.

For example, in no. 41 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* we read: "the rite that is called rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens is of utmost importance." How does a pastor and his RCIA team know if a person is ready for Rite of Acceptance? The Church supplies us thresholds. She describes what we should be looking for if we are to move forward. In no. 42 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* we read:

"The prerequisite for making this first step is the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates. There must be evidence of the first faith that was conceived during the period of evangelization and precatechumenate and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ. Consequently, there must also be evidence of the first stirrings of repentance, a start of the practice of calling up on God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience other company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with some members of the community. The candidates should also be instructed about the celebration of the liturgical rite of acceptance."

The discernment to celebrate the Rite of Acceptance needs to happen weeks before the scheduled celebration. The team and sponsors aid in this discernment process by reflecting back to the inquirer's growth in consciousness and change in lifestyle because of the initial exposure to the Gospel within the Catholic tradition. The rite gives us some of the "indicators" that guide us in this discernment process.

1. Evidence of first faith: Does the individual have a desire to be in relationship with God? Does he or she want to discover more to life?
2. Initial conversion: Has the individual begun to recognize that his or her life will change because of God? Have there been any preliminary changes and adjustments in the individual's life, attitudes, or actions because of what he or she has experienced to date?
3. Intent to change one's life: Does the individual desire to leave behind all that is inauthentic? Does he or she desire to live life fully, whatever the cost?

4. Intent to enter into relationship with God in Christ: Does the individual desire to follow the way of Christ in the Gospel? Is he or she able to embrace the demands of the Gospel willingly, at least as much as he or she knows of them now?
5. First stirrings of repentance: Does the individual recognize that there are areas of his or her life that are wounded and broken? Has he or she begun to accept responsibility for areas of failings in his or her own life?
6. Beginnings of the practice of prayer: Has the individual begun to pray outside of the gatherings? Does he or she recognize that prayer is an essential dimension of Christian life?
7. Sense of Church: Has the individual had the opportunity to discuss basic issues of the Catholic Church? Does he or she have a basic awareness of the distinctiveness of the Catholic Church?
8. Some experience of the community: Has the individual expressed an interest in getting to know more about the parish, especially through participation in parish activities? Has he or she had the opportunity to meet and spend time with members of the parish?

These thresholds guide the process. They indicate how to move forward, how fast to move forward, and what to focus on as we move forward. This process is relational. This process has been around for ages: “Let’s meet people where they are and then, based off of where they are, then, and only then, do we move forward.”

So, why isn’t this the case with CCD?

CCD, as it currently operates has very little adaptability to respond to the individual needs of each and every student. If we are honest with ourselves, we can admit that often what drives the program is a rigid adherence to the curriculum and an attitude that says we just need to “get them through the year’s requirements”. Perhaps this is because we are at a loss for what else to do. Perhaps we have fallen into a routine and have continued it because “we’ve always done it like this”. Perhaps, the calendar has driven our approach. Perhaps, our perception is that our focus should be on the required number of classes because “that’s what the diocese wants”. 79% of today’s youth leave the Catholic Church by their 23rd birthday. 79%. Why is this? Because instead of equipping our volunteers to walk with our young people, we have allowed peripheral things become our focus. This is not an indictment on the DREs, Youth Ministers, Parish or Diocesan staff, etc., but this is just an honest assessment of a structure that does not serve an ever-changing demographic that shifts at a more rapid pace than ever before.

Listen to Pope Francis: “One of the great challenges facing the Church in this generation is to foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church’s mission, and to enable them to fulfill that responsibility as missionary disciples, as a leaven of the Gospel in our world. **This will require creativity in adapting to changed situations, carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions, which have served us well, but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us** and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of our life.” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Journey to Cuba, September 26, 2015)

We must change. We must, as the Holy Father says, respond with “creativity in adapting to changed situations, carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions, which have served us well, but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us”.

If thresholds work for RCIA, why can't they work for what we used to call "CCD" or youth formation?

- First, thresholds honor the movement of God.
- Second, thresholds honor the young person.
- Third, thresholds yield greater fruit because we are meeting the reality of the student's situation with the reality of the Gospel.

Thresholds are markers of where we are in the present and are connected to where we want to go. What would thresholds look like in youth formation? Let us begin with what are moving toward?

From May through December of 2016 the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux went through a comprehensive planning process. There was an emphasis on forming disciples which was to serve as the golden thread woven throughout all of the planning. The Bishop was clear with his desire: the renewal of parish life. The Holy Father Pope Francis has clearly called us to **make disciples**.

If "making disciples" was to be the golden thread, we needed to ask the question: *How* do you make a disciple? Specifically: How do we make one in a parish? In our diocese? With our resources? Yet, before we could answer how do you make a disciple we first needed to answer the question: **What is a disciple?**

The word disciple appears 22 times in the Gospel. The word disciple is not limited to Jesus, for many of the great teachers at the time of Jesus had disciples. John the Baptist had disciples, as we read in John 1:35-37: "The next day John was there again with two of his **disciples** and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.' The two **disciples** heard what he said and followed Jesus."

The word disciple in the Bible, especially in the Gospels, reveals three things. A disciple: (1) learned what the master taught, (2) taught what the master taught, and (3) tried to live like the master.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to commit to the same three things. Disciples **learn** what Jesus taught. Disciples **teach** others what Jesus taught. Disciples long to **live** like Jesus. The first two are understandable and expected. The third is the most difficult. Disciples strive to live like Jesus. Whew, no pressure.

What does it look like to concretely **live** as a disciple? What are the thresholds one should strive for? What is the visible fruit we should expect to see in one's life?

Our strategic planning team analyzed the following documents:

- *Lumen Gentium (The Church in the Modern World)* Second Vatican Council, 1964
- *Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World)* Pope Paul VI, 1975
- *Redemptoris Missio (Mission of the Redeemer)* Pope John Paul II, 1990
- *Go and Make Disciples* USCCB, 1992
- *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* USCCB, 1999
- *Ecclesia in America (The Church in America)* Pope John Paul II, 1999
- *Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)* Pope Francis, 2013

After summarizing the core themes from each of these major documents on evangelization, we illustrated what we believe to be nine dimensions of a mature missionary disciple. Of course, we are always on the journey. We will never be complete in our growth. Yet, this is the visible fruit we would hope to see in one's life as they mature as a disciple.

Characteristics of a Mature MISSIONARY DISCIPLE



RELATIONSHIP

I have a **personal relationship with Jesus Christ** that gives my life meaning and direction.



CONVERSION

I say **YES** to that which brings me closer to God.
I say **NO** to that which pulls me away from God.
I have aligned my lifestyle with the Gospel.



DISCERNMENT

I want what God wants.
I begin to discern the little things.
I can recognize His voice, and I follow as He leads me.



SACRAMENTS

The Sacraments are a regular part of my life.
Sunday Mass and frequent Confession.
Additional Masses, especially during Lent and Easter.



HOLINESS

I pray daily. I am growing in virtue, particularly Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Humility, Faith, Hope, & Charity.
I want to be a witness of holiness.



GROUNDING

My relationship with God is **no longer dependent upon whether I "feel" His presence.**
I study the Bible and Church teaching.
On-going study of my faith is a lifestyle.



COMMUNITY

I have people who hold me accountable.
I have regular conversation about where I am with my commitment to Christ.



OTHERS

I no longer live in a "me-centered" world.
My Faith is no longer just "me and Jesus."
I see and respond to others as Christ does.



EVANGELIZATION

I know my testimony - the story of what God has done in my life.
I can share and do share that testimony with others.

What does “the nine” look like for healthy youth formation? Our team consulted with experts across the country to translate the benchmarks of adult formation to age appropriate expectations for our youth. If we look at youth formation through the lens of 6-12th grade, we ask ourselves: “If we have seven years, from 6th thru 12th grade, to work with our youth, what would we want to see in their lives by the time the graduate from high school?”

Imagine, for a moment, if all our graduating high school seniors looked like this.

Characteristics of a Teenage MISSIONARY DISCIPLE



RELATIONSHIP

Have a relationship with Jesus Christ
Pray more days than they don't for 20 minutes in a contemplative manner with Scripture



CONVERSION

Have learned how engage their will
Seek out monthly confession and a weekly examination of conscience



DISCERNMENT

Ask God to show them the way
Are able to pray and hear God speak. Do what God and the Church asks of them.



SACRAMENTS

Committed to the sacraments
Go to Mass weekly, open to daily Mass. Confession once a month.



HOLINESS

Growing in virtue
Growing in the virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude



GROUNDING

Relationship with God not governed by feeling
They feel comfortable reading the Bible and understand the Church on tough topics



COMMUNITY

They have others who hold them accountable
See small group accountability as a need and know how to build it



OTHERS

It's not about “me and Jesus”
Have a general sense of being other-focused and willing to serve on their own



EVANGELIZATION

Not afraid to share their story
Are familiar with their own faith testimony and want to share it

How do we get there? How do we partner with God so that our teens grow in the aforementioned graces? Thresholds. We set thresholds from 6th thru 12th grade and then design a curriculum and formation process designed to help teenagers mature through the thresholds.

For example, we know that we want our teens to have a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. It's part of "the nine" that we just illustrated for teenagers. What we are illustrating is that we want our 12th grade graduating seniors to "Pray more days than they don't". We want them to be able to pray "for 20 minutes" and we want them to do so "in a contemplative manner with Scripture". In order for that to happen, we have to work backwards from 12th grade.

- In order to progress to that threshold of prayer, where would we want to be in 11th grade?
- In order to reach that threshold of prayer by their 12th grade year, where would we want to be in 10th grade?
- When do we teach them about prayer?
- What does it practically look like in their lives?
- What are the small goals we can give them?

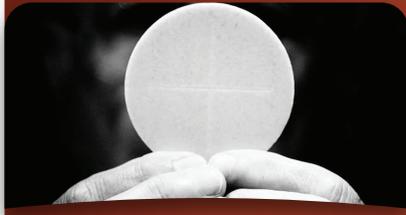
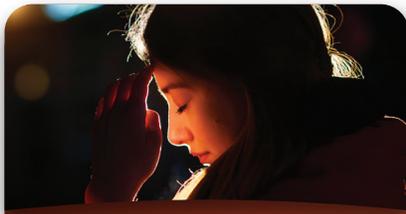
The thresholds regarding prayer would need to be strategically placed throughout the curriculum and mentoring. Of course, this approach is incompatible with "How many classes we need to cover to keep the diocese happy?" However, this approach using thresholds is compatible with the mind of the Church and RCIA. It is also in line with the mind of the US Bishops and their most recent document *Living as Missionary Disciples*. The bishops write:

"The parish must be concerned with bearing fruit throughout the discipleship process. This shift in focus ensures that attention is directed toward pruning what is ineffective so that new life and fruit can occur. Throughout Scripture, the metaphor of fruit is used many different times and in many ways in reference to mission. Jesus commands the disciples to 'go and bear fruit that will remain' (John 15:16)." (pg. 22)

"A planning framework focused on fruitfulness suggests an approach to pastoral ministry that discerns what will be fruitful, what needs to be pruned, and how weeds will be separated from new growth. This means, at the start of the process, identifying the overall fruit and outcomes that a parish or diocese desires for its ministry and aligning programs and ministries to achieve this result." (pg. 2)

We must change. Our attitudes, our calendars, our curriculum, everything we do in youth formation needs to fundamentally be at the service of our young people and their formation. We must change the mentality and false perception that it is a certain number of classes is "what the diocese wants". It is *not* about the number of classes. Regardless of how things may have been presented, it never was. It is *not* about the DREs calendar, it never was. It is *not* about "getting them through the year."

The need for change is critical. *We are in this together.* We all need to be part of the solution. This is how Jesus envisioned it when He commanded us "go, therefore and make disciples".



What about Confirmation?

SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

As anticipate better serving our teens, many are asking, “What about confirmation?”

The details of the new Confirmation preparation, as well as the first draft of the curriculum based on thresholds and assessments, will be presented to all the priests and DREs on **September 26, 2018**.

There will be a few options of how you can see the presentation.

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM | Option 1 (for priests): Presentation for Pastors and Associate Pastors, in person |
| 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM | Option 2 (for priests): Livestream via YouTube for Pastors and Associate Pastors |
| 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM | Option 1 (for lay leaders): Meeting with Coordinators of Youth Formation (DREs and/or youth ministers) |
| 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM | Option 2 (for lay leaders): Meeting with Coordinators of Youth Formation (DREs and/or youth ministers) |

Looking forward to presenting all of this for you and your staff!



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12

SECTION 4



WHAT?

An analysis of today's youth ... from the youth themselves

To help us appreciate the reality of where today's youth are I invite us to listen to the experts: the youth themselves. They have insight into their experience of life that we adults do not have. Therefore, the remaining text within this section will be a representation of quotations from international synod on youth pre-synodal meeting.

As they say in the world of public speaking: "I now turn the floor over to ... the youth of our world."

INTERNATIONAL SYNOD ON YOUTH PRE-SYNODAL MEETING
FINAL DOCUMENT FROM THE PRE-SYNODAL MEETING
March 19-24, 2018

*All text below are direct quotes **from youth themselves***

Introduction

- "It is important to note that these are the reflections of young people of the 21st century from various religious and cultural backgrounds. With this in mind, the Church should view these reflections not as an empirical analysis of any other time in the past, but rather as an expression of where we are now, where we are headed and as an indicator of what she needs to do moving forward."
- "These reflections were borne out of the meeting of more than 300 young representatives from around the world, convened in Rome March 19-24, 2018 at the inaugural Pre-Synodal Meeting of Young People and the participation of 15,000 young people engaged online through the Facebook groups."

Part One: The Challenges and Opportunities of Young People in the World Today

i. The Formation of Personality

- “Young people look for a sense of self by seeking communities that are supportive, uplifting, authentic and accessible: communities that empower them.”
- “The Church oftentimes appears as too severe and is often associated with excessive moralism. Sometimes, in the Church, it is hard to overcome the logic of ‘it has always been done this way’. We need a Church that is welcoming and merciful, which appreciates its roots and patrimony and which loves everyone, even those who are not following the perceived standards.”

4. Relationship with Technology

- “When referring to technology, one must understand the duality of its application. While modern advancements in technology have greatly improved our lives, one must be prudent with its usage. As with all things, reckless application can have negative consequences. While technology has, for some, augmented our relationships, for many others it has taken the form of an addiction, becoming a replacement for human relationship and even God. **Regardless, technology is now a permanent part of the life of young people and must be understood as such.** Paradoxically, in some countries technology and particularly internet is accessible while the most basic needs and services are still lacking.”
- “**The impact of social media in the lives of young people cannot be understated. Social media is a significant part of young people’s identity and way of life.** Digital environments have a great potential to unite people across geographical distances like never before. The exchange of information, ideals, values and common interests is now more possible. Access to online learning tools has opened up educational opportunities for young people in remote areas and has brought the world’s knowledge to one’s finger tips.”
- “**The duplicity of technology however, becomes evident when it leads to the development of certain vices.** This danger is manifested through isolation, laziness, desolation and boredom. It is evident that young people around the world are obsessively consuming media products. **Despite living in a hyper-connected world, communication among young people remains limited to those who are similar to them. There is a lack of spaces and opportunities to encounter difference.** Mass media culture still exercises a lot of influence over young people’s lives and ideals. With the advent of social media, this has led to challenges over the extent to which media companies have power over the lives of young people.”
- “Often, young people tend to separate their behavior into online and offline environments. It is necessary to offer formation to young people on how to live their digital lives. Online relationships can become inhuman. **Digital spaces blind us to the vulnerability of another human being and prevent us from our own self-reflection. Problems like pornography distort a young person’s perception of human sexuality. Technology used this way creates a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity.**”

- “Other risks include: the loss of identity linked to a misrepresentation of the person, a virtual construction of personality and the loss of grounded social presence. Furthermore, long-term risks include: the loss of memory, culture, and creativity before the immediacy of access to information and a loss of concentration linked to fragmentation. In addition, there exists a culture and dictatorship of appearances.”
 - “We offer two concrete proposals regarding technology. First, by engaging in a dialogue with young people, the Church should deepen her understanding of technology so as to assist us in discerning its usage. Moreover, the Church should view technology – particularly the internet – as a fertile place for the New Evangelization. The outcomes of these reflections should be formalized through an official Church document. Second, the Church should address the widespread crisis of pornography, including online child abuse, as well as cyber-bullying and the toll these take on our humanity.”
5. Search for Meaning in Life
- “Today, religion is no longer seen as the main stream through which a young person searches for meaning, as they often turn to other modern currents and ideologies. Scandals attributed to the Church – both real and perceived – affect the confidence of young people in the Church and in the traditional institutions for which she stands.”
 - “There is often great disagreement among young people, both within the Church and in the wider world, about some of her teachings which are especially controversial today. Examples of these include: contraception, abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation, marriage, and how the priesthood is perceived in different realities in the Church. What is important to note is that irrespective of their level of understanding of Church teaching, there is still disagreement and ongoing discussion among young people on these polemical issues. As a result, they may want the Church to change her teaching or at least to have access to a better explanation and to more formation on these questions. Even though there is internal debate, young Catholics whose convictions are in conflict with official teaching still desire to be part of the Church. Many young Catholics accept these teachings and find in them a source of joy. They desire the Church to not only hold fast to them amid unpopularity but to also proclaim them with greater depth of teaching.”
 - “Ultimately, many of us strongly want to know Jesus, yet often struggle to realize that He alone is the source of true self-discovery, for it is in a relationship with Him that the human person ultimately comes to discover him or herself. **Thus, we have found that young people want authentic witnesses – men and women who vibrantly express their faith and relationship with Jesus while encouraging others to approach, meet, and fall in love with Jesus themselves.**

Part Two: Faith and Vocation, Discernment and Accompaniment

6. Young People and Jesus

- “The relationship of young people with Jesus is as varied as the number of young people on this earth. There are many young people who know and have a relationship with Jesus as their Savior and the Son of God...Others may not have such a relationship with Jesus but see Him as a moral leader and a good man. Many young people perceive Jesus as a historical figure, one of a certain time and culture, who is not relevant to their lives. Still others perceive Him as distant from the human experience, which for them is a distance perpetuated by the Church.”
- “One way to reconcile the confusions that young people have regarding who Jesus is involves a return to Scripture to understand more deeply **the person of Christ, His life, and His humanity**. Young people need to encounter the mission of Christ, not what they may perceive as an impossible moral expectation. However, they feel uncertain about how to do so. This encounter needs to be fostered in young people, which needs to be addressed by the Church.”

7. Faith and the Church

- “For many young people, faith has become private rather than communal, and the negative experiences that some young people have had with the Church have contributed to this. There are many young people who relate to God solely on a personal level, who are “spiritual but not religious”, or focused only on a relationship with Jesus Christ. For some young people, the Church has developed a culture which focuses heavily on members engaging with the institutional aspect of herself, not the person of Christ. Other young people view religious leaders as disconnected and more focused on administration than community-building, and still others see the Church as irrelevant. It can seem that the Church forgets that the people are the Church, not the building...Without this anchor of community support and belonging, young people can feel isolated in the face of challenges. There are many young people who do not feel the need to be part of the Church community and who find meaning to their life outside the Church.”
- “Unfortunately, there is a phenomenon in some areas of the world where young people are leaving the Church in large quantities. Understanding why is crucial in moving forward. Young people who are disconnected from or who leave the Church do so after experiencing indifference, judgment and rejection. **One could attend, participate in, and leave Mass without experiencing a sense of community or family as the Body of Christ. Christians profess a living God, but some attend Masses or belong to communities which seem dead.** Young people are attracted to the joy which should be a hallmark of our faith. **Young people express a desire to see a Church that is a living testimony to what it teaches and witnesses to authenticity on the path to holiness, which includes acknowledging mistakes and asking for forgiveness.** Young people expect leaders of the Church – ordained, religious, and lay – to be the strongest example of this. Knowing that models of faith are authentic and vulnerable allows young people to freely be authentic and vulnerable themselves. It is not to destroy the sacredness of their ministry, but so that young people might be inspired by them on the path to holiness.”

- **“On many occasions, young people have difficulty finding a space in the Church where they can actively participate and lead.** Young people interpret their experience of the Church as one where they are considered too young and inexperienced to lead or make decisions as they would only make mistakes. There is a need for trust in young people to lead and to be protagonists of their own spiritual journey. This is not just to imitate their elders, but to really take ownership of their mission and responsibility, lived out well. Movements and new communities in the Church have developed fruitful ways to not only evangelize young people, but also to empower them to be the primary ambassadors of the faith to their peers.”
- “Another common perception that many young people have is an unclear role of women in the Church. If it is difficult for young people to feel a sense of belonging and leadership in the Church, it is much more so for young women. To that end, it would be helpful for young people if the Church not only clearly stated the role of women, but also helped young people to explore and understand it more clearly.”

8. The Vocational Sense of Life

- “The term “vocation” has become synonymous with the priesthood and religious life in the culture of the Church. While these are sacred calls that should be celebrated, it is important for young people to know that their vocation is by virtue of their life, and that each person has a responsibility to discern what it is that God calls them to be and to do. There is a fullness to each vocation which must be highlighted in order to open the hearts of young people to their possibilities.”
- “Young people of various beliefs see vocation as inclusive of life, love, aspiration, place in and contribution to the world, and way to make an impact. **The term vocation is not very clear to many young people;** hence there is need for greater understanding of the Christian vocation (the priesthood and religious life, lay ministry, marriage and family, role in society, etc.) and the universal call to holiness.”

9. Vocational Discernment

- “Discerning one’s vocation can be a challenge, especially in light of misconceptions about the term. However, young people will rise to the challenge. Discerning one’s vocation can be an adventure along the journey of life. That being said, many young people do not know how to intentionally go about the process of discernment; **this is an opportunity for the Church to accompany them.**”
- “Many factors influence the ability of young people to discern their vocations, such as: the Church, cultural differences, demands of work, digital media, family expectations, mental health and state of mind, noise, peer pressures, political scenarios, society, technology, etc. **Spending time in silence, introspection and prayer, as well as reading the Scriptures and deepening self-knowledge are opportunities very few young people exercise. There is a need for a better introduction to these areas.** Engaging with faith-based groups, movements, and like-minded communities can also assist young people in their discernment.”

- “We recognize in particular the unique challenges faced by young women as they discern their vocation and place in the Church. Just as Mary’s “yes” to God’s call is fundamental to the Christian experience, young women today need space to give their own “yes” to their vocation. We encourage the Church to deepen its understanding of the role of women and to empower young women, both lay and consecrated, in the spirit of the Church’s love for Mary, the mother of Jesus.”

10. Young People and Accompaniment

- **“Young people are looking for companions on the journey, to be embraced by faithful men and women who express the truth and allow young people to articulate their understanding of faith and their vocation. Such people do not need to be models of faith to imitate, but instead living testimonies to witness. Such a person should evangelize by their life. Whether they are familiar faces in the comfort of home, colleagues in the local community, or martyrs testifying to their faith with their very lives, there are many who could meet this expectation.”**
- **“Qualities of such a mentor include: a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; is a confidant without judgement; actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; is deeply loving and self-aware; acknowledges their limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey.”**
- **“An especially important quality in a mentor is acknowledgement of their humanity – that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, the devastation may impact young people’s abilities to continue to engage with the Church.”**
- **“Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person’s process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well...This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation.”**

Part Three: The Church’s Formative and Pastoral Activity

II. The Manner of the Church

- **“Today’s young people are longing for an authentic Church.** We want to say, especially to the hierarchy of the Church, that they should be a transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community.”
- **“A credible Church is one which is not afraid to allow itself be seen as vulnerable. The Church should be sincere in admitting its past and present wrongs, that it is a Church made up of persons who are capable of error and misunderstanding. The Church should condemn actions such as sexual abuse and the mismanagement of power and wealth. The Church should continue to enforce her no tolerance stance on sexual abuse within her institutions and her humility will undoubtedly raise its credibility among the world’s young people. If the Church acts in this way, then it will differentiate itself from other institutions and authorities which young people, for the most part, already mistrust.”**

- “We desire that the Church spread this message through modern means of communication and expression. The young have many questions about the faith, but desire answers which are not watered down, or which utilize prefabricated formulations. We, the young Church, ask that our leaders speak in practical terms about controversial subjects such as homosexuality and gender issues, about which young people are already freely discussing without taboo. ... **An attractive Church is a relational Church.**”

12. Young Leaders

- “The Church must involve young people in the decision-making process and offer them more leadership roles. These positions need to be on a parish, diocesan, national and international level. We strongly feel that we are ready to be leaders, who can grow and be taught by older members of the Church.”
- “We also strongly express a wish for a prominent creative voice. This creativity often finds itself in music, liturgy and the arts, but, at the moment this is an untapped potential, with the creative side of the Church often dominated by the older Church members.”
- “In all these aspects of Church life, young people wish to be accompanied and to be taken seriously as fully responsible members of the Church.” When we say, at Confirmation, that young people are adults in the Church, why don’t we treat them like they are?

14. The Initiatives to be Reinforced

- “We long for experiences that can deepen our relationship with Jesus in the real world. Initiatives that are successful offer us an experience of God. Therefore, we respond to initiatives that offer us an understanding of the Sacraments, prayer and liturgy, in order to properly share and defend our faith in the secular world. Because of the lack of clear and attractive presentation as to what the Sacraments truly offer, some of us go through the process of receiving but undervaluing them.”
- “Some fruitful initiatives are: events such as World Youth Day; courses and programs that provide answers and formation, especially for those new to the faith; outreach ministries; youth catechisms; weekend retreats and spiritual exercises; Charismatic events, choirs and worship groups; pilgrimages; Christian sports leagues; parish or diocesan youth groups; Bible study groups; university Christian groups; different faith apps, and the immense variety of movements and associations within the Church.”
- “We respond to well-organized, larger-scale events, but also hold that not all events need to be of this scale. Small, local groups where we can express questions and share in Christian fellowship are also paramount to maintaining the faith. These smaller events in social spaces can bridge the gap between larger Church events and the parish. Gathering in these ways is especially important to those in countries less accepting of Christians.”

15. Instruments to be Used

- **“The Church must adopt a language which engages the customs and cultures of the young so that all people have the opportunity to hear the message of the Gospel.** However, we are passionate about the different expressions of the Church. Some of us have a passion for “the fire” of contemporary and charismatic movements that focus on the Holy Spirit; others are drawn towards silence, meditation and reverential traditional liturgies. All of these things are good as they help us to pray in different ways. Outside of the Church, many young people live a contented spirituality, but the Church could engage them with the right instruments.”
- “Multimedia – The internet offers the Church an unprecedented evangelical opportunity, especially with social media and online video content. As young people, we are digital natives who could lead the way. It is also a great place to encounter and engage people of other faiths and none. Pope Francis’ regular video series is a good example of the use of the internet’s evangelical potential.
Gap Year Experiences – Years of service within movements and charities give young people an experience of mission and a space to discern. It also creates the opportunity for the Church to encounter non-believers and people of other faiths in the world.
The Arts and Beauty – Beauty is universally acknowledged and the Church has a history of engaging and evangelizing through the arts, such as music, visual art, architecture, design etc. Young people especially respond to and enjoy being creative and expressive.
Adoration, Meditation and Contemplation – We also appreciate the contrast of silence offered by the Church’s tradition of Eucharistic Adoration and contemplative prayer. It provides a space away from the constant noise of modern communication and it is here that we encounter Jesus. Silence is where we can hear the voice of God and discern His will for us. Many outside of the Church also appreciate meditation, and the Church’s rich culture of this could be a bridge to these secular but spiritual people. It can be counter-cultural, but effective.
Testimony – The personal stories of the Church are effective ways of evangelizing as true personal experiences that cannot be debated. Modern Christian witnesses and the witness of the persecuted Middle Eastern Christians are particularly strong testimonies to the fullness of life found in the Church.



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12 SECTION 5



WHAT?

What do we see happening across the United States?

The challenges we face in the in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux are not isolated to south Louisiana. The challenges facing the Church locally are the same trends that we see across the country. If we are to remain committed to pioneering a new vision of youth formation in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, we would do well to understand what we see happening across the country.

The remaining information in this section is a collection of research from leading experts in the area of information. In order to best serve you we thought it would be a good idea to let you here from the leaders of youth formation.

Let us begin with the USCCB Convocation from 2017: *The Convocation of Catholic Leaders: The Joy of the Gospel in America*. There, on Sunday, July 2, 2017 the US Bishops choose Amy McEntee, Brandon Vogt, Ketherine Angula, and Jonathan Lewis to address the nation. Here is a summary of their presentation entitled *The Rise of the Nones and Understanding Inactive and Disconnected Catholics*.

- While parents ask the question “What did we do wrong?”, there is an alarming silence. Where is the outrage that the Catholics are leaving?
- There is a lack of a sense of belonging. In other words: There is a great need to respond to many people’s thirst for God. Many people are filling that thirst with a spirituality that is absent of God. They may identify as “None” in that they do not belong to any organized religion. They are “spirituality without religion”. There are 25 million former Catholics who have left the Church for “spirituality without religion”.

- According to the Pew Research Center (2014):
 1. 50% of millennials who were baptized Catholic no longer call themselves Catholic today
 2. Of the people who leave (the 50%), 79% of those leave before the age of 23
 3. 90% of those that leave the Church, do so by age 29

- What does it mean to be affiliated?
 1. “Language” matters. We need to clarify language and expectations. What do we mean by “being Catholic”? What does it mean to become Catholic or be a practicing Catholic?
 2. We tend not to define it clearly, so people make up their own meaning of what it means to be Catholics
 3. Young people are seeking meaning and identity

- To quote *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... And Rethinking Faith* by David Kinsman, what do we know about the “Nones”?
 1. “Nomads” – 4 out of 10 people who leave the Church and become a None leave for an average of three years. There is dissociation and experimentation, often during their college years
 2. “Prodigals” - 4 out of 10 people who leave the Church and become a None are gone. They claim identity as “ex-Catholics”.
 3. “Exiles” - 5 out of 10 people who leave the Church and become a None are in a period where they are struggling with identity and meaning. They don’t feel at home in the Church. They are wrestling with their identity: “How do I live my faith in a practical way?” They see a disconnect between their spiritual life and their “real” life

- Role of Family: According to a National Study on Youth and Religion, the role of practicing parents and/or mentor: unless a young person who has a parent or mentor who is practicing their faith, they will not remain Catholic.

- One of the main reasons people leave is because their spiritual needs aren’t being met although we mostly think it’s because they want to be “entertained”

- If 50% of our young people have left, how do we reach them?
- They won't come to us and most of us won't go to them. So, we have to find a third place where we can encounter people who have left the Church. Where is that?
- The Internet is a gift because we know that an overwhelming amount of people who have left the Church and re-purposed the gospel are spending an overwhelming amount of time. We know they are gathering there and we can go to them there.
- Just because you cut and copy the parish bulletin, doesn't mean that this form of communication is effective.
- If we are going to reach today's youth we can no longer presume we know how. We must ask them what are the communication structures that they respond to.
- Young people feel that the Church and their parents have abandoned them: they have failed to pass on the legacy of the Church.
- The feedback is overwhelming. This is what youth, especially those that left, are saying to us: "It's not that I didn't believe what they were teaching me, I just couldn't find someone who lived out what they believe."
- **Young people are looking for authenticity in the people who live the faith.**
- Young people feel welcomed in the Church but when they leave, they don't feel missed.
- What are the instances that turn people into the "Nones"? It doesn't seem to be one big moment, it's a slow gradual wearing away of the faith life. They tell us:
 1. "I kind of slowly drifted away."
 2. Many "Nones" still believe that the Church has moral authority.
 3. "Nones" are glad that the Church is finally asking why they left.
 4. "Nones" are spiritual but not religious, they believe in God and moral rules, they just don't follow teachings of the Catholic Church.

- The Mass may not be the entry point of the “None” into the Church. This, of course, is the source and summit of our faith but not the entry way. What is the access point for someone seeking the faith? We must find easier ways for those who have left the church to return. Mass is not the answer to this problem. We must find other ways for them to reengage with us.
- What does the website look like? Is it made for those who are already in the parish or are they aimed at people who just happen upon the site and drawing them in?

Let us now move to reflections from Michael Gormley and his podcast: *Mellinial: A Theological History*. Again, to summarize his reflections:

- The word teenager was invented in the 1930’s
- The 20th century created an awareness of the concept of “adolescence”
- Until then there were “children” and then adults. You were either one or the other. (For example: with “bar mitzvah” you became an adult at 13) This is not the case today.
- The adult culture dominated the world until the 20th century
- In the 1950’s we see the emergence of a full-blown high school culture. Instead of the adult world that children happen to live in, there is the emergence of a “youth culture”. Teens, or the culture that is “teens”, emerge in the 1950s.
- In the 1960’s we see teen riots. They begin to distrust anyone over 30. There is the emergence of two distinct, rival cultures.
- In the 80’s and 90’s there is a flip. Youth culture became the dominant culture in America. There was the rise of the professionalism of children, they are no longer served by coaches and youth ministers, children now serve coaches and youth ministers. Professional children: 6 hours of homework, go to bed at 1:00 am, wake up at 5:00 am. Parents were doing this to them. The youth culture today is nothing like it was in the 80’s and 90’s.
- Youth today have less involvement with their families which studies show (involvement with family) decreases stress and anxiety.

- The youth struggle with an adequate perception of their identity. They live in an online world where they are constantly attacked whether directly by bullying or by the constant threat of their lives not measuring up to the digital portrayal of other people’s lives. They live in an age where identity is fake and one is constantly being judged by an online persona. Youth feel as though they constantly being evaluated as a human person. Anyone’s life is public and online content is permanent. These are the ramifications of the digital life.
- Today, parents are taking kids to all kinds of “things” (dance, faith formation, batting practice) because they want to give them experience and opportunity. Parents think: “I need to give my kid a leg up.” What ends up happening is there are 1st and 2nd graders taking Mandarin because “this is the future”. Today’s youth constantly feel like they are not enough. There is a competition out there to be everything. To be considered “in the top” you have to have above a 4.0. This is insane. This is unhealthy.
- Gormley shares a personal story as he describes a friend of his who is around 40 and how she had a full ride to college for volleyball. They would start practice in October, play the normal season and then when it was over it was “see you next year”. He compares this to middle school football now. To play football in middle school you not only have try out, but you are also expected to work out twice a day. Then, when the season is over, you have to join the track team in order to stay in peak physical shape because you are a “professional.”
- This is destroying young people because they don’t have a family to come home to anymore. Instead, they have a Netflix account, videos games, pornography, and other vices to come home to.
- Families are too busy.
- Here are a few key moments in the history of youth ministry in America.
 1. The 1960’s. Billy Graham. He preached to youth for 20+ years. They would dress up in suits, rent out tents and preach about the gospel for up to five hours. Youth poured in. They came because this was the first youth ministry. Youth for Christ and Young Life are part of this movement. They spoke in the youth’s language. They took them seriously. The previous generation did not. Billy Graham saw the division between the two cultures.
 2. 1980’s and 1990’s. There is a consequential tragedy of youth ministry: the “buddy” culture. You want to become their friend to a point that you lose the distinction between adults and teen. This is the age of pizza parties and not much else. The reason why we did this is because this is where youth culture became dominant and we wanted to remain relevant, the cool kid. This was good to a point because you are adopting the culture to which you are evangelizing to.

3. 2000's. The Church knows the "buddy" culture is a bankrupt model. We can now call it a discipleship/mentor model. The adult is the mentor of the youth: be totally involved in the youth culture but don't think for a moment that you are one of them. You are there to do the same thing as the 1960's, transition young people to adulthood.
- Mentor culture is the way of realizing that if I'm going to care about you, I have to actually invest in you.
 - When you talk to lapsed Catholics, it doesn't take long to realize that they don't actually know what the Church teaches. They've been so immersed in the culture and convinced erroneously that they have no room for the real teachings of the Church. They think they've already heard the message and they move on.
 - Post Christian - "It's the kingdom without the king". These are "Progressive Secularists" who are seeking a more just order, just without God. They don't want Jesus, the myth, they want science and technology. They want a steady march of progress.
 - The demise of girl culture. Little girls used to keep diaries. Think about what a diary is, an end of the day reflection on the day's events. This is a spiritual discipline. This has been obliterated by Instagram and other social media apps. We are documenting things as they happen with no reflection.
 - We are no longer fostering reflection in our youth. Take the pic, post it on Instagram and see how many likes you can get. You might reflect on it, but you probably won't.
 - Zygmunt Bauman says: "We don't live in a culture of hard things, we live in a liquid culture. We used to pride ourselves on production and now we pride ourselves of software. There is so much immaterial and intangible things and they change so rapidly that the way we define our identity in a sociological worldview is our relationship to institutes and structures that last. But now they are changing so rapidly and they are immaterial in and of themselves."
 - We cease being pilgrims on a journey and we've become tourists going from fleeting experience to fleeting experience.
 - What happens when you are 7-years old and you get your first iPhone? You play games. You train your mind that entertainment is privately consumed. This has consequences. Technology replaces virtue. In other words: "I don't need to learn chastity, I'll just use a pill or a condom." When technology replaces virtue, you have a whole bunch of people with powerful means in their hands and zero ability to control themselves. Kids with homework that keeps them up until 1:00 am and then go to sleep with their phone on their chest, waking up 30 times a night to respond to text messages. There is no reflection, no self-control, no sense of delayed gratification. It's rigged, it's set up that way. Like a slot machine, designed to give you random rewards in small amounts to keep you hooked.

- Baby boomers ended civic involvement. Their parent's generation was the most civically involved and had the largest church attendance in the history of the United States. The 1980s killed civic involvement. Millennials were raised after the death of civic involvement. Volunteerism and leadership died but monetary gifts have been on the rise. "We want to help but do not want to give our time." Organizations have more money than ever but the least amount of volunteers ever. There is also an extremely low voter turnout because no one wants to get involved anymore.
- We can access entertainment and education individually. We put in our earbuds and 90% of our entertainment comes from little screens.
- The great quest of today is that we get to invent our own meaning. When we say today that God has a plan for you, they respond, "What? Am I a puppet?" The problem with invented meaning is the moment suffering comes, invented meaning has no resources to deal with it.
- In the 80's and 90's, if you were a Christian and were living the Church's sexual ethic, people admired you though they may have thought you were crazy or puritanical. They may have thought it was a little oppressive but there was an admiration there. Now, there is a post-Christian culture. People now think the sexual ethic of Christianity is evil. They don't just think that it is difficult or stringent they think it's immoral because it's bigoted. You aren't being a more moral person, you are being immoral with your heteronormism. People who were really moral but not Christians used to be drawn to Christianity by the goodness and the truth of our moral teaching. Now they are repulsed by it.
- Millennials are disgusted with Christianity because our culture has wedded religious views with political views. The hope of the world does not come from a political party, it's the gospel.
- When we cease to serve both God and mammon, because mammon has kicked us out, we don't have to worry about being cool, we can focus on who we are.
- So, imagine that there are a bunch of young adults whose homes do not foster community or communication, whose friendships are largely digital, and we come to them with some permanent thing, perhaps the only permanent thing left in America: a 2,000 year old, slow to react Church. They can walk into our doors and experience the Mass, no matter where they are in the world, ever ancient, ever new.

- When God spoke to Ezekiel, Ezekiel was with the remnant in Babylon. He was speaking to him about the idolatry of the priesthood back in Jerusalem. The Shekinah Glory Cloud left the temple and came to Babylon. We are in exile from our culture. We are *persona non grata* in universities and halls of power. This is the beautiful thing: We are the new remnant of God. What Christ has enabled us to do is to realize that the mission field is to go outside of myself. We need to realize that we are on mission to a post-Christian culture. The danger of a post-Christian culture is the risk we face of them colonizing Christians. If we don't amplify what is true, good and beautiful in their culture, they'll strip that from us.

- Glimmers of hope:
 1. Basic spiritual disciplines. Get people back into reading scripture, the Liturgy of the Hours, etc. Teach people "how".
 2. Reignite small groups.
 3. Meet them where they are, especially if that place is not religious. He is relational ministry: be interested in them, even if they don't love the Church. Find common ground to build a relationship.

From Joel Stepanek and his reflections: *And Then There Were None*. Again, to summarize:

- **Have No Assumptions.** In the past, there was the assumption that teens leave after high school, go to college, and when they need to get baptized or married, they come back. That doesn't happen anymore. When teens leave, they leave for good. The foundations that we thought were there aren't. They have the basic introductions only. We can't have assumptions about what they do or do not know. We can't have assumptions about their maturity level. We can't assume that what we see on the surface is what we get. We live in a filter mentality culture. Increased technology and screen use is causing higher rates of depression, mental illness and anxiety. There is a correlation between the time spent on screens and lower rates of mental health and the opposite because we were created for community. But teens are good at hiding things from adults. They find ways to put on filters in their lives. We can't assume that the teen in front of us at youth group is doing really well. We can't assume that people are even open to being spiritual. They aren't always religious or spiritual. Unfortunately, 9/11 was an attack by religious fanatics. Pre 9/11, atheists wanted a peaceful truce with religion. Now, in their eyes, religion starts wars. It's bigoted and close minded, a place where people unfortunately seem to be cast out. We can't assume that people have had a positive experience with religion if an experience at all.
- **We Have to Answer Tough Questions.** A young boy 13, goes to his pastor and asks, "If I raise my finger, does God know I was going to do that?" The pastor answers, "Yes, God knows everything." The boy pulls a magazine out of his back pocket with a picture of starving children on it. "Does God know about this?" His pastor answers, "Yes, he knows about this. I know it's hard for you to understand right now, but God knows." The pastor brushes the boy off. This boy is Steve Jobs and that's the last time he went to a Christian church. He asked a tough question that his pastor maybe didn't have time for or didn't take seriously. It was a landmark moment in Steve Jobs' faith. Teens have tough questions and 36% of them believe that they cannot ask those tough questions at Church. Are we ready to answer them? Teens have tough questions and they want to know. We need to be willing to enter into those conversations. We as adults gets nervous because when we enter into those conversations we have to get into what we stand against and that makes us nervous. Focus on what we stand for. People associate religion with "do not". But what do we stand for?
- **Live Joyfully.** Live lives that make teenagers ask why are you so joyful? They are living with higher rates of depression and are seeking joy. It requires something of us. The same way that social media affects our kids, it can affect us. Disconnect. Live like people who have been transformed by the Gospel.
- There is no quick fix. There are people like you and me who are called by God to be missionaries to a teen culture. This can be scary, but today's youth crave the hope that comes from the Gospel.
- Every generation is a product of the generation before it and the culture surrounding it. How many millennials bought into their own participation trophies? None, their parents bought it for them.



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAux PARISH PLANNING

DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12

SECTION 6



WHAT?

What do we see happening within the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux?

If we rewind back to the time immediately leading up to the entrance into the new millennium, there was a drastic shift in American teen culture. The 1990s was a time of rebellion. Teen culture was codified in pop culture, the result of which was seemingly embodied by MTV. Generation X partook in higher rates of high risk behavior, but they were still feeling safe. In contrast to this, the American Church experienced a particular outpouring of grace in 1993, when World Youth Day was hosted in Denver. This brought a unity of Teenage American Catholicism as the young American Church was brought face to face with John Paul II. This established an opposition of sorts between the world behind the banner of MTV and the young Church behind the banner of John Paul II. The darkness of the culture and light of hope that seemingly embodied World Youth Day would remain in drastic opposition until the end of the decade.

In consecutive years, the psyche of the rebellious teen culture of the 1990s and the wave of grace and growth of Catholic culture met a series of events that drastically changed the way teens looked at the world around them. These 4 events have shaped the world in which our current teenagers are growing up. In 1999, the tragic school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado made teens ask: “Is my school safe?” In 2000, the fear and hysteria around Y2K begged the question: “Is our world safe?” In 2001, 9/11 leads to: “Is my country safe?” And finally in 2002, the Catholic Church scandal breaking in Boston leads teens to ask: “Is my Church safe?”

In the last 15 years, there is a drastically different world that teenagers have grown up in simply due to the circumstances of the turn into a new millennium. If we take these sociological shifts into account along with the influence of conception, proliferation of social media, the impact of technology, especially with smart phones, the accessibility of pornography, the plague of cyber bullying, and the further disintegration of the family, we can see that there are a lot of influences that have added a level of complexity to the culture teens find themselves in today.

In this 15-year timeframe, there has been a shift of sorts for youth ministry in our local diocese, where we have seen a shift from the local parish to an event-based youth ministry. In the early to mid-2000s, many parishes around the diocese had local retreats for their youth ministry, which were not necessarily mandatory for a Confirmation curriculum. There were tournaments for softball and volleyball hosted on weekends which would gather parish sponsored teams to come together to play against one another. The youth of the diocese would gather every Palm Sunday for Youth Rally, which was a celebration of the teens from all around Houma-Thibodaux, but most of the ministry for youth in the diocese was parish based. In the shift of the 2000s, these parish retreats were replaced by attending events like TEC (Teens Encounter Christ) or CLI (Christian Leadership Institute), which were being hosted by the Office of Youth Ministry. Youth Rally began to lose traction as a celebration of the local Church and Steubenville on the Bayou was seen as a celebration of the more universal Church. Parishes began to outsource their youth ministry to the events that “the diocese” was hosting.

In recent years, there has been a drastic decline in the attendance at these events (larger scale events and overnight retreat experiences) hosted by the diocese. For example, the large-scale event of Youth Rally has gone from 663 participants in 2012 to 110 in 2018 (83% decline). This was an event that pulled upwards to 1200-1500 participants in the early 2000s. Also, CLI, which has historically been the biggest overnight experience on the diocesan youth ministry calendar, has gone from 65 participants in 2012 to 26 in 2018 (60% decline). TEC retreats have been reduced from 3 a year (all with roughly 50 teens attending), to routinely canceling 1 of the 2 TECs that are scheduled each year due to lack of attendance, to now planning on only hosting one during this school year in February 2019.

What are teens saying to us?

The teens are telling us that they don't just want more events or large-scale events that are great for facilitating an encounter, but do not provide the structures to continue to grow in their faith back at home. To use some familiar language from the Formation Life Cycle (“the five”), many of these events have served the youth by offering a place to connect with peers and facilitating an encounter with Jesus Christ, but they cannot offer the ongoing accountability and accompaniment that is required for walking through the process of conversion.

Our teens want to live out their faith in an authentic way, but this formation cannot happen on a diocesan level.

There needs to be a shift back to the parishes as the place where teenagers receive the attention, accountability, and discipling that is necessary for lasting growth to take place.



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CHAPTER 12

SECTION 7



WHAT?

Our vision: What does a healthy teenage disciple look like?

From May through December of 2016 the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux went through a comprehensive planning process. There was an emphasis on forming disciples which was to serve as the golden thread woven throughout all of the planning. The Bishop was clear with his desire: the renewal of parish life. The Holy Father Pope Francis had been speaking about the call to **make disciples**.

If “making disciples” was to be the golden thread, we needed to ask the question: *How* do you make a disciple? Specifically: How do we make one in a parish? In our diocese? With our resources? Yet, before we could answer how do you make a disciple we first needed to answer the question: **What is a disciple?**

The word disciple appears 22 times in the Gospel. The word disciple is not limited to Jesus, for many of the great teachers at the time of Jesus had disciples. John the Baptist had disciples, as we read in John 1:35-37: “The next day John was there again with two of his **disciples** and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God.’ The two **disciples** heard what he said and followed Jesus.”

The word disciple in the Bible, especially in the Gospels, reveals three things. A disciple: (1) learned what the master taught, (2) taught what the master taught, and (3) tried to live like the master.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to commit to the same three things. Disciples **learn** what Jesus taught. Disciples **teach** others what Jesus taught. Disciples long to **live** like Jesus. The first two are understandable and expected. The third is the most difficult. Disciples strive to live like Jesus. Whew, no pressure.

What does it look like to concretely **live** as a disciple? What are the thresholds one should strive for? What is the visible fruit we should expect to see in one’s life?

Our strategic planning team analyzed the following documents:

- *Lumen Gentium (The Church in the Modern World)* Second Vatican Council, 1964
- *Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World)* Pope Paul VI, 1975
- *Redemptoris Missio (Mission of the Redeemer)* Pope John Paul II, 1990
- *Go and Make Disciples* USCCB, 1992
- *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* USCCB, 1999
- *Ecclesia in America (The Church in America)* Pope John Paul II, 1999
- *Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)* Pope Francis, 2013

After summarizing the core themes from each of these major documents on evangelization, we illustrated what we believe to be nine dimensions of a mature missionary disciple. Of course, we are always on the journey. We will never be complete in our growth. Yet, this is the visible fruit we would hope to see in one's life as they mature as a disciple.

Characteristics of a Mature MISSIONARY DISCIPLE



RELATIONSHIP

I have a **personal relationship with Jesus Christ** that gives my life meaning and direction.



CONVERSION

I say **YES** to that which brings me closer to God.
I say **NO** to that which pulls me away from God.
I have aligned my lifestyle with the Gospel.



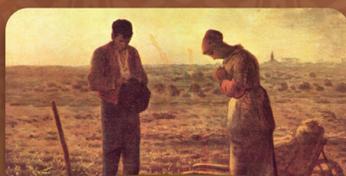
DISCERNMENT

I want what God wants.
I begin to discern the little things.
I can recognize His voice, and I follow as He leads me.



SACRAMENTS

The Sacraments are a regular part of my life.
Sunday Mass and frequent Confession.
Additional Masses, especially during Lent and Easter.



HOLINESS

I pray daily. I am growing in virtue, particularly Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Humility, Faith, Hope, & Charity.
I want to be a witness of holiness.



GROUNDING

My relationship with God is **no longer dependent upon whether I "feel" His presence.**
I study the Bible and Church teaching.
On-going study of my faith is a lifestyle.



COMMUNITY

I have people who hold me accountable.
I have regular conversation about where I am with my commitment to Christ.



OTHERS

I no longer live in a "me-centered" world.
My Faith is no longer just "me and Jesus."
I see and respond to others as Christ does.



EVANGELIZATION

I know my testimony - the story of what God has done in my life.
I can share and do share that testimony with others.

What does “the nine” look like healthy youth formation? Our team consulted with experts across the country to translate the benchmarks of adult formation to age appropriate expectations for our youth. If we look at youth formation through the lens of 6-12th grade, we ask ourselves: “If we have seven years, from 6th thru 12th grade, to work with our youth, what would we want to see in their lives by the time they graduate from high school? Imagine, for a moment, if all of our graduating high school seniors looked like this.

Characteristics of a Teenage MISSIONARY DISCIPLE



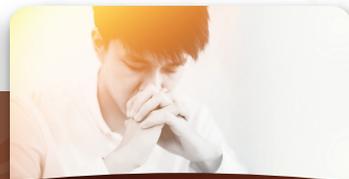
RELATIONSHIP

Have a relationship with Jesus Christ
Pray more days than they don't for 20 minutes in a contemplative manner with Scripture



CONVERSION

Have learned how engage their will
Seek out monthly confession and a weekly examination of conscience



DISCERNMENT

Ask God to show them the way
Are able to pray and hear God speak. Do what God and the Church asks of them.



SACRAMENTS

Committed to the sacraments
Go to Mass weekly, open to daily Mass. Confession once a month.



HOLINESS

Growing in virtue
Growing in the virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude



GROUNDING

Relationship with God not governed by feeling
They feel comfortable reading the Bible and understand the Church on Tough topics



COMMUNITY

They have others who hold them accountable
See small group accountability as a need and know how to build it



OTHERS

It's not about “me and Jesus”
Have a general sense of being other-focused and willing to serve on their own



EVANGELIZATION

Not afraid to share their story
Are familiar with their own faith testimony and want to share it



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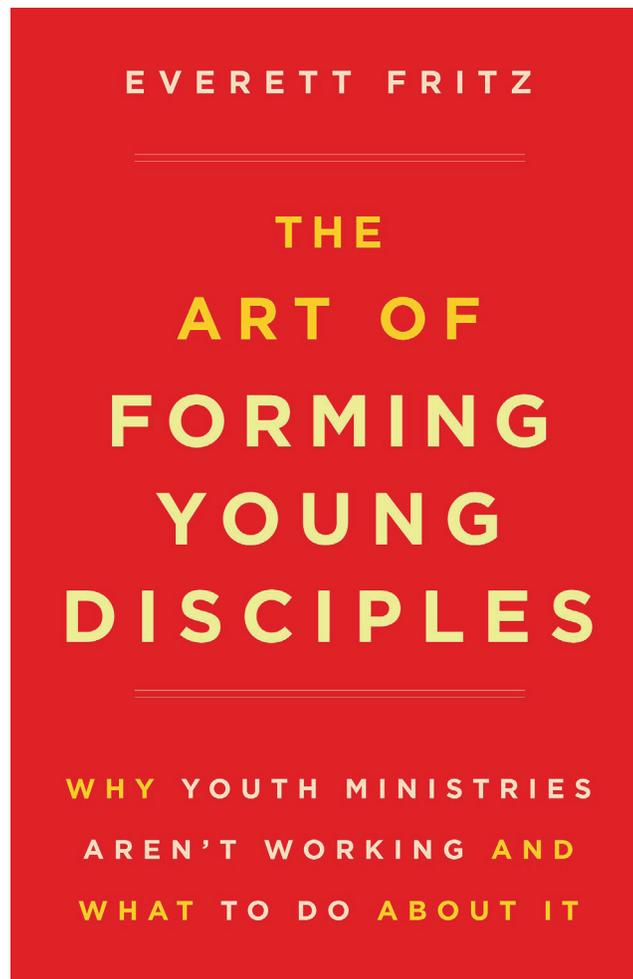
DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

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WHAT?

What is *not* working and *why* is it not working?



Introduction

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

When asked by a colleague “How many teens do you think will become lifelong disciples coming out of youth ministry?” He immediately began to make excuses:

It’s not about the numbers.

The parents are the real problem.

All teens are at different levels of development. Some are rich soil, while others are rocky or full of weeds. In some cases, we’re planting seeds that will take root later in a teen’s life.

He replied he thought about 10. When asked, “What did you do differently with those ten that you didn’t do with the other teens in your youth ministry?” When he thought about it he realized, “those ten teens were the ones I had spent the most time with.

I did Bible study with them.

I mentored them in their prayer life.

I had a type of relationship with them in which I could challenge them to live virtuously.

I answered the difficult questions these teens had about the Faith.

I knew and mentored their parents.

I spent most of my relational ministry time with these teens.

“What you’re describing to me is called discipleship - the process of mentoring someone through relationship and living example.” (pg. 6)

“In parishes, we try to program our teens instead of mentoring them. Teens need adult guidance and deep, meaningful relationships with other teens. And there is no possible way for one youth minister to meet the pastoral needs of every teen in the parish. Instead of thinking about the youth in the parish as one large group, I needed to think smaller. I needed to find a way to get on a mentoring level with every teen in the parish.” (pg. 6)

Part 1: Understanding Youth Ministry

Chapter 1: We Are Losing Our Youth

“But is participation alone a good indicator of success? Do we really have many, many young people who are being formed in Catholicism, ensuring the passing on of our Faith for generations to come?” (pg. 12)

CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY IS NOT WORKING

“When a soul walks away from the Church, that soul usually leaves when it is young.” (p.13)

“Dynamic Catholic states that 85 percent of Catholic young adults stop practicing their Faith (most of them within their first year of leaving home).” (pg. 13)

After walking around a youth ministry conference expo: “If we are losing our young people in the Church today, it isn’t due to a lack of effort. Nor is it due to a lack of good resources and programs.” (pg. 14)

“Between the millions of dollars that the Church has invested in Catholic secondary education, and the time, talent, and treasure in youth ministry, young people get more attention from the Catholic Church than does any other ministry or demographic. Why is there so little return on that investment? More importantly, why is the Church failing to make young disciples?” (pg. 14)

UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLESHIP

“The disciple imitates the rabbi...I believe discipleship is marked by three characteristics: it is a process, it is an apprenticeship, and it involves practicing discipline.” (pg. 15)

Discipleship is a Process

Five thresholds a person passes as he grows into intentional discipleship of Jesus (Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples*)

- Initial Trust
- Spiritual Curiosity
- Spiritual Openness
- Spiritual Seeking
- Intentional Disciple

Discipleship doesn’t happen in an instant: it’s an ongoing process in life.

Discipleship is an Apprenticeship

“Discipleship is not discipleship without mentoring. A disciple must first be inspired to follow the rabbi. And then be impacted by his living example. In discipleship the Faith is not taught; it is caught. It is experimental in nature: the disciple learns by following the example of the rabbi.” (pg. 17)

Disciples Practice Disciplines

“Latin word *discere*, ‘to learn.’ A disciple learns to be a disciplined person in everyday life. This means that disciples practice habits, and those habits lead to deeper conversion.” (pg. 17)

“Most importantly, these practice disciplines lead to a personal relationship with Christ - a relationship in which the disciple makes Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior of his life.” (pg. 17)

“If a young person becomes a lifelong follower of Christ, the following habits will likely be visible in his life: regular visits to the Blessed Sacrament; weekly or even daily Mass attendance; daily prayer, including the Rosary; reading and studying Scripture; intentional growth in virtue and service; and tithing This is what we want - to form our young people into lifelong followers of Jesus Christ and His Church through the process of discipleship.” (pg. 18)

THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM

“Ask a person associated with the Church why youth ministry is struggling, and you will likely hear responses I have heard many times:

- A pastor will say that he lacks the funds necessary to hire a capable youth minister.
- A pastor will say that he can’t find or keep a qualified youth minister.
- A youth minister will say that her pastor is not supportive.
- A parent will say that her teen doesn’t like the youth group and doesn’t connect with the youth minister.
- A youth minister will complain that parents are disengaged and aren’t supportive of their teenagers’ faith.
- A parent will complain that the Catholic school isn’t doing a good job teaching the core doctrines of the Faith.
- A Catholic-school teacher will complain that parents are not modeling the Faith for their children at home.
- A parent will complain that the church youth group or religious-education program is not much more than stale pizza, lame entertainment, and a boring curriculum.
- A parent will state that he is waiting for the pastor to fire the middle-aged DRE who is under-qualified for working with young people and out-of-touch with modern methods of ministry.
- A diocesan director will observe that parish leadership lacks vision, so that teens end up planning their own ministry, or pastors and youth leaders end up pinning their hope of success on the latest program resources.
- A bishop will observe that youth-ministry events in his diocese are all hype, flash, and entertainment, and no substance.
- A teenager will complain that the Church doesn’t understand teens and their questions about God and faith aren’t being answered.”

“Any one of these statements may be true, but not one single one of them correctly identifies the problem in the Church today. These are symptoms of a greater problem: we don’t understand young people and how to meet their most basic needs. If we don’t understand the problem, we can never hope to solve it.” (pg. 19)

Evangelii Gaudium - “Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems, and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns, demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand. For the same reason, our efforts in the field of education do not produce the results expected.” (pg. 20)

“The structures our Church uses to minister to young people are not meeting their basic needs, and because of this, our young people are failing to become disciples. It’s not enough to have the best resources money can buy - a youth minister, a Catholic school - or to be catechizing a large number of teens. The landscape of youth culture is changing. In fact, in some cases, parishes are implementing approaches to youth formation that haven’t been updated in more than four hundred years.” (pg. 20)

“Our Church is facing a crisis - we are hemorrhaging young people. For decades, the Church has been talking of a New Evangelization - a kind of new birth or revolution of the gospel in the Church. But no major revolution in the world has ever thrived without a youth movement. The Church cannot reinvigorate her members so long as her young people are uninspired.” (pg. 20)

Chapter 2: The Nature of Youth Ministry

WHAT IS YOUTH CULTURE?

“A culture is the way of life of a people - what they value, how they communicate, how they dress, their music, dance, and customs. In recent years, there has been a lot of talk in the Church about the development of a ‘youth culture’ in America. But what is ‘youth culture?’” (pg. 22)

Prior to the industrial revolution - straight from childhood into adulthood, learning the trade of their parents. Higher education not an option → As the work became more complex, there was a need for more education. Young people stayed in school longer and we see the emerge of adolescence. “Teenagers in school were not yet adults but were also no longer children.” → Post WWII - “culture” began to develop around teens, country was booming economically and television came into the picture. G.I. Bill made it possible for more people to get an education. Companies began to “discover that American teenagers were a marketable demographic.” Teens began to have their own “hairstyles, a way of speaking, clothes, music, values, and ideals that were different from those of their parents.” → As the youth culture grew in the 60’s: Young people experienced several revolutions: sexual, rock-n-roll, drug, and anti-authority movement. At about the same time we have Vatican II. “Since then, not much has changed. That’s because the ‘culture’ that developed out of this time has largely influenced the upbringing and development of young people over the past several decades.” (pg. 23)

“An interesting fact about youth culture is that its ideals, styles, languages, and trends are constantly changing. A generation of teenagers lasts only about seven years, and each new one seeks to differentiate itself from the previous generation. Things change rapidly in youth culture - and therefore efforts in evangelization and discipling teens have to change as well in order to maintain effectiveness.” (pg. 24)

“In our Church today, we cannot say, ‘Let’s rely on the methods the Church used several decades ago, when the seminaries were full and teens were more virtuous.’ These methods won’t work with teenagers today. We’re dealing with a different culture, which necessitates a constant missionary approach in order to be effective.” (p.24)

WHAT IS A MISSIONARY?

“A missionaries job is to evangelize a culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But missionaries do not do this merely by setting up classes and communicating dogmas and traditional prayers.” (pg. 24)

“A missionary spends time in a culture to gain that culture’s trust. A missionary gains trust by building relationships. In building relationships, the missionary earns the right to be heard. Also, by building relationships with the people, the missionary learns the culture’s language and value - which, in turn, helps the missionary communicate the gospel.” (pg. 24)

“A missionary doesn’t seek to create cookie-cutter Catholic cultures. Rather, he seeks to baptize particular cultures, identifying the good within them and using understood value to elevate them to an understanding and acceptance of the teachings of Catholicism.” (p.25)

“In order for youth ministry to be successful, we must learn to listen to young people - to their value, worries and way of life - and where possible, we must find ways to teach and baptize into Catholicism what they value. Merely setting up classes to teach traditional prayers will never be effective in evangelizing the modern-day teenager.” (pg. 25)

WHAT IS MINISTRY?

“Ministry is the process of meeting a person’s pastoral needs. This is an extremely important concept. It’s not enough to have a curriculum, resources, structure, volunteers, participation, and events. If youth ministry at the parish doesn’t meet a young person’s primary pastoral needs, then youth ministry is not happening.” (pg. 26)

“To make disciples, we must form people intellectually, spiritually, and as human persons. To minister to a person, we must identify his needs as they relate to each of these categories. This requires individualized attention. Every individual has pastoral needs, and when a person lacks relationships with mentors and like-minded peers in his church, he lacks the relationships that are necessary to meet his individualized needs.” (p.26)

“If success is measured by making disciples, then our ministry has to start with a plan for meeting the individualized needs of each young person...Unfortunately, youth ministry has become a series of programs and events intended to keep kids in the Church in hopes that we won’t lose them. If we have any hope of stopping the loss of our youth, we must start at the source of the problem and meet the basic pastoral needs of each person.” (pg. 27)

Chapter 3: Understanding The Needs Of Every Teen

MEETING TEENS' BASIC NEEDS

“Why is it that so many (teens) are not becoming lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ? Because their basic needs are not being met by our Church structures.” (pg. 32)

“My colleague Sean Dalton at the Augustine Institute in Denver articulates better than anyone the five basic needs of teens: the need to be understood, the need to belong, the need to be transparent, the need for critical thinking about faith and life, and the need for guidance.” (pg. 32)

THE NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD

“If I don't first understand the people I am ministering to, I can never hope to reach them with the gospel. Every person has a cross in his life, and the first step in helping someone to accept Christ's love is to help him to carry his cross.” (pg. 33)

“Too many ministries in parishes approach teens with the intention of teaching them about the Faith without first seeking to know them...Teenagers don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Before you teach them about the Faith, you must earn the right to be heard.” (pg. 34)

THE NEED TO BELONG

“Teenagers, however, have such a strong need to belong that they will sacrifice the moral values that they are raised with in order to belong.” (pg. 34)

“Parents understand better than anyone their teens' need to belong. This is why so many parents are willing to overcommit their teenagers to so many activities - so their teenagers will find community and belonging. Parents know that if they don't get their teenagers' need to belong met, their teens may find a sense of belonging in a community that they don't want them to be a part of.” (pg. 34)

“When parents prioritize their kids' extracurricular activities ahead of faith formation, what they essentially are saying to the parish leadership is that their children find a greater sense of belonging within their extracurricular activities than they do in the Church. That means the parish is at fault: the parish is failing to meet the children's basic needs. In these cases, when parish leadership insists that teens participate in the parish faith formation (or else, for example, they will be unable to receive a sacrament), the parish puts the parents in a difficult position. Do the parents put their children in the parish formation program, where their kids will not feel as if they belong? Or do they keep them on the soccer team with all their friends? More times than not, the Church loses the battle.” (pg. 35)

“We cannot expect teens to become lifelong disciples unless we create an environment (or environments) in which teens can develop friendships with other teens and find a sense of belonging in our parishes.” (pg. 36)

THE NEED TO BE TRANSPARENT

“Many teens do not have friends with whom they can be transparent...Often, if a teenager is having difficulty with something in his life, he doesn’t have anyone he feels he can approach about that problem - and about his subsequent emotions.” (pg. 36)

“Teens make you work for their affection, but once they find that you are willing to listen to their problems, to treat them with respect, and to offer them help, they become an open book.” (pg. 37)

“Every teen is a person, and every person carries a cross. All teens have a basic need to be transparent, because if they can’t be transparent about their struggles, they’ll never learn how to surrender their cross to Christ.” (pg. 37)

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT THE FAITH

“Teens have a lot of questions about faith and religion, and they want answers to their questions. The Catholic Church does a fantastic job of answering questions. The Catholic Church does a fantastic job of answering questions that teens do not have but does not do a good job of answering the questions that teens do have.” (pg. 37)

“On Sundays, most teenagers enter a church where the message communicated from the pulpit has little relation to their life (actually, that’s the experience of most Catholics in general). In faith-formation classes, most teens endure a predetermined curriculum that systematically walks them through the dogmas of the Creed and the Catechism. Sometimes, they experience a predetermined curriculum that is disjointed, with no scope and sequence at all. Seldom does a teenager experience formation in his faith that grows organically out of the natural questions he has.” (pg. 37)

“Naturally, as children enter adolescence and their minds critical-thinking capabilities...they develop questions about faith and even challenge some of the things they have been taught. This is good. They are engaging in critical thinking. It’s the beginning of their taking ownership of their faith.” (pg. 38)

“Unfortunately, too often, the method of teaching and engaging teens in the parish does not change as children grow into adolescence. Too often, the Church expects teens simply to accept what is communicated to them. If they don’t receive good answers to their questions, teens begin to believe that the Church doesn’t have good answers because good answers don’t exist. They become disengaged in church and begin to reject the dogmas of the Church in favor of the dogmas of their youth culture. Eventually, as these teens enter adulthood, they stop attending church altogether.” (pg. 39)

“Teens need relationships, and, within those relationships, they have to be given the opportunity to engage in critical thinking and discussions about faith and life.” (pg. 39)

THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

“Looking at the schedule of the average American teenager, consider this important question: At what point during most teenagers’ daily schedules do they have a meaningful conversation with an adult?” (pg. 40)

“Most teens don’t have adults who provide guidance in their lives. In this period when teens are most in need of guidance, our culture has removed from their lives the very people who are responsible for providing guidance. The average schedule for an American teenager does not allow for mentoring relationships with adults. As a result, when teenagers need advice, they’re more likely to turn to a peer than to an adult because they have relationships with their peers and no relationship with adults.” (pg. 40)

Part 2 The Catholic Youth Ministry Problem

Chapter 4: The Cultural Problem: The Separation of Youth from Adults

“We expect them (teenagers) to learn to participate in the world of adults, but our culture has largely removed adults from the mentoring roles with teenagers. As a result, teens are growing up in a peer-dominated culture. As they grow into adulthood, they have difficulty assimilating into the adult world and into the responsibilities and expectations that come with being an adult.” (pg. 46)

“THEY HAVE NO CLUE”

“One study found that adolescents spent only 4/8% of their time with their parents and only 2% with adults who were not their parents.” (pg. 47)

“The peer-dominated world of today’s youth struggles with suicide, self-worth and identity, dangerous sexual attitudes, unhealthy stress and expectations, and addictions to social media and gaming. What’s more, Dr. (Chap) Clark found that teens believe that their parents are unaware of the struggles in their life.” (pg. 47)

LORD OF THE FLIES

“A recent survey shows that the average American family spends less than eight hours together each week.” (pg. 49)

CHILDREN YEARN FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

“The perception in our culture is that young people do not want relationships with adults or parents. Yet *USA Today* surveyed 1,200 teenagers and 76% of them said that they wanted their parents to spend more time with them.” (pg. 49)

PARENTS ARE THE PRIMARY EDUCATORS

“I believe that parents don’t fail as primary educators as much as we think. Most parents I know are not theologians, and all of them are sinners. But I know many parents who love their children. And if parents know how to love their children, then the Church can and should build off this example to teach a child the gospel.” (pg. 51)

“I have found that parents who love their children are more motivated than anyone else to meet their children’s pastoral needs. Yet parents of teenagers are burned out and can be uncertain about what to do with their teenagers.” (pg. 51)

“They (parents) wanted meaningful relationships for their teenagers, and they wanted their own need for support in their vocation as parents heard by the parish leadership.” (pg. 52)

MINISTRY PROFESSIONALS CAN MAKE PARENTS THE ENEMY

“If parents are to blame for failing to raise their children in the Faith, ministry leaders are also to blame for failing to engage and partner with parents who are willing to raise their children in the Faith.” (pg. 54)

Chapter 5: The Parish Problem: Why Youth Groups Fail

THE PROBLEMS WITH THE YOUTH-GROUP MENTALITY

“A youth group tries to create an entertaining or interactive presentation of the Faith for a large number of teenagers in one space. Yet successful youth ministry has little to do with the programs presented to teens and everything to do with the relationships that teens have with the people mentoring them.” (pg. 59)

“Even when a youth group is executed well, there are inherent problems that affect the success of youth ministry. Here are a few:” (pg. 60)

Group Meetings Engage Few Teens

“Large-group faith formation requires the youth minister to choose either a basic track or a deeper track, ensuring that he will miss the majority of his audience.” (pg. 60)

No Teen Wants A Relationship With Every Teen In The Parish

Large-Group Youth Programs Hinder Ministry

Youth Groups Are Generally Superficial

“There are times when I appreciate a good icebreaker, game funny presentation, skit or movie clip to pull me into a presentation. If this is presented to me every week, however, I get annoyed and irritated.” (pg. 61)

“Every hour spent preparing a presentation is one less hour spent in relationship with teens - and relationships are where basic needs get met.” (pg. 61)

Popular Youth Ministers Are Not The Answer

“In many cases, effective large-group youth ministry depends on the gifts and talents of a particular youth minister. Only 12% of parishes currently pay a full-time youth minister, and the average burnout for a parish youth minister is around two years. Given these statistics, if successful youth ministry depends on finding a dynamic youth minister, the Church is going to struggle to build sustainable youth ministry in parishes.” (pg. 62)

Youth Groups Can Be Quite Expensive

Youth Groups Are Largely Obsolete

Religious-Education-Based Ministers Don't Work

“Youth activities became popular over forty years ago as a method of youth ministry intended to get teens to participate in their parishes. They largely consist of a series of organized fun activities that teens attend at the parish - and that’s basically it. That isn’t youth ministry because there’s no ministering involved.” (pg. 65)

“Teens can have social gatherings anywhere. They don’t need to come to church to have a social life (unless they’re among the handful of teens who have no social life). Youth ministry has to be about a lot more than social gatherings.” (pg. 65)

“In religious-education programs, parishes require teenagers to sit in a classroom with a volunteer catechist for two hours each week and receive systematic catechesis on Catholicism. I had a professor in college who said, ‘It’s a mortal sin to bore someone with the gospel.’ If that’s true, there are a lot of catechists who are going to Hell.” (pg. 66)

Chapter 6: The Catholic School Problem: It's A Train Wreck

THE TERRIFYING REALITY OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

“Catholic education represents the single biggest investment in youth ministry in the Catholic Church...A Catholic school has the chance to work with students for the better part of their week, and even in their extracurricular activities, to form their intellect and values. Apart from parents, a Catholic school has the greatest opportunity to impact the lives and directions of young persons.” (pg. 70)

“Here are some of the things that I commonly hear from alumni of Catholic schools:

- The vast majority of our classmates are no longer practicing Catholicism.
- Bullying and cliques were commonplace.
- The religion teachers knew little or not theology and were not equipped to teach even the most dogmatic teachings. I’ve taught at schools in theology departments who hired people with no theology degree who literally wanted to “give teaching a try” and because there are little to no state requirements, a theology position was the “best spot” for this person.
- Many of the teachers demonstrated little understanding of Catholicism, and many were not practicing Catholics.
- Administrators were lacking in their witness of Catholic values to the students.
- The student subculture within the school was saturated with drug and alcohol abuse and promiscuity.
- There were liturgies filled with all kinds of abuses - including liturgical dance, skits during Mass and other gimmicks to try to get kids more involved in the Mass.

Catholic teaching focused primarily on service to others and moral teaching, which was basically a list of the rules we were supposed to follow in our lives.”

THE CHANGING CULTURE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

“Several decades ago, every Catholic family sent their children to Catholic schools. The attitudes of families was that it was the school’s responsibility to form young persons in the Faith (which has contributed to the problem of parents failing to raise their children in the Faith). With the rise of tuition and expenses in Catholic schools and the growth of public education (which is paid for by taxes), more and more Catholics sought alternatives to Catholic schools.” (pg. 72)

“Fewer Catholic families send their children to Catholic schools than ever before.” (p.73)

“In the 1950’s and 1960’s, Catholic schools had the luxury of having very little overhead expense. Nuns and priests didn’t need to be paid much to work. But with the decline in vocations and the massive number of Catholic schools, the schools had to turn to lay teachers to keep themselves staffed. This meant an increase in tuition in order to pay lay teachers a living wage (something that many Catholic schools still struggle to do). Furthermore, very few lay teachers had formal philosophical or theological training. There soon became little to differentiate Catholic school education from public school education. If there is no difference in the quality or type of education, people are not going to pay for something they can get for free.” (pg. 73)

“Many Catholic schools tried to provide more value by focusing almost entirely on ‘academic excellence.’ Don’t get me wrong. Academic excellence should be the mark of every Catholic school. But when it becomes the sole focus and primary marketable asset of the education, the school fails to attract a student-body that reflects the Catholic value necessary to create a Catholic subculture.” (pg. 73)

“A Catholic school can have the best teaching methods, the best Catholic teachers, and the best curriculum, but without a student body focused on living their Faith (because they come from families that reinforce faith), the student subculture in the school will never be truly Catholic.” (pg. 74)

“More and more faithful Catholic families are turning to homeschooling. Many of these families (because they are open to life and faithfully living out Catholic teaching) have many children, and putting them all through Catholic schools is not affordable. Ironically, many home-schooled youths end up better educated and more mature in their Faith because they have adult guidance daily and their education is individualized to meet their needs...Catholic schools are missing out on these families. These are exactly the young people who can change the environment of the Catholic school to create a true, Catholic subculture.” (pg. 74)

THE LACK OF ORTHODOXY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Land O’Lakes Conference, 1967 - “Much can be written about the impact of this conference, but the long and short of it is that these leaders signed a statement that declared that their Catholic universities were separate from Church hierarchy...This allowed Catholic universities to become institutions for ‘religious dialogue’ and ‘free thought,’ which mean that they became safe haven for Church dissenters.” (pg. 75)

“The effect of this conference on the Catholic identity of primary and secondary Catholic schools was catastrophic. With the majority of lay teachers being educated at these universities, it became difficult to find teachers who were capable of teaching and witnessing the ‘right teachings’ of the Catholic Church. Catholic education went through a crisis of faith for several decades and even still feels the effects of this great Catholic dissent.” (pg. 75)

WHAT CATHOLIC EDUCATION SHOULD LOOK LIKE

“It is not enough for a school to hire a few good religion teachers or a campus minister, or to have a few priests teaching on campus. Every person a student encounters on school property must be actively trying to be a Christian witness. When a student is saturated in Catholicism as a lived experience, he cannot help but be formed by those experiences.” (pg. 78)

WHAT CATHOLIC EDUCATION CAN LOOK LIKE

“It isn’t simply about having a religion class, service hours, or liturgies available for children. Catholicism can and should be taught in every subject.” (pg. 79)

Part 3: The Twofold Solution

Chapter 7: Small Group Discipleship

THE “SERMON ON THE MOUNT” MENTALITY

“Jesus had twelve apostles. Those twelve lived with Him and were mentored by Him for three years. Those twelve carried the gospel all over the world. Those twelve were His biggest success story. Jesus’ large group ministry didn’t have the biggest impact on the world; His small-group ministry changed the world.” (pg. 85)

“What if, instead of thinking of all the youth in the parish as one large group, I thought about them as a series of small groups? What if I abandoned the youth-group concept and other programmed concepts in favor of doing ministry the way Jesus did it? What if I stopped giving Sermons on the Mount and instead spent my efforts in youth ministry developing a system of discipleship - one in which I invested my time in a handful of teenagers and other adult mentors instead of trying to stretch myself to meet the needs of every young person?” (pg. 86)

YOUTH MINISTRY THAT WORKS

“Within one year, I went from having three small groups of teens to having twelve small groups. I went from having a weekly youth group with 60 teens participating to having 120 teens disciplined in small groups that met throughout the week (in many locations). The youth ministry doubled in size in a year’s time, but what was more important was that discipleship was happening and pastoral needs were being met.” (pg. 87)

“I loved small-group discipleship because I was no longer spending my time planning silly activities and dynamic presentations for the youth group. I was free to spend my time mentoring the handful of teens I was passionate about and mentoring adults who were leading the small groups.” (pg. 87)

“The teens loved the small groups because the attention they received was individualized and the small groups were meeting on their own turf (homes, coffee shops, their school). They developed close friendships and found that they were listened to and understood by their group leader. They found a sense of belonging; they could be transparent about what was going on in their lives; and they could get their questions about the Faith answered.” (pg. 88)

“The core teams of adult volunteers loved the small groups because they could focus all their attention on the same handful of teenagers every week, and they could see a real different in the teens they were working with over the course of several years. They also got to meet with the teens when their schedule allowed for it, rather than having to give up their Sunday nights to assist at the mediocre youth group. This made it much easier to recruit more adults into the ministry.” (pg. 88)

“Parents loved the small groups because they saw how small group discipleship was meeting the basic needs for their teens. Many of them were more than willing to open their homes and host the small groups for dinner. This presented the opportunity to start to evangelize the entire family, because the simple gesture of doing ministry within the home presented the example of discipleship to the parents. The structure of the small groups also provided more flexibility, which accommodated the busy schedules of parents.” (pg. 88)

“The pastor loved the small groups because the youth ministry was growing. Even more, he knew that if the youth minister eventually resigned and moved on to another opportunity, his youth ministry wouldn’t fall apart. The youth ministry was built around the adult volunteers, not around the gifts and talents of one youth minister.” (pg. 88)

SHIFTING TO SMALL-GROUP DISCIPLESHIP

“Find some holy men and women in your parish and have them draw a handful of teenagers into their lives for weekly mentoring. Simplify the ministry approach and focus on what is most effective. Think small, in order to grow big. Raise up saints (like Pope St. John Paul II) and change the world.” (pg. 91)

Chapter 8: Parent-Focused Youth Outreach

“How do I start small-group youth ministry? By evangelization and outreach through parents. Why is this effective? Because no one is more concerned about meeting the pastoral needs of young persons than their parents.” (pg. 94)

PARENTS ARE THE SOLUTION

“More and more, we are hearing about the need for family-based ministry. Yet I’ve seen a lack vision in parent ministries. Very few parishes have launched a parent ministry as part of their youth ministry (outside of mandated parent catechesis nights as part of sacramental formation). Even fewer are running successful parent ministries.” (pg. 95)

ENGAGING PARENTS WITHIN THEIR VOCATION

“Parents may be disengaged from the Faith, but they have not abandoned their primary vocation! They understand that their vocation is to love their children, and they take the responsibility very seriously...I know that the shortest path to conversion in parents’ hearts is through their relationship with their teenagers.” (pg. 97)

YOUTH OUTREACH THROUGH PARENTS

“Do the math: If there are 8 teens in every small group and you start 2 small groups with freshmen every year, you will have 64 teenagers engaged in high school youth ministry by the time the first two groups finish their senior year. That’s 128 parents engaged in ministry by the time all these small groups have gotten off the ground. That’s not just 64 teens participating in high school youth ministry. It’s 64 teens actively and intentionally disciplined by mentors within their small groups. Those 64 teens will have their basic needs met.” (pg. 98)

“I found that large-group youth activities (for the purposes of larger parish fellowship) were easier to execute once I had several small groups going well. All I had to do was tell my small-group mentors what we were going to do, and they would show up with their groups. It was an instant youth group. Teens were more willing to engage in activities at the parish (service, prayer, or fun) when they knew that their friends were coming.” (pg. 98)

A PRACTICAL STRATEGY

“It’s simple. The tasks of the youth minister then become facilitation of the process, engagement of the parents in mentoring the mentors of the small groups. Anything else done in youth ministry - retreats, mission trips, service projects, youth group gatherings - supplements the discipleship that happens in the small groups.” (pg. 100)

“When parents are engaged in this manner, outreach can grow exponentially. More importantly, parents are re-engaged in the process of forming their teenagers into disciples of Jesus Christ.” (pg. 100)

Chapter 9: The Recipe for Success

STRATEGIES, PITFALLS, AND OBSTACLES

“Here are a few key lessons I have learned about developing small-group ministry:”

- Start Small, Grow Big
- Establish Same-Gender Groups Of Five To Eight
- Let Discussion Develop Organically
- Create A Comfortable Environment
- “The worst environment for a small-group meeting is the parish or classroom. (pg. 103)
- Be Flexible With Scheduling Group Meetings
- Group Teens With Their Friends
- Engage Parents Every Week



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12 SECTION 9



WHAT?

Best practices: What *is* working and *why* is it working?

CRITERIA USED TO DETERMINE BEST PRACTICES

THE FORMATION LIFE CYCLE

How well does this address the issues articulated in our Formation Life Cycle?

IS IT BEARING FRUIT?

Can you see evidence that it is affecting change in people's lives?

EASE OF IMPLEMENTATION

It might work in parish "A" but can it work in all of the parishes?

HAND OFF

How well does it interact with other parish ministries? Is it easy to get into? Does it feed other ministries?

SUSTAINABILITY

Is it dependent on a certain personality or leader? Can it sustain multiple pastors?

LACK OF PERIPHERAL "NOISE"

Are there questions? Perhaps with its leadership? theology? history?



RESOURCES TO HELP YOU LEARN MORE



**AUGUSTINE
INSTITUTE**

UNDERSTAND, LIVE, AND SHARE YOUR FAITH



WHAT IS IT? The Augustine Institute partnered with Jim Beckman in providing the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia with an online in-service regarding the changing face of youth ministry.

HOW CAN I WATCH IT? They are on YouTube.

- First watch: The Changing Face of Teens: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMLuG-_W-Po&t=1s
- Then watch: The Changing Face of Youth Ministry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YB7RSvpJJRs>



WHAT IS IT? Ave Marie Press hosted a “Best Practices in Catholic Youth Ministry Webinar”. It’s just that: experts in the field who are sharing what’s working.

WHO ARE THE PRESENTERS? Jared Dees, Alison Griswald, Katie Prejean, Tony Vasinda, Christopher Wesley

HOW CAN I WATCH IT? It’s on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO5eAcvwmUU



WHAT IS IT? LIFE TEEN is hosting the next in a series of training conferences on June 9-12, 2019

WHY SHOULD I GO? Because no one in the country trains people for youth ministry better than does LIFE TEEN.

WHAT’S MY NEXT STEP? Visit their website: www.lifeteen.com/events/catholic-youth-ministry-convention-date/



BEST PRACTICE RESOURCES LIFE TEEN



WHY DID IT MAKE OUR LIST OF BEST PRACTICES? LIFE TEEN's commitment to quality is better than any other producer of youth ministry resources. They are relevant in content, as well as in presenters. Whether the resources are online, video, or planning packets, they are the best out there. Furthermore, they approach the whole process together. There are resources for youth ministers and those just getting in youth ministry. There are resources to be used in the parish during ministry events with teenagers. There are resources for parents.

ARE THEY PERFECT? No, but no program is. As with many things in the Church, LIFE TEEN has had its ups and downs. On a national level they have had both dramatic impact as well as scandal within their founder. Here at home in our diocese we have seen both unparalleled success as well as poor implementation that has skewed people's experience and understanding of what LIFE TEEN is. Both of these factors have led to an opinion of what LIFE TEEN is or isn't. LIFE TEEN can be analogized to losing weight. It takes a lot of work to lose weight, and it takes more than one thing. The only way to lose weight, and to sustain weight loss, is to change one's lifestyle. You have to exercise and you have to change your diet and you have to change other factors which may threaten the previous two. Trying to do one without the other will leave one frustrated and will not yield the success you had hoped for. To successfully implement LIFE TEEN, a parish needs a commitment to commitment. It needs well trained adults, a commitment to liturgical renewal, and much more. Unfortunately, our diocese has still yet to see any parish successfully implement LIFE TEEN the way it is supposed to be implemented. Therefore, the negative opinion within some parish's is more of a reflection of our experience of local implementation than it is of LIFE TEEN in and of itself.

WHAT KIND OF RESOURCES DO THEY OFFER?

- Issue nights
- Social nights
- Life Nights (9-12 grade resources)
- Edge Nights (6-8 grade resources)
- Retreats
- Training videos
- Resource videos

HOW CAN MY TEAM GET MORE INFORMATION? www.lifeteen.com/cym/resources/life-teen-timeline/



BEST PRACTICE RESOURCES Y DISCIPLE



WHY DID IT MAKE OUR LIST OF BEST PRACTICES? *YDisciple* is an intuitive online platform designed to help parents and parishes work together to reach more teens more effectively with the Gospel. *YDisciple* offers training, streaming video content, well-crafted leader guides, and more to aid the forming and multiplication of small groups. *YDisciple* is not a program. It is an apprenticeship in the Christian Life.

ARE THEY PERFECT? No, but no program is. Most parishes are looking for a program. They want something they can put in place. The learning curve of youth ministry and the changing landscape of teen culture is difficult to keep up with. Furthermore, the crisis of adult formation is compromised the number of adults capable, without extensive formation, ready and willing to mentor teenagers. *YDisciple* is not a program. It is an apprenticeship in the Christian Life. They provide great resources, as well as a framework of successful youth ministry. But, parishes will need adult mentors. That could be a challenge. If pastors are looking for a program to plug-and-play then *YDisciple* will challenge that mindset.

WHAT KIND OF RESOURCES DO THEY OFFER?

- Small group trainings
- Small group resources
- Retreats
- Training Videos
- Resource Videos

HOW CAN MY TEAM GET MORE INFORMATION? www.augustineinstitute.org/formed/ydisciple/



BEST PRACTICE VIDEO RESOURCES OUTSIDE DA BOX FILMS



odb
FILMS



WHY DID IT MAKE OUR LIST OF BEST PRACTICES? ODB's films are some of the best Catholic media available to today's youth. The videos are relevant and touch on a variety of topics. With the influence of technology changing the landscape of youth ministry, ODB is a relevant option for parishes looking to incorporate video into their formation.

ARE THEY PERFECT? They are not trying to do everything. They do not have every topic you may be looking for. What they do have is top notch. They have what they have.

WHAT TOPICS HAVE THEY ADDRESSED?

- VCAT: Video based teachings on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- Chasity
- Atheism
- Mercy
- Virtue
- Pornography
- True Presence
- Eucharist
- Confession
- Struggles common to today's teens
- 144 videos ... growing by the day

HOW CAN MY TEAM GET MORE INFORMATION? www.odbfilms.com/films



BEST PRACTICE VIDEO RESOURCES SPIRIT JUICE STUDIOS



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PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

RESOURCE A



Evaluating youth formation ministries

TO BE USED BY Parents, and perhaps students; teachers; youth ministers; DREs, CREs, CYFs; priests

PURPOSE These two worksheets can be used as a way to begin a conversation with DREs, volunteers, parents, etc. This would be a way to facilitate an honest conversation to assess the current and/or future program.

PLEASE NOTE Assessment scoring

POOR		DECENT		EXCELLENT	
1	2	3	4	5	

The current blueprint for parish-based evangelization in the United States is the 2017 USCCB document entitled *Living as Missionary Disciples*. There, we read:

“The parish must be concerned with **bearing fruit** throughout the discipleship process.

This shift in focus ensures that attention is directed toward pruning what is ineffective so that new life and fruit can occur. Throughout Scripture, the metaphor of fruit is used many different times and in many ways in reference to mission. Jesus commands the disciples to ‘go and bear fruit that will remain’ (John 15:16). The work of pastoral planning ought to **bear fruit** and also involve effective pruning through planning, organization, and implementation so that new life and growth can occur.”

If we expect to see renewal within our parishes, especially with youth formation, we must begin to discipline ourselves with the practice of **focus**. Practically speaking, youth ministers would do well to ask specific questions in order to remain focused on the mission that has been given to us. It is important that we ask **why** we are doing something so that we can ask ourselves **what** we expect to see in people’s lives because of what we are doing. Thinking with the mind of *Living as Missionary Disciples* requires us to know **what** we are doing and so that we are clear about what type of fruit we expect to see in someone’s life.

The US bishops are calling parish leaders to establish objective evaluations based on fruitfulness within the discipleship process. The Bishops state: “This means, at the start of the process, identifying the overall fruit and outcomes that a parish or diocese desires for its ministry”.

So, what are the “outcomes that a parish or diocese desires for its ministry?” Specifically, what are the “outcomes that a parish or diocese desires for its” youth formation?

What is “good fruit” within a discipleship process? During the strategic planning process in 2016 the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux articulated nine dimensions of a fully mature missionary disciple. Commonly known as “the nine”, these dimensions reveal the very fruit that is intended in one’s life because of healthy formation. These are nine signs of maturity; nine dimensions of a fully mature missionary disciple. We developed these with **adults** in mind. In a sense, they are the fruits of an **adult** who is coming to know Jesus, to live with Jesus, and live like Jesus. If we see these nine dimensions visible in someone’s life, we see the “good fruit” of formation.



RELATIONSHIP

I have a **personal relationship with Jesus Christ** that gives my life meaning and direction.



CONVERSION

I say **YES** to that which brings me closer to God.
I say **NO** to that which pulls me away from God.
I have aligned my lifestyle with the Gospel.



DISCERNMENT

I want what God wants.
I begin to discern the little things.
I can recognize His voice, and I follow as He leads me.



SACRAMENTS

The Sacraments are a regular part of my life.
Sunday Mass and frequent Confession.
Additional Masses, especially during Lent and Easter.



HOLINESS

I pray daily. I am growing in virtue, particularly Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Humility, Faith, Hope, & Charity.
I want to be a witness of holiness.



GROUNDING

My relationship with God is **no longer dependent upon whether I “feel” His presence.**
I study the Bible and Church teaching.
On-going study of my faith is a lifestyle.



COMMUNITY

I have people who hold me accountable.
I have regular conversation about where I am with my commitment to Christ.



OTHERS

I no longer live in a “me-centered” world.
My Faith is no longer just “me and Jesus.”
I see and respond to others as Christ does.



EVANGELIZATION

I know my testimony - the story of what God has done in my life.
I can share and do share that testimony with others.

If authentic and sustainable growth is to happen in the parish and in the lives of our **youth**, it is critical that each parish take an honest look at existing ministries as well as ensuring that there is an on-going assessment of any new initiatives. This assessment cannot be driven by subjective impressions or the fear of infringing upon relationships that may have existed in the parish for a number of years. There must be an honest evaluation of **“What is bearing fruit?”**

What is “good fruit” within healthy youth formation? Let’s translate the illustration on the previous page so that we are able to appreciate what would be the nine dimensions a healthy teenage disciple. What would we hope to see in a graduating high school senior?

Imagine for a moment if all our teenagers looked like this as they were sent off to college.

Characteristics of a Teenage **MISSIONARY DISCIPLE**



RELATIONSHIP

Have a relationship with Jesus Christ
Pray more days than they don't for 20 minutes in a contemplative manner with Scripture



CONVERSION

Have learned how engage their will
Seek out monthly confession and a weekly examination of conscience



DISCERNMENT

Ask God to show them the way
Are able to pray and hear God speak. Do what God and the Church asks of them.



SACRAMENTS

Committed to the sacraments
Go to Mass weekly, open to daily Mass. Confession once a month.



HOLINESS

Growing in virtue
Growing in the virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude



GROUNDING

Relationship with God not governed by feeling
They feel comfortable reading the Bible and understand the Church on tough topics



COMMUNITY

They have others who hold them accountable
See small group accountability as a need and know how to build it



OTHERS

It's not about “me and Jesus”
Have a general sense of being other-focused and willing to serve on their own



EVANGELIZATION

Not afraid to share their story
Are familiar with their own faith testimony and want to share it

How can we assess if this is happening?
How can we assess if our youth formation
is helping teens grow towards
the nine characteristics
of a mature teenage missionary disciple?

Characteristics of a Teenage MISSIONARY DISCIPLE



RELATIONSHIP

Have a relationship with Jesus Christ
Pray more days than they don't for 20 minutes
in a contemplative manner with Scripture



CONVERSION

Have learned how engage their will
Seek out monthly confession
and a weekly examination of conscience



DISCERNMENT

Ask God to show them the way
Are able to pray and hear God speak.
Do what God and the Church asks of them.



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It's not about "me and Jesus"
Have a general sense of being other-focused
and willing to serve on their own



EVANGELIZATION

Not afraid to share their story
Are familiar with their own faith testimony
and want to share it

DIMENSIONS	CRITERIA	RATING	EVIDENCE
RELATIONSHIP	Youth, as well as adult mentors, have an active and illustrated relationship with Jesus Christ		
CONVERSION	Desire to change my behavior to be in more conformity with a follower of Christ		
GROUNDING	Experience the Faith through a deeper knowledge of Scripture and Tradition		
DISCERNING	Establish a docility to the Holy Spirit, which leads to following God's plan for my life		
HOLINESS	Experiencing a closeness to God through personal prayer and the establishment of virtue		
SACRAMENTS	Build a discipline of our youth attending Sunday Mass and frequenting the Sacrament of Reconciliation		
COMMUNITY	Build the necessary relationships that aid youth in remaining in their relationship with God, with accountability and love		
OTHERS	Emerging desire to serve others younger youth in the parish <i>For example:</i> <i>the poor</i> <i>mission trips</i> <i>etc.</i>		
EVANGELIZATION	Evident willingness of our young people to share their story of Christ working in their life		



Formation
LIFE CYCLE

THE 5

DIMENSIONS	CRITERIA	RATING	EVIDENCE
CONNECT	Provide healthy and inviting space for youth to grow in deep, meaningful relationships with their peers <i>Are any isolated on campus?</i> <i>Are they bringing their friends?</i> <i>Do we witness authentic friendships?</i>		
ENCOUNTER	Facilitate experiences where they personally experience the person of Jesus Christ <i>Are they talking about this?</i> <i>Do we witness their prayer?</i>		
CONVERSION	Equip youth with the appropriate resources and accountability structures for them to begin the process of conversion <i>Are we providing Confession?</i> <i>Are they going to Confession?</i> <i>Are they holding each other accountable?</i>		
GROW	Educate our teenagers in Scripture and Tradition, while relating the timeless teaching of the Church to an ever-changing world <i>Can they explain: the Bible?</i> <i>Can they explain: the Eucharist?</i> <i>Can they explain: the Priesthood?</i>		
MISSION	Equipping our teens to serve the rest of the Church through discerning their gifts and talents and putting them to best use <i>Have we taught them their gifts?</i> <i>Can they name their gifts?</i> <i>Do they have a passion?</i>		



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

RESOURCE B



Sample goal with building blocks

YOUTH FORMATION GOAL
 By August 1, 2021, [name of parish] will have full implementation of the entire youth formation process for forming young missionary disciples

BY JANUARY 1, 2020
 High School students engaged in small and large group meetings as part of the process for forming young missionary disciples

BY JANUARY 1, 2021
 Middle School students engaged in large group meetings as part of the process for forming young missionary disciples

BY AUGUST 1, 2021
 Full implementation of the entire youth formation process for forming young missionary disciples.

STAFF & ADMIN

ASSESS & PRUNE

YF LEADERSHIP TEAM

CAST VISION

RECRUIT NEW VOLUNTEERS

ONGOING FORMATION ADULTS

ONGOING ASSESS RECRUIT



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

RESOURCE C



Sample goal with timeline

YOUTH FORMATION GOAL

- By **August 1, 2021**, [name of parish] will have full implementation of the entire youth formation process for forming young missionary disciples

MAPPING OUT A PLAN TO GET US THERE

Year by year benchmarks for small group participation

1. By **January 1, 2020**, [name of parish] will have High School students engaged in small and large group meetings as part of the process for forming young missionary disciples.
2. By **January 1, 2021**, [name of parish] will have Middle School students engaged in small and large group meetings as part of the process for forming young missionary disciples.
3. By **August 1, 2021**, [name of parish] will have full implementation of the entire youth formation process for forming young missionary disciples.

Getting started. The fall of 2018. Complete before January 1, 2019.

1. Transition position of DRE/CRE to Coordinator of Youth Formation (CYF) through lens of job description
2. Intentional prayer and discernment appealing to God for more volunteers*
**Rosary suggested*
3. Assess current adult volunteers and catechists involved with high school formation.
4. Communicate vision to the wider parish community.
5. Begin process of recruiting youth formation leadership team for high school formation that are raised up as a fruit of their prayer.

First half of 2019. Complete before July 1, 2019.

6. Begin implementation of a parish-wide recruitment plan recruiting adults who are on board with forming youth missionary disciples particularly for high school students.*
** Goal is to have 1 adult for every 3 teens*
7. Finalizing roster of adult mentors/volunteers
8. By March, begin 6-month formation process for adults for the sake equipping them to best form high school students.
9. Assess current adult volunteers and catechists involved with middle school formation.
10. Ongoing recruiting of adults for high school formation to bring the ratio into better conformity with 1:3 diocesan goal.*
** This should be assisted by Adult Formation initiatives engaging adults into the Formation Life Cycle*

Second half of 2019. Complete before January 1, 2020.

11. Recruit particular adults who are on board with forming youth missionary disciples particularly for high school students.*
** Goal is to have 1 adult for every 3 teens*
12. In September, CYF and key adult teams (Core Teams) for parishes form all the other adults who are committed to helping with high school formation.
13. In October, the parish will begin hosting high school large group nights in conjunction with a Mass in the parish.
14. Continue recruiting adults for middle school formation.

First half of 2020. Complete before July 1, 2020.

15. Begin hosting small groups of roughly 12 total people (9:3 teen to adult ratio).
16. Continue hosting large group nights on campus of the parish once a month in conjunction with a Mass in the parish.
17. Continue recruiting adults for middle school formation.
18. By March, begin 6-month formation process for adults for the sake equipping them to best form middle school students.
19. Ongoing recruiting of adults for middle school formation to bring the ratio into better conformity with 1:6 diocesan goal.*
** This should be assisted by Adult Formation initiatives engaging adults into the Formation Life Cycle*

Second half of 2020. Complete before January 1, 2020.

20. By August 2020, full and complete implementation of the high school formation program.
21. Parishes form all the other adults who are committed to helping with middle school formation.
22. In October, the parish will begin hosting large group nights in conjunction with a Mass in the parish.



PLANS OF HOPE
HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

RESOURCE D



Sample timeline for implementation

	HIGH SCHOOL FORMATION	MIDDLE SCHOOL FORMATION	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FORMATION
SEPTEMBER 2018	Pitching Vision		
OCTOBER 2018	Pitching Vision		
NOVEMBER 2018	Assessing Adults		
DECEMBER 2018	Assessing Adults		
JANUARY 2019	Recruiting Adults		Finalizing approach
FEBRUARY 2019	Recruiting Adults		Diocesan approach planned
MARCH 2019	Forming CYFs, as well as initial Group of Adults for High School (Core Team) [ORIENTATION - 9&5]		
APRIL 2019	Forming CYFs, as well as initial Group of Adults for High School (Core Team) [CONNECT]	Assessing Adults	
MAY 2019	Forming CYFs, as well as initial Group of Adults for High School (Core Team) [ENCOUNTER]	Assessing Adults	
JUNE 2019	Forming CYFs, as well as initial Group of Adults for High School (Core Team) [CONVERSION]	Recruiting Adults	
JULY 2019	Forming CYFs, as well as initial Group of Adults for High School (Core Team) [GROW]	Recruiting Adults	
AUGUST 2019	Forming CYFs, as well as initial Group of Adults for High School (Core Team) [MISSION]		

SEPTEMBER 2019	Forming All Adults for HS (by Parish Core Team) [ORIENTATION – 9&5]	
OCTOBER 2019	HS Large Group Forming All Adults for HS (by Parish Core Team) [CONNECT/ENCOUNTER]	
NOVEMBER 2019	HS Large Group Forming All Adults for HS (by Parish Core Team) [GROW]	
DECEMBER 2019	HS Large Group Forming All Adults for HS (by Parish Core Team) [MISSION]	
JANUARY 2020	HS Large Group Small Groups	
FEBRUARY 2020	HS Large Group Small Groups	
MARCH 2020	HS Large Group Small Groups	Forming Initial Group of Adults for MS [ORIENTATION - 9&5]
APRIL 2020	HS Large Group Small Groups	Forming Initial Group of Adults for MS [CONNECT]
MAY 2020	HS Large Group Small Groups	Forming Initial Group of Adults for MS [ENCOUNTER]
JUNE 2020		Forming Initial Group of Adults for MS [CONVERSION]
JULY 2020		Forming Initial Group of Adults for MS [GROW]
AUGUST 2020	Full Implementation <i>Small Groups</i> <i>HS Large Group</i> <i>1 on 1 Mentoring</i> <i>Social Outings</i> <i>Continued Adult Formation</i>	Forming Initial Group of Adults for MS [MISSION]
SEPTEMBER 2020		Forming All Adults for MS (by Parish Core Team) [ORIENTATION – 9&5]
OCTOBER 2020		MS Large Group Forming All Adults for MS (by Parish Core Team) [CONNECT/ENCOUNTER]
NOVEMBER 2020		MS Large Group Forming All Adults for MS (by Parish Core Team) [GROW]
DECEMBER 2020		MS Large Group Forming All Adults for MS (by Parish Core Team) [MISSION]

JANUARY 2021	MS Large Group Small Groups	
FEBRUARY 2021	MS Large Group Small Groups	
MARCH 2021	MS Large Group Small Groups	
APRIL 2021	MS Large Group Small Groups	
MAY 2021	MS Large Group Small Groups	
JUNE 2021		
JULY 2021		
AUGUST 2021	Full Implementation <i>Small Groups</i> <i>MS Large Group</i> <i>1 on 1 Mentoring</i> <i>Social Outings</i> <i>Continued Adult Formation</i>	Full Implementation of discerned approach
SEPTEMBER 2021		
OCTOBER 2021		
NOVEMBER 2021		
DECEMBER 2021		



PLANS OF HOPE

HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

RESOURCE E



How do I know if I have the right leader?

1. They understand and have a passion for the vision of intentionally forming the youth as disciples in the parish.
2. They are a living witness of “the nine” characteristics of a mature missionary disciple and are taking personal steps to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
3. They understand and believe in the need for an integrated approach to youth formation (intellectual, human, spiritual, and equipping for mission).
4. They have the potential to journey with young people both in the basics of life as well as spiritually.
5. They have leadership skills necessary to pioneer change, cast vision, build “buy in”, and recruit people.
6. They have the potential to integrate systematic key learning into a new vision of youth formation.
7. They verbalize and demonstrate an openness to learning how to integrate new methods and approaches when presenting the unchanging truth of the Gospel.
8. They desire on-going personal formation as well as desire to be more fully equipped to accompany other volunteers and youth in the process of spiritual growth.
9. They have the intellectual capacity to understand “the nine” and “the five”.
10. You have observed they may have a “gift” for journeying with and relating to youth in their faith journey.



THE DIOCESE OF HOUMA THIBODAUX

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POSITION TITLE: **COORDINATOR OF YOUTH FORMATION**

POSITION SUMMARY: The Coordinator of Youth Formation administers and implements a total parish youth formation program that builds a solid foundation to support Christian living, ministry and outreach in teens.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- I. Implement catechetical programs which support the formation of missionary disciples in accordance with the diocesan vision of youth formation, parish needs and culture, and parish mission and vision.
 - I.1. Current vision of youth formation includes:
 - High School (9th -12th grade) and Middle School (6th-8th grade) formation programs
 - Small groups & Large group parish-based event rotation
 - Elementary School (1st -5th grade) formation program
 - To be discerned and detailed
 - Vacation Bible Camp
 - I.2. Conducts periodic parish assessment of needs in area of formation
 - I.3. Integrates diocesan curriculum, current ecclesial insights, and church documents into program planning in consultation with parish liaison
 - I.4. Works in collaboration with Pastor to develop goals, objectives and strategies for the youth formation program
 - I.5. Aligns youth formation program with the vision/mission for the parish formation program in accordance with diocesan guidelines
 - I.6. Pursues further personal education and professional development in the Catechism/ Theology
 - I.7. Coordinates logistical details for all formation related events
- II. Assist Pastor with implementation of a coordinated approach toward parish-based youth formation in conjunction with the diocesan standards, i.e., forming missionary disciples according to the Formation Life Cycle through youth formation initiatives for all grade levels (1st-12th grades).
 - II.1. Plans the implementation and continued assessment of the diocesan youth formation plan
 - II.2. Recruits/hires, trains, supervises and evaluates small group leaders, mentors, and other adults
 - II.3. Provides initial and ongoing formation opportunities for the adult volunteers involved with youth formation
 - II.4. Maintains relationship with Pastor, other parish staff members, pastoral/finance council members, parish formation staff and Diocesan Office of Youth Formation office
- III. Directs the implementation and on-going management of the youth formation programs
 - III.1. Identifies and enables leadership within the community to take responsibility for program components (small groups, large group events, etc.)
 - III.2. Adjusts program components (space, time, materials, human and physical resources) as needed.
 - III.3. Works in collaboration with Parish Bookkeeper to create and monitor a budget (income/revenue allocation) for the operation of programs.
 - III.4. Coordinates liturgical/sacramental functions and varied prayer experiences with the Pastor
 - III.5. Communicates with participants, parents, parish-at-large to keep them informed of youth formation efforts.
 - III.6. Works closely with Safe Environment Coordinator to follow all guidelines under Safe Environment program including training of students
- IV. Promotes and coordinates attendance for outside ministry opportunities for the youth of the parish

- IV.1. Works closely with Safe Environment Coordinator to follow all guidelines under Safe Environment program including training of students
- IV.2. Discerns new opportunities (conferences, retreats, camps, etc) to promote growth as missionary disciples for youth
- IV.3. Assists in dissemination of information pertinent to events, especially those hosted by the Office of Youth Formation
- IV.4. Coordinates fundraising efforts for the program when necessary.
- IV.5. Assists in collecting registration forms/payments, organizing transportation, etc. for participants to attend events

- V. Evaluates the youth formation programs of the total parish in relation to the goals, objectives and strategies.
 - V.1. Conducts program evaluation at all levels.
 - V.2. Collates evaluation information and gives feedback to Pastor, and appropriate groups.
 - V.3. Assists Pastor to adjust religious education programs as necessary in consultation with the diocesan liaison
 - V.4. Meets with coordinators of programs to elicit further information regarding evaluation and future planning.

OTHER OR SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

THIS POSITION SUPERVISES:

All volunteers for religious education programs

1. Youth Mentors
2. Adult Volunteers
3. Confirmation Sponsors

QUALIFICATIONS TO PERFORM THE JOB SUCCESSFULLY:

The individual must be a Catholic in good standing with the Catholic Church. They must be able to live by the diocesan lifestyle for employees and striving to live as a missionary disciple themselves.

EDUCATION AND/OR EXPERIENCE:

Must have a masters catechist or equivalent youth ministry certification or working towards it, a Master's degree or its equivalent in Religious Education is preferred.

LANGUAGE SKILLS:

Ability to effectively present information to and train staff and volunteers, youth and parents both verbally and in writing.

COMPUTATIONAL SKILLS:

Ability to set a budget with the Pastor and maintain expenses throughout the fiscal year.

REASONING ABILITY:

Ability to solve practical problems and deal with conflicts among staff and parents/children.

TECHNICAL SKILLS:

Proficiency in word processing and database software programs, specifically, Microsoft Word, Excel, and Access.

CERTIFICATES, LICENSES, REGISTRATIONS:

Maintain all Diocesan requirements for continuing education for certification
Safe Environment Training

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:

While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to sit for extended periods of time, use hands in repetitive motion tasks, handle objects and talk or hear. The employee is occasionally required to stand, walk and reach with hands and arms and must occasionally lift and carry books/packets up to 25lbs.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:

[Work space as determined by parish facilities]

WORKING CONDITIONS:

The employee must be able to work cooperatively with other members of the staff and with clients and be able to multi-task and be a self-starter.

This job description is a summary of the essential duties and responsibilities of the position.

It is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of all duties and responsibilities.

This job description is subject to change at management's discretion.