Engaging and Accompanying Young People: The Challenge and the Blessing

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Objectives
Assess the current ministry territory
Identify engagement as a ministerial lens
Consider strategies for accompaniment

Disaffiliation is a PROCESS that BEGINS AT A YOUNG AGE and happens OVER TIME

Existing Research
• A majority leave before age 21. About ½ become unaffiliated “Nones” and the other ½ begin to identify with another denomination.

• 35% of millennials (18-33) are religiously unaffiliated. 22.8% of the general population is unaffiliated – about 56 million people (Pew Study).

• There are an estimated 20 million former Catholics, 5.4 million between 15-25 years old. (CARA)
At what age did disaffiliated youth report that they stopped identifying as Catholic?

No single reason ... No single solution ...

Religious Identity among the “religiously unaffiliated” millennials is about . . .

Hunger of Young People:
- Meaning and Purpose
- Connection
- Recognition
- Holy
- Justice

Where are my hungers being fed?

“teachers of the faith can no longer rely on a pervasive Catholic culture to form their students. That culture no longer exists...”

--Patrick Manning PhD, Seton Hall Seminary
Infant Baptism
Adult Baptism
RCIA
First Communion
Confirmation
Marriages
Annulments
Funerals
Secondary School
Elementary School
Parish R.E.

Catholic Markers Past 17 Yrs

Infant Baptism 34%
Adult Baptism 52%
RCIA 24%
First Communion 19%
Confirmation 8%
Marriages 44%
Annulments 59%
Funerals 17%
Secondary School 14%
Elementary School 40%
Parish R.E. 30%

“fewer and fewer Catholics recognize the relevance of the sacraments for their lives.

Yet none of this is to say that spirituality and religion are on the way out.”

--Patrick Manning, PhD

They see themselves as moral and committed to living a moral life, but reflect Peter Berger’s observation about secularism – “I can be ethical without religion.”

One doesn’t need religion to have morals.
If you can’t determine right from wrong then you lack empathy, not religion.

Rachel’s Story .... “Finally!”

Those Who Have Disaffiliated:
- Do we know who they are?
- Do we miss them now that they are gone?
- Do they know they are missed now that they are gone?
“Our distinct impression is that very many religious congregations and communities of faith in the United States are failing rather badly in religiously engaging and educating youth.”

THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT!

Engagement is a strong emotional connection to the faith community

It is more than involvement

THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT!

It is a sense of belonging to the community

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

A new paradigm: “In most cases, belief does not lead to belonging, belonging leads to belief”

Belonging ..... behaving ...... believing
Modern world: people come to worship to know more about God – “That sermon made me think”

Post-modern world: people come to worship to experience God “That worship really moved me” … experience is the criteria!

ENGAGEMENT AS MINISTERIAL PARADIGM

The community is the context.

How do we:

- worship together
- build relationships
- foster participation and belonging
- live our faith
- know their names!

THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT!

AND ACCOMPANIMENT!

A Process

- Contact
- Conversation
- Connection
- Commitment

Contact

Encourage everyone to be “inviters”

- challenge the parish to move beyond their comfort zone
- help them understand the Gospel call to reach out
- help them develop a faith language
Touch points for young adults:

Sacramental Prep: Marriage Prep, Baptism, 1st Reconciliation and Eucharist, RCIA
Liturgical celebrations: Christmas, Easter, Ash Wednesday, weddings, funerals
Geography as evangelization: where can we make contact ... foster connections ... where is their 'holy ground?'

Go to young people when they can’t come to you
• treatment programs, hospitals, detention centers, funerals

Conversation as accompaniment
Safe spaces for deep conversations ... and listening to stories
• Questions and doubts can be shared
• Non-judgmental
• Listen to understand ... (vs. respond)

• Open, honest, candid
• Hospitality
• Faith is a journey... ... questions are a sign of going deeper!

ACCOMPANIMENT
• Move beyond dictation and doctrinization.
• Go deeper/quicker. Address the issues and questions that young Catholics are thinking about at earlier and earlier ages.

• Move from orthodoxy to orthopraxis
• Create a catechesis of current events ... connecting life to faith.
• Faith sharing
• It’s about Jesus!

Connection
Develop Personal Relationships
the heart of ministry

Connection
Invite young people into the pastoral, liturgical, leadership ministries
Connection is an intentional process or approach

Individuals: Contact/ask
Identify gifts/interests
Connection
Support
Reflection

A Process or Approach:

Integrating ‘groups of young people’:
• Parish events (social, service)
• Liturgical events (Stations of the Cross, Adoration)

Integration and Engagement

• Mass:
  ✓ Special commissionings
  ✓ Special blessings
  ✓ Youth reflections at Liturgy
  ✓ Intercessions

• Create prayer partners with parish adults

Remember:

• The pastoral leader needs to provide/arrange for training as appropriate
• Involve the parish staff
• Involve the key volunteer ministers
• Create an ‘engagement attitude’ in your parish
• Make them ‘connectors’

An Examination of Conscience

Key questions for pastoral ministry leaders and for the team:

• In each area of parish life, is there a role for young people here?
• What skills will my young people need?
• Who are the other key people?
• Which young people and/or their families are not integrated or engaged in the faith community?

Connection

Connect young people with Jesus
The goal of all ministry
Commitment

Personal Decision
- there is no ‘right’ way or process
- faith is a journey, not a destination
- comes from the heart – this is the way for me!

Call to Discipleship
- to be a follower of Jesus
- to commit to a noble adventure

Reflection
- What did we hear that will be helpful going forth in our work?
- What are the implications of an engagement/accompaniment approach for our pastoral ministry?

THE CONTEXT...
No previous generation of American Catholics inherited so little of the content and sensibility of the faith from their parents, as have today’s Catholic youth.”

WHAT IS NEEDED...
“The challenge of Catholic education and formation in our media-driven, cyberspace age is no less than this: older Catholics must be restored to, and younger Catholics introduced to, a sense of Catholicism as a comprehensive way of life.”

Church historian R. Scott Appleby
Notre Dame University

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Catholicism Rediscovered

To be Catholic is social
• We are communal
• Catholic identity is connected with the community
• Belonging to behaving to believing
• Accompaniment

To be Catholic is to be comprehensive:
• vertical and horizontal spirituality
• head, heart, and hands = know, love, and serve God

To be Catholic is to see differently
• Catholic imagination ...
  Catholic world view
• Our sacramental lens
• Everything expresses the transcendent: beauty, the arts, ritual, gatherings, nature, devotionals

To be Catholic is to engage the world through, justice, service, and heroic charity …
Catholic Social Teaching … discipleship in action

The Jesus Experience:
The Heart of Catholicism as Spiritual Path

Key Points
• We don’t have a ‘believing’ issue, we have a ‘belonging’ issue.
• We don’t have a ‘youth’ issue, we have a faith community challenge.
• Do we know their names? Do we know their stories?
• How are we effectively accompanying children and youth on their spiritual journey?
• How are we engaging young people in our faith communities?
Yearnings

Where are their hungers being fed?

“If we don’t build loving, caring, intimate relationships with our children, it doesn’t matter what we teach them or how much we pray for them, they’ll walk away.”

--Josh McDowell