

National Conference of Vicars for Religious:

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Responses to Questionnaire for XV Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

July 2017

Evaluating the Situation

a) Young People, the Church and Society

These questions refer both to young people who take part in Church programmes, as well as those who do not take part or have no interest to participate.

1. In what manner does the Church listen to the lived situations of young people?

Formal: Diocesan and parish youth programs, family programs, Sacramental programs, discernment opportunities, educational programs, conferences, peer ministry retreats, mission trips

Informal: social media, casual gatherings, after school activities and maintain contact with students, sound family programs, listening to parents

2. What are the main challenges and most significant opportunities for young people in your country / countries today?

Challenges:

Society: low dignity and self-respect vs. sex culture, morality, individualism, racism

Environment: urban challenges, poverty, family structures, family instability and broken homes, peer pressure, violence and gangs

Technology: all absorbing, poor inter-personal skills, imbalance of interests and activities. How to know what is true and important?

Materialism; affluence distracts youth from hearing God's voice and awareness of persons / needs around them

Too many choices and needed skills to make good value-based decisions;

Need healthy relationships: self, family, parish, peers, God

Need better understanding of God in their lives and a belief system, and of Church

Opportunities:

Volunteer ministry programs that address socio-political issues

Youth ministry programs in schools and parishes; youth retreats, education in faith

Opportunities for participation in liturgical/parish life with an outreach program

Active campus Ministry programs with involvement in Church/ society issues

Expanded use of technology and social media for far-reaching involvement and connection to other Catholic youth

3. What kinds and places of group gatherings of youth, institutionalized or otherwise, have a major success *within* the Church, and why?

World Youth Days, Diocesan Youth days, special events for youth geared to their interest and involvement levels; retreats, Life-Teen Masses, conferences with overnights, social time, meal; sports /concert events; Theology on Tap; Catholic Underground, Diocesan youth groups, ex. choir, volunteer Christian service projects; opportunities for prayer, reflection, adoration of Blessed Sacrament; praise and worship experiences, exposure to positive role models, religious practices and levels of responsibility

4. What kinds and places of group gatherings of youth, institutionalized or otherwise, have a major success *outside* the Church, and why?

Evening and late night events: music, cultural at reasonable cost; sports events; playing sports which hold a prime place for them; programs designed for at-risk youth, probationary, prison services: job-training, GED, counseling, career training; non-denominational Christian retreats

5. What do young people really ask of the Church in your country / countries today?

Inclusion in life of Church at their level, to feel welcome and at home: evangelizing, peer group faith sharing; empowered and involved in service and decision making at parish and diocesan levels; involved in causes that address social ills; answers to questions related to morality, faith, vocation in life; to be understood, accepted and respected for who they are. They have low expectations of this. For times of quiet prayer, adoration; they want the Church to guide them through transitional stages

6. What possibilities for participation exist in your country / countries for young people to take part in the life of the ecclesial community?

In some areas, opportunities for involvement, ex. liturgical participation in ministries, altar servers, lectors, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist; music ministry; youth ministry groups; study groups; Diocesan and Parish Councils; Campus Ministry activities

7. How and in what manner is contact made with young people who do not frequent Church surroundings?

There is little or no direct contact in general; in some areas information and invitations on social media, personal invitations from friends; Welcome packages with information about Church and faith for those who only show up on holidays; Family members share information; some contact in prison ministry and programs and Campus Ministry programs open to all students; class reunions

b) Pastoral Vocational Programmes for Young People

8. How are families and communities involved in the vocational discernment of young people?

Some parish and Diocesan events and programs help to build a culture of vocations: Operation Andrew, Operation Myriam, Called by Name, parish vocation committees; open houses at seminaries, religious houses, days of prayer, information and

discernment; Serra Club activities. Some home-school families are more vocation oriented.

9. How do schools and universities or other educational institutions (civil or ecclesial) contribute to young people's formation in vocational discernment?

College Diocesan retreats, interviews with religious, videos of religious communities on diocesan TV and Youtube; National Vocations Awareness Week activities; personal interactions with religious and priests; some ministry experience with religious; create a culture of vocations, use programs designed within a framework of vocation; on-line retreats for students led by religious

10. In what manner are you taking into account the cultural changes resulting from the development of the digital world?

It is imperative to use all forms of social media for information on ecclesial life, Church ministries, vocational discernment: websites, FaceBook, Twitter, Youtube, etc. On-line survey of college students on topic of vocations, discernment and interest; don't wait for them to come to us; we must go to their world.

11. How can World Youth Days or other national or international events become a part of ordinary pastoral practice?

Use that model of WYD to collaborate among schools and youth groups in a diocese or area to build programs, focus and structure; wide advertising and planning to send youth to WYD; have youth on planning committees; financial support of sponsors; plan follow up meetings and activities for those who participated.

12. In what manner is your diocese planning experiences for the pastoral vocational programme for young people?

Create Diocesan Offices for specific youth evangelization and discipleship; Be inclusive of all religious vocations, not only priests; Diocesan prayer for vocations said in every parish; events for discernment / information with religious and priests participating; vocation directors speak in high schools; specific groups for prayer and discernment, ex. new immigrants

c) Pastoral Care Workers with Young People

13. How much time and in what manner do clergy and other formators provide for personal spiritual guidance?

They are available through vocation programs at the diocesan level as speakers, spiritual directors; on-line retreats connect students to religious in a personal spiritual guidance setting for a week which may encourage on-going direction; video meetings, face time; spirituality centers have trained spiritual directors

13. What initiatives and opportunities for formation are in place for those who provide pastoral vocational guidance?

Many organizations are dedicated to campus ministry programs, vocations and discernment and on-going formation with training programs for ministers of formation and vocations: (National Religious Vocation Conference, Religious Formation Conference, National Conference of Directors of Diocesan Vocations, etc.); Diocesan Vocation Councils of representatives of religious congregations of women and men; spiritual centers may offer programs for directors of formation; peer supervision groups of directors; on-going formation programs, webinars for all religious

14. What personal guidance is offered in seminaries?

Personal spiritual directors, mentors, faculty advisors

d) Specific Questions According to Geographic Areas

AMERICA

a. How does your community care for young people who experience extreme violence (guerrilla warfare, gangs, prison, drug addiction, forced marriages) and accompany them in various ways in their life?

Volunteers and professionals are trained for special services: faith, psychological and sociological approaches; Catholic chaplains are provided by Diocese/ Catholic Charities for counseling, prison ministry, addiction recovery, challenged youth(see <http://urban-impact.org>). There is a growing concern for new immigrants and refugees coming to US. Churches offer sanctuary

b. What formation is offered to support the engagement of young people in society and civil life, for the common good?

Schools, parishes, campus ministry programs focus on working for systemic change for the common good; local and distance hands-on service opportunities to society on the margins; school curricula stress need for social justice and service programs; mission trips; Pro-Life March to Washington DC every March; time for reflection, prayer and faith sharing on all the experiences to relate them to the Gospel call to service.

c. In a world which is greatly secularized, what pastoral activities are most effective for continuing the journey of faith after the Sacraments of Christian Initiation?

Service activities with adult modeling /mentors to integrate experiences and prayer/personal formation; lay leadership formation to pursue opportunities for youth to stay engaged in parish, diocesan programs, ex. as group leaders for younger students, assistant teachers of religious education, altar servers, music ministry, Bible study. Use social media as medium for engaging activities. Spend time with young people in a casual, informal setting

Sharing Activities

1. List the main types of pastoral activity in accompaniment and vocational discernment in your present situation.

Congregations offer "Come and See" weekends, discernment retreats, service opportunities with religious, on-line retreats with religious, Called by Name program, school presentations; Diocese offers list of trained spiritual directors, posters, invitations to involvement; Twilight evening of Prayer and conversation for women discerning vocation; monthly "Open Office for Discerners" to offer personal guidance in discernment; "Who Will Fill These Shoes?" evenings in parishes.

2. Choose three activities you consider most interesting and relevant to share with the Universal Church.

Regular animation and accompaniment of vocation directors: meetings and sharing of ideas

Theater groups that perform in parish involving youth

Theology on Tap

Global Sisters Report website for current involvement of religious women over the world

Twilight Evenings of Prayer for discernment: dinner, conversation, holy hour led by religious

Seasonal days of reflection at Diocesan level on aspects of discernment and religious life

R U Called? Program led by Bishop, vocation ministers, Office of Vocations: prayer, video: *The Face of Religious Life Today*, witness talks by young religious, social time and sharing

Consecrated Life Poster of women and men in serious discernment / formation in the diocese

Social media uses for information, engagement and sharing

Called By Name Program: 4 day event for ages 12-18, planned by vocation ministers of religious communities, Diocesan Vocation Office, seminarians and young priests and sisters: Music, praise and worship with keynote speaker. Sacraments are available throughout event; exhibits displayed and religious available to share.

School presentations by religious: Vocations Fair

Catholic Underground NYC: <http://catholicunderground.net/homr.html>

Additional resource:

Sr. Joyce Candidi, OSHJ from Youngstown, OH has developed a course designed to teach catechists on ALL levels of religious education to teach with a vocation frame of reference. This project expands the meaning of vocation to include three levels: (1) the universal call to holiness, (2) expressly lived through one's particular state in life, and (3) becoming both unique and communal on a day to day basis.

Please see the link for further explanation: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED516218>