

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

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Going, Going, Gone
 The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics

Principal Researchers

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 Principal Quantitative Researchers and Interviewers

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Disaffiliation is a **PROCESS**

that **BEGINS AT A YOUNG AGE**

and happens **OVER TIME**

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Existing Research

- A majority leave *before* age 21. About 1/2 become unaffiliated "Nones" and the other 1/2 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)

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They are leaving....

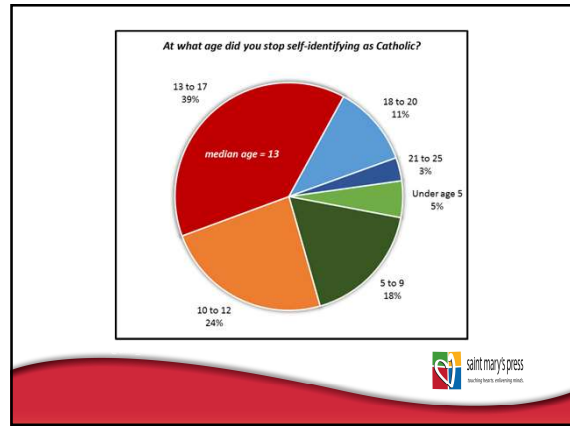
I left at 28. I left at 14. I left in 18. I am leaving now. I left at 26. I left at 35. I left at 20.
 I left at 16. I left at 17.

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At what age did disaffiliated youth report that they stopped identifying as Catholic?



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

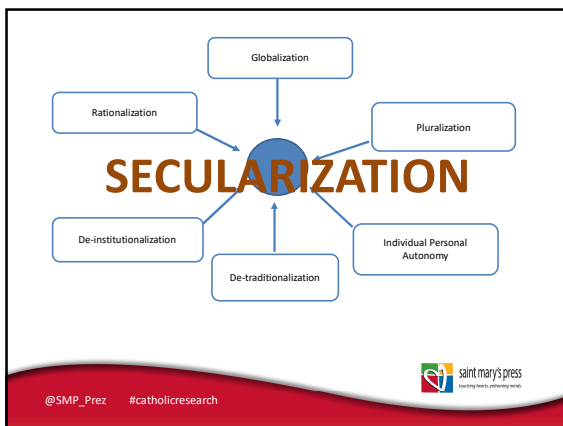
Hungers of Young People:

- Meaning and Purpose
- Connection
- Recognition
- Holy
- Justice

Where are my hungers being fed?




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“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



@SMP_Prez #catholicresearch

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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%

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“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

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Crafting a religious identity

is increasingly . . .

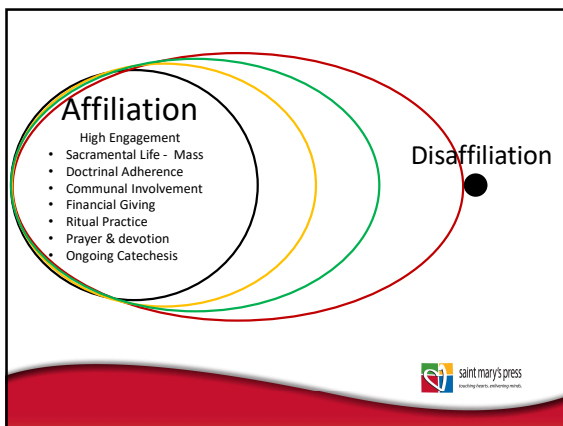
Personally Constructed and Piecemealed

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You don't need religion to have morals. If you can't determine right from wrong then you lack empathy, not religion.

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.”

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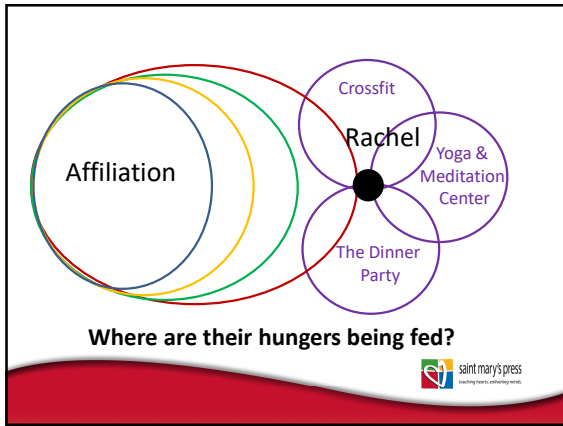
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Rachel's Story “Finally!”

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?

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THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT!

“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.”

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THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT!

Engagement is a strong emotional connection to the faith community

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THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT

It is more than involvement

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THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT!

It is a sense of belonging to the community

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WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?


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

Belonging behaving believing

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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!



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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!

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THE DIFFERENCE IS ENGAGEMENT!



AND ACCOMPANIMENT!

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A Process

- Contact
- Conversation
- Connection
- Commitment

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Be where they are

- skills for small talk
- spend the time to develop relationships

Contact

Be known

- develop a welcoming reputation
- newsletters, bulletin boards, billboards, parish/school life
- technology: website, email, podcasts



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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



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Touch points for young adults:

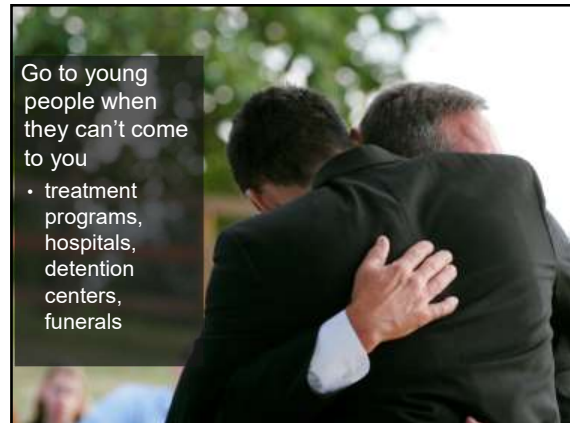


Sacramental Prep: Marriage Prep, Baptism, 1st Reconciliation and Eucharist, RCIA
 Liturgical celebrations: Christmas, Easter, Ash Wednesday, weddings, funerals
 Geography as evangelization: where can we make contact ... foster connections ... where is their 'holy ground'?

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Go to young people when they can't come to you

- treatment programs, hospitals, detention centers, funerals



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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!

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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!



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Connection



Develop Personal Relationships
the heart of ministry

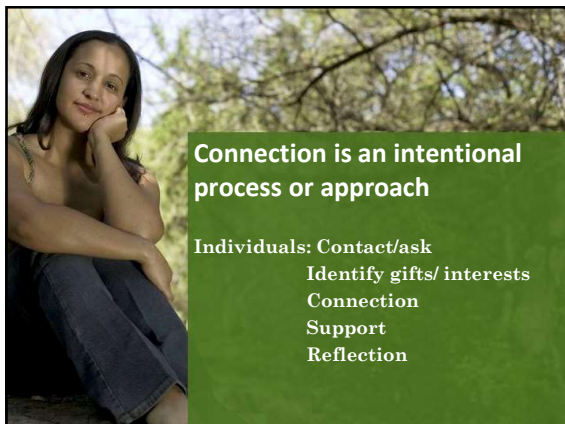
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Connection

Invite young people into the pastoral, liturgical, leadership ministries



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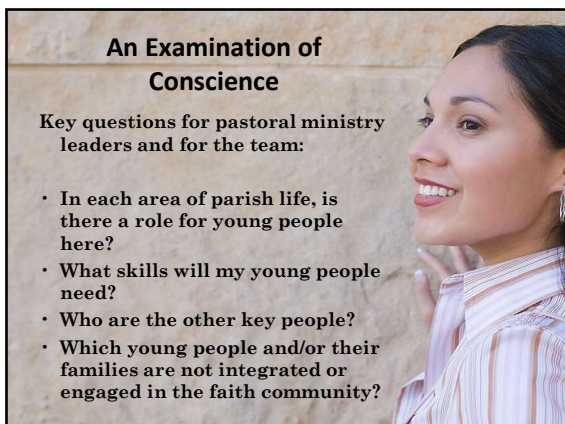
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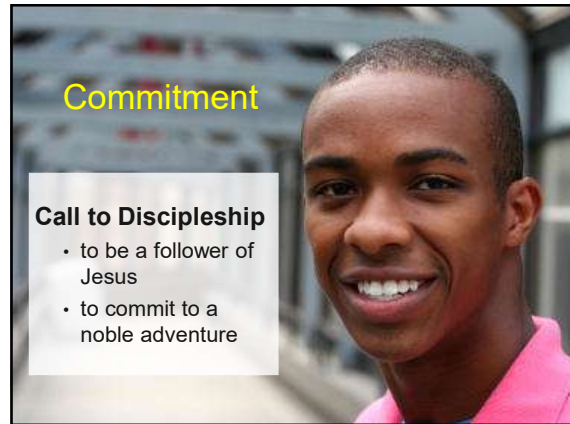


Commitment

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!

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Commitment

Call to Discipleship

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

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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?*

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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.”





Church historian R. Scott Appleby
Notre Dame University

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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*



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To be Catholic is to be comprehensive:


- *vertical and horizontal spirituality*
- *head, heart, and hands = know, love, and serve God*



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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*



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To be Catholic is to engage the world through, justice, service, and heroic charity ...

Catholic Social Teaching ... discipleship in action



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**The Jesus Experience:
The Heart of Catholicism as Spiritual Path**



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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?



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Yearnings


Where are their hungers being fed?



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"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



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