

April 25, 2010

I had the opportunity to celebrate Eucharist and engage in dialogue with a group of young adult Catholics from throughout Northwest Indiana. "Generation Christ" was the name given to the February symposium on the subject of young adult ministry held at Calumet College of St. Joseph in Whiting.

The name "Generation Christ" was borrowed from a recent effort by the United States Catholic Bishops to explore young adult ministry. We recognize the importance of young adults to parish communities, and we are also well aware of the declining number of young adults active in parish communities.

The Office for Youth & Young Adults will soon make a resource available to parishes that will summarize the results of the symposium. I salute the young adults who were present to have their voice heard. We have a strong group of young adult Catholics who are committed to their faith and want to see more of their peers gathered at Mass and participating in their parishes.

The young adults placed an emphasis on networking and experiencing a connection with other Catholics. Almost all in attendance agreed to connect with one another via internet social networking. While they would prefer that their own parish establish more programs specifically created for younger Catholics, they are willing to travel to other parishes to feel supported in their faith and seek fellowship. This is an age group that is not at all parochial.

They'd like to see more opportunities for adult education. Those present showed a real sense of pride in being Catholic, but admitted that they lack an adequate knowledge of Catholic doctrine. The young adults placed a great deal of importance on preaching, and felt a desire for clergy to connect the Word to their everyday lives. When asked to surface reasons for a lack of Mass attendance, uninspired liturgy was cited most often.

Most agreed that much of the disconnection between them and the Church was due to a lack of young adults being offered leadership roles. As a sign of hope, they did not point a finger of blame at their parishes, but instead pledged to make concerted efforts to volunteer to participate in dynamic ministries and assume roles on Parish Pastoral Councils.

I recently read an intriguing book, “Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults,” authored by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell. Smith was the lead researcher and author of 2005’s “Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers.” “Souls in Transition” serves as a follow-up. There is much we can learn from this book about young adults ages 18-23, their religious practices, the social influences that shape their lives, and the way they do or don’t change religiously and spiritually as they exit their teenage years.

The young adults I met at the symposium are not unlike their peers nationwide and across faiths. They seek an experiential faith and they are open to the Church – especially if it understands their worldview which is very idealistic, proactive, tolerant of others, and socially conscious.

There are many challenges facing us as we seek to understand and nurture this important segment of the faithful. The diocesan symposium affirmed what Smith’s book asserted: there are many apathetic Christians, but there are probably more young adults than you think that are just waiting to be inspired.

*Footnote: Kevin Driscoll, our Director of Young Adult Ministry, has established a Facebook page for young adults: facebook.com, search “Generation Christ.”*