

October 11, 2009

In my column two weeks ago, I challenged us older Catholics to listen to the voices of our youth. While they may be short on experience, and perhaps a bit naïve to the inner workings of our parishes and ministries, they are, by their Baptism, fully Christian and, therefore, as vested in the mission of Jesus as we are. We are blessed to have their fresh perspectives, renewed energy, and hopeful optimism.

Recently, our Diocesan Youth Council completed a five-month process that included Christian leadership skills' development and a group consensus process rooted in the dignity of the human person. The DYC produced a document titled, "Top Ten Challenges Facing High School-Aged Teens."

The process was facilitated by Kevin Driscoll, our Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, and Carole Sluce, Youth Ministry Coordinator at Our Lady of Consolation in Merrillville and DYC Youth Minister Liaison. But the document was written by the teens, giving youth leaders, catechists, teachers, priests, and parents an honest look at the world through the eyes of teens in Northwest Indiana.

The document is a quick and easy read. The issues, listed alphabetically, are: depression, drugs and alcohol, faith, media, money, personal image, school, sex, stereotypes, and stress. Each is followed by a paragraph description of why the DYC reps felt strongly about that issue. The teens also give friendly advice on how to address the issue in a healthy and positive way.

I commend the Council for formulating the list, and for making it easily available for anyone in ministry with today's teens. It is more difficult than ever

for adolescents to be Christ to one another when sin is so pervasive in their culture.

Regarding faith, the teens wrote: “Many teens have a hard time deciding what to believe, what to follow, and what to express. This struggle is internal, but it is influenced by many external factors such as peers and media. We encourage teens to have the courage to be proud of their faith and what they believe.”

I, too, encourage all teens touched by Christ’s love to have the courage to express that love, to share their beliefs, and to proclaim their faith to others not yet touched by God’s love. The teen culture is filled with youth struggling to fill a void that God can fill. It is my hope that teens who participate in parish youth events, or diocesan events like CYX, TAPT, or Grásta Dé have more than a good time, and are truly inspired to be disciples of Christ, and to spread the Gospel message.

While the Internet has been a developing medium for some time, the Web has quickly emerged as the primary medium of choice for adolescents and young adults. How we as Church leaders embrace the Internet will have a drastic impact on our ability to connect with a large number of Catholics.

As with any media, the Internet has a dark side. We’ve seen far too many cases of sexual predators. Online pornography addiction is alarming. But the Internet also offers us an incredible opportunity to reach out toward a vast community to evangelize the faith, as well. Today’s Internet is interactive. It gives us the ability to proclaim the Gospel, promote a culture of life, and to listen to the needs of those we serve.

In an era in which nearly all teens carry Internet-enabled cellular phones, I am delighted to learn that the recent Catholic Youth Xperience found a way to integrate social networking into the program as a means of evangelization,

encouraging teens to “Tweet” during CYX. Parents, friends, and family were also given the opportunity to follow along on their computers at home with live streaming video.

Wrote the DYC reps, “Teens can monitor how much the media will be able to affect them by making good choices: avoiding immoral behavior, images, and forms of communications, and seeking alternative media outlets.”

I encourage everyone to read the list at our diocesan youth Website, garyoyya.org, and please join me in praying for the young people on our Diocesan Youth Council as they strive to serve us well.