



YOUNG PEOPLE: OUR FUTURE AND OUR NOW

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“Youth are like fire. We flame, we bring light, give warmth but are also under the threat of getting extinguished.

Today we are flickering, we may either blow off into the darkness or blow up into wildfire to burn down everything.

The church needs to kindle these sparks into the right flames.”

Percival Holt, Indian Catholic Youth Movement, National President

We often refer to young people as “our future.” Although there's truth to that statement, we can't just look at our younger Catholics as the future of our church. They are also our “now.” In order to ensure an authentic, vibrant, and empowering Church; a Church where all are invited to answer the call to holiness and a deeper relationship with Christ, we cannot discount what our younger folks are telling us. We need to listen, be willing to learn, and courageously and humbly walk side by side with our younger brothers and sisters. As the body of Christ, no matter what age category we fall under, our baptism unites us in purpose, as does our Profession as Secular Franciscans. We must not allow age, ideologies, life circumstances, or even personality traits divide us. Rather, our love of God and desire to bring the Gospel into a hurting world should bring us together.

What are our youth saying? What do they need or want in order to draw them into a relationship with God and others who share their faith? How can we help them, and how can they help us?

Many beautiful and inspiring quotes have come from two recent gatherings. More than 14,000 young people participated in the pre-synod survey and meeting, and 36 young people attended the “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment” synod last month. Here are a few quotes that give a little insight into their minds and hearts:

“I would like to be part of a church in which everyone has a place and in which the voice of each member is considered, without 'demanding' a certain prototype of faithful, in a profound encounter with the diversity in which Christ manifests himself.” (Silvia Retamales—Chilean bishops' youth office)

After sharing about how young and old islanders lived and worked in the past, sailing from island to island, the younger rowing the boats, elders using stars and currents to guide, one young person said “until we start paddling together by way of listening and equipping our young people with the tools to navigate the inevitable storms, our canoe will only float into irrelevance. If you, our elders, set the right course and steer this canoe in the right direction, we the young faithful are ready to help you power it through the challenges.” (Moenono-Kolio—Pacific Islands, Caritas International Youth Forum)

“Yes, we exist!” One young sister says. “We are a generation that strongly values clarity and authenticity, perhaps to a fault. Slick, expensive presentations go ignored, while raw, sincere testimony is held with reverence.” (Sister Benedicta Turner of the Daughters of St. Paul)

“We want to be part of the solution to conflicts. We believe that young people must be the first authors and promoters of their personal fulfillment.” (Yithzak Gonzalez—Secretary of youth office, Panama)

“Let us be Jesus to others, letting them see the source of true light in our own lives and relationships.” (Nicole Perez, catechist, Philippines)

“Young people need to see examples of holiness so that they know that Christianity is true, it's beautiful and it's attainable.” (Carmelite Brother Neil Conlisk, 30 yrs. Old)

These quotes help us realize our younger generation is asking to be a vital, necessary part of the church. As Franciscans, our Rule calls us to “go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people.” (Art. 6) Many have ignored or actually run from the fact that the younger generation is part of that mission. If they are brave enough to approach us with their questions, doubts, good ideas, and challenges — if they are courageous and humble enough to admit they might need help discerning their vocation and growing in their faith — our imperative is to find ways to listen and respond.