Engaging Young People in the Faith Community: The Pain and the Promise!

Objectives:
- Review the case for ‘engage and integrate’
- Describe ‘engagement’ as a ministerial approach
- Identify practical engagement strategies

PEW STUDY: US RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE SURVEY 2008
- Congregational membership is shrinking
  - Believers, not belongers?
  - Religion-less spirituality
  - Privatized, individualistic
- 44% of adults have changed their religious affiliation since birth
  - Growth of religious minorities
  - American mobility
  - Interfaith marriage
- 20% of adults are unaffiliated

RETENTION RATES
- 76% Jews
- 70% Mormons
- 68% Catholics
- 60% Baptists
- 59% Lutherans
- 47% Pentecostals and Methodists
- 45% Episcopalians
- 44% Protestant, nondenominational
- 40% Presbyterians

The Challenge for Pastoral Leadership
- 60% of those who leave the Catholic Church, do so between the ages of 13 – 23. (Pew 2010)
- Of those who leave, 50% become unaffiliated and 50% join Protestant Churches
- Why do they leave? It’s NOT only about doctrine or theology, it’s about experience … “parish doesn’t meet my spiritual (emotional, physical, social, etc.) needs.”
- How and where are those needs being met?

• Engagement includes …

• Integrating young people into the faith community includes …
69% of her generation will be confirmed
91% of her generation were confirmed
79% of her generation were confirmed
CARA, 2008

THE DIFFERENCE IS ....
ENGAGEMENT!
Engagement is a strong emotional connection to the parish

THE DIFFERENCE IS ....
ENGAGEMENT!
It is a sense of belonging to the community

THE DIFFERENCE IS ....
ENGAGEMENT!
It is more than involvement

RISE OF THE “NONE”S
32%
Of 18-29 year old identify themselves as unaffiliated with any religion

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?
More often than not, engagement leads to spiritual commitment.

Spiritually committed individuals are much more likely to exhibit the outcomes of inviting, serving, giving, and life satisfaction.
WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

A new paradigm: “In most cases, belief does not lead to belonging, belonging leads to belief”
Belonging ….. behoving ….. belief!

NATIONAL STUDY OF YOUTH AND RELIGION

“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.”

A different generation…

Teenage faith is very conventional.

“The vast majority of U.S. teens are not alienated or rebellious… Most are quite content to follow in their parents’ footsteps.”

THE PARENTAL MIRROR

“…most American youth faithfully mirror the aspirations, lifestyles, practices, and problems of the adult world into which they are socialized…”

THE PARENTAL MIRROR

“The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.”
“GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES”

"Yet our relationship with Jesus is found in our relationship with the community of Jesus – the Church. The way to Christ is through the community in which he lives ... Jesus is present in and among his disciples, the People of God”.

RTV Goal # 2

To draw young people into responsible participation in the life, work and mission of the faith community.

Engaging young people

The community is the context.

How do we:

- invite/welcome
- provide hospitality
- build relationships
- foster youth participation and belonging
- provide support
- discipleship-doing faith
- engage parents

A Process or Approach

Individuals: Contact/ask
Identify gifts and interests
Connection
Support
Reflection

A Process or Approach:

Connect to existing parish ministries:

- Liturgical
- Pastoral
- Leadership

and organizations:

* lay the groundwork with the organizations’ leaders and or members – engage them in engaging young people, invite them into youth ministry

A Process or Approach:

Integrating “groups of young people”:

- Parish events (social, service)
- Liturgical events (Stations of the Cross, Adoration)
Remember:

• The pastoral leader needs to provide/arrange for training as appropriate
  ➢ Involve the parish staff
  ➢ Involve the key volunteer ministers

• Create an ‘engagement attitude’ in your adult team
  ➢ Make them ‘connectors’

Integration and Engagement as Advocacy

• Be their voice ... enable them to find their voice

• Mass:
  ✓ Special commissionings
  ✓ special blessings
  ✓ Youth reflections at Liturgy
  ✓ Intercessions

• Create prayer partners with parish adults

An Examination of Conscience

Key questions for the youth ministry leader and for the team:

• In each area of parish life, is there a role for young people here?
• What skills will my young people need?
• Who are the other key people?
• Which young people and/or their families are not integrated or engaged in the faith community?

ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE

• Engage parents!
• Connect young people with caring adults
• Educate young people in the faith
• Practice “articulation” and application
• Model religious practices and skills
• Connect youth with the faith community

Ministry Assessment

When it comes to engaging young people:

• What are our strengths?
• What are our challenges?

Serving those who serve the young Catholic Church