

# ***YOUTH CONGRESS ON THE JOURNEY IN FAITH AND GRACE***

## ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

The *Youth Congress on the Journey in Faith and Grace* was held on February 18, 2006 at the Adam's Mark Hotel in Buffalo. Over one hundred young people (ages 14-19) representing 58 faith communities engaged in dialogue with one another and with members of the Diocesan Strategic Planning Commission.

### **Top Concerns of Young People**

Teenagers in our diocese are worried that the following will occur within our church:

1. People's involvement in (and subsequent ownership of) the planning process may be limited.
2. Faith communities will not welcome and include new members.
3. Mass attendance and involvement of laity in church will continue to decrease.
4. A lack of openness to change may limit the potential benefits of this process.
5. Catholics will lose a sense of connection to their local faith community.

### **Top Hopes of Young People**

The youth of the diocese hope that *The Journey in Faith and Grace* helps to create the following results:

1. Greater unity among all people, especially between parishes and between generations.
2. An increased value on youth input and inclusion of youth's perspectives in decision making.
3. An increase in the church's activities for social justice and service to the poor.
4. Greater youth involvement and leadership in faith communities.
5. A stronger church resulting from greater involvement and more vibrant expressions of faith.

### **Needs of Youth**

When asked to name the needs that young people have that they hope the church might address, the most commonly named needs were:

1. To be welcomed and accepted in faith communities
2. To be invited and encouraged to participate more fully in faith communities
3. More understanding and openness from adults in faith communities
4. Catechesis that is more age appropriate and applicable to daily life
5. Help with applying their faith to daily life
6. Opportunities to be included in leadership and decision making
7. Opportunities to engage in community service
8. Opportunities to be more involved in liturgical celebrations
9. Liturgical celebrations and homilies to which teens can more easily relate and connect
10. Role models, mentors and others to encourage and inspire

### **Gifts of Youth**

The young people recognized that their gifts are needed in order for the church to carry out its mission of building the kingdom of God. The gifts they can share in service to the church are:

1. Faith
2. Excitement and enthusiasm
3. Energy and vitality
4. A new outlook / new perspective
5. New ideas and hopes for the future
6. Focus on the future
7. Hope and optimism
8. Openness to change
9. Diversity
10. Laughter, humor and ability to have fun
11. Happiness
12. Loyalty, dedication and commitment
13. Leadership
14. Intelligence and openness to learning
15. Creativity
16. Musical talents
17. Artistic talents (dancing, acting, drawing, painting, etc.)
18. Desire to serve and help others
19. Passion for social justice
20. Awareness of the "real world"

**Ideas for Vibrant Parishes**

The teenagers considered each of the criteria for vibrant parishes and offered the following ideas.

**Prayer and Worship:** prayer and worship opportunities that are full of energy, convey a sense of welcome, and in which all people participate; homilies that relate to youth, readers of all ages, interpretive liturgical dancing or gesturing, uplifting music, and a variety of prayer groups open to all.

**Spirit of Community:** welcoming attitudes, opportunities for parishioners to bond, and intentional efforts to communicate excitement for faith, openness to change and an openness to new people; ministry strategies such as parties or dinners with food and music from different cultures, cultural nights or talent shows, outreach to divorced/remarried people and homosexuals, grief counseling, orientations for new parishioners, greeters at Masses and signs and symbols that show welcome in church buildings.

**Lay Leadership and Involvement:** a larger role for deacons, functioning parish councils, lay parish administrators, ministry fairs, leadership training programs in parishes and interactive web sites. Get people involved through personal invitations and constant encouragement.

**Faith Formation:** help all ages learn about their faith by: using examples that are relevant to each age group being targeted, hands-on activities (e.g. skits), inviting older teens and young adults to teach the younger children, intergenerational programs, retreats, Bible studies, discussion groups, children’s liturgy or teen liturgy, youth groups, groups for adults to learn about their faith, and bringing faith values to other activities in which young people are already engaged (e.g. dancing, singing, sports, etc.).

**Pastoral Ministry and Collaborative Administration:** a variety of vibrant ministries: youth ministry, RCIA, hotlines, grief support, Bible studies, discussion groups on “faith + real life” with youth involved or leading them, intergenerational catechesis, teen Christian bands, teen music ministry, liturgical dance groups, family and marriage counseling, and parish councils with youth representatives; more collaboration with ministers from other churches (Catholic and non-Catholic) for diverse ideas.

**Service and Justice:** teach Catholics the Church’s views on social justice and focus on “the two feet of social justice;” encourage individuals to take action, sponsor programs to help parishioners learn about others’ perspectives, involve different age groups in working together for service and justice, and partner with other churches to achieve greater results.

**Evangelization:** engage in purposeful, Christ-centered activities to spread the Good News, including free, Christian concerts, motivational speakers, interfaith services, mission trips and service projects, open houses for potential parishioners, Church social events (picnics, lawn fetes, dinners, parties), Bible camps, ministry fairs, and publicity in the newspaper, fliers and brochures and through word of mouth.

**Financial stability:** pay bills to provide for facility needs, but also provide funding for ministries that serve people; value modesty and simplicity; allocate some funds for charity and investing in Christian stock market funds; educate parishioners on tithing and stewardship.

**Buildings and property:** consolidate and utilize fewer buildings; use décor that will be appealing to all age groups; murals in appropriate places painted by teenagers or children.

**Conclusions**

Young Catholics care about the future of the church, they want it to thrive in the future, and they want to play an integral role in the church. To draw forth the potential that youth offer, faith communities must show they are:

- ◆ Communities of welcome and openness
- ◆ Communities of invitation and involvement
- ◆ Communities of service and justice
- ◆ Communities of discipleship and adventure

As we revitalize our diocese, teens say: ***“Youth are valuable resources, and we want to be included. Use us!”***

**The complete Youth Congress report and resources to assist with efforts to strengthen parish ministry with adolescents are available from the Youth Department web site: [www.buffalodiocese.org/youth/](http://www.buffalodiocese.org/youth/).**