

Diocese of Buffalo

Listening in Love and Hope Synod Report

ATTACHMENT 2B – SUMMARY OF YOUNG ADULT INPUT

The following is a summary of Synodal responses gathered through a collaboration between the Diocese of Buffalo Synod team and the Movement to Restore Trust. The Diocese Synod held small group sessions with active Young Adult Ministries, and the Movement to Restore Trust held individual and small group interviews to collect Young Adults views on Church. Josh Merlo who participated in the design and development of the approaches for both groups prepared the following summary.

1. Demographics

- 0. Around 75 total respondents
- 1. More female than male respondents
 - 0. Probably around a 60-40 split
- 2. Average respondent age around 25
 - 0. Age range ran from late teens to late thirties
- 3. Most respondents were raised Catholic, received sacraments of initiation, had some Catholic schooling
- 4. Of non-Catholic respondents, all were either Christian or disaffiliated from Catholicism
 - 0. Around 15-20 disaffiliated persons
 - 1. Importantly, some respondents who met the definition of ‘disaffiliated’ self-identified as Catholic
 - 0. These respondents no longer attended masses or other communal religious functions
 - 1. These respondents maintained Catholic spiritualities
 - 2. Disaffiliated persons who did not self-identify as Catholic classified themselves as atheists, agnostics, spiritual but not religious, or nothing in particular

2. Assessment of the Church

- 0. *Identity issues*
 - 0. The Church is capitulating to social and political pressures instead of “speaking the truth”
 - 1. The Church is regressing into a pre-Vatican-II traditionalist mindset that emphasizes legalism and fideism over love and understanding

2. The Church is too insular and not welcoming enough (especially to LGBTQ persons, ethnic minorities, women)
3. The Church needs to adapt to new societal, cultural, and political norms and values
4. The Church (especially the American Church) has become overly politicized and partisan
 0. Example: anti-abortion zealots that don't also support pacifism and the abolishing of the death penalty because of political identity
5. It can feel uncomfortable to identify as Catholic
 0. Because of the problems in the Church
 1. Because of the common connotation of 'Catholic' with being unaccepting or bigoted
6. Being Catholic can provide a sense of purpose, but discerning a vocation isn't a process that is well-explained or well-supported
 0. Trying to find "the one" God-given purpose a person's life has is rooted in poor formation, leads to distressing pressure and self-doubt
7. Catholic life is centered on the sacraments
8. Being Catholic (or even having been Catholic) comes with the emotional weight of Catholic guilt

1. Education and formation

0. Catechesis, especially of cradle Catholics, is insufficient
1. Persons don't understand what the Church teaches and why the Church teaches it because they were never taught
 0. Homilies might be a vehicle to correct this
2. Catholic schools and colleges don't provide a good experience with Catholicism
 0. Basic Catholic beliefs aren't adequately explained
 1. Being authentically Catholic is met with peer hostility
 2. Representatives of the Church don't interact with students in ways that keep students engaged with or interested in (or even positively disposed to) the Church
3. The Church needs to better provide moral guidance

2. Institutional failures

0. Sexual abuse
1. Clericalism
2. Lack of honesty and transparency from authority figures
3. Lack of institutional roles for women
4. No developed theology of womanhood
5. Lack of listening to and acting on the needs and desires of the faithful

6. Lack of listening to and acting on the needs and desires of the disaffiliated
 7. The increasing rate of disaffiliation among youth and young adults
 8. Lack of engagement with young adults, support for young adults, focus on churching young adult population
 9. Overemphasis of church finances compared to more spiritual elements of Catholicism
 10. Implicit support of white supremacy, explicit and implicit devaluing of ethnic minorities
 11. Too regimented and strict – the Church has “left the love of God behind”
3. *Evangelization*
0. Outreach is crucial
 0. More outreach (food, shelter, care for community) that isn’t expressly connected to converting persons is needed
 1. Catholicism is best expressed through “leading with love”
 2. Needs to start with listening to a person, not immediately attempting to convert that person
 3. Religious beliefs are often forced on younger persons without awareness of power disparities in relationships or respect for individual wants
4. *Community*
0. At its best, the Church provides a sense of community, belonging
 1. Individual churches need to offer more opportunities for building community
 0. Social events
 1. Especially important to offer opportunities for young adults to build relationships with each other

3. Assessment of Christians

0. *Christians don’t live up to the demands of Christianity*
0. Believing in the Christian religion requires personal commitment to Christian values, actions consistent with those values
 0. Christians should love and respect God and all other persons, and, to a lesser degree, the rest of creation
 1. Need to hold themselves to a higher standard, the same standard they hold others to
 2. Christians are hypocrites
 0. Christians need to act on the things they say they believe
 3. Christians are judgmental

- 0. “Traditional (extreme) Catholics will turn others away ... especially those [traditional Catholics] with sexist, racist, or generally judgmental tendencies”
- 1. *Christians don’t sincerely and empathetically listen to non-Christians*
 - 0. Christians only “listen to your story” to find an opening to proselytize
 - 1. True openness and care for a person demand more respect for that person’s values and choices
 - 0. “Look at me like a human being; don’t look at me like I’m a project.”
 - 2. Christians need to be more open to hearing persons they don’t share beliefs with
 - 0. “If you’re not going to have a conversation, then leave me alone.”
 - 3. Supporting another person doesn’t mean secretly trying to convert that person
- 2. *Christians need to model the love of Jesus*
 - 0. Be genuinely welcoming
 - 1. Christian love can be very ingenuine, especially when expressed through institutions
 - 2. There is something attractive about the love of God Jesus expresses, an unconditioned and equal love for all persons
 - 3. There is something attractive about Pope Francis’s loving embrace of those historically marginalized by the Church and his pointed refusal to be judgmental of those persons who provoke the ire of many more traditional Christians

4. Common themes

- 0. Importance of personal commitment to religion – shouldn’t just be done because of accidental relationships (family, culture), should influence everyday behavior if taken seriously
- 1. Questions about religious faith provoked by exposure to persons with different beliefs, apparent contradictions among articles of faith (especially regarding the treatment of women, LGBTQ persons, ethnic minorities)
- 2. Many self-identified Catholics and self-identified disaffiliated persons don’t believe that going to church is definitive of being religious or important for being religious
- 3. Many self-identified Catholics and self-identified disaffiliated persons are disapproving of or hostile toward the institutional Church while being approving of or sympathetic toward the Catholic faith

4. Many self-identified Catholics and self-identified disaffiliated persons are critical of the Church's and Catholics' being ingenuine and hypocritical – teaching love without acting lovingly
5. Importance of the Church being welcoming and accepting, listening and understanding – the Francis Church contrasted with the traditionalist Church; the former model is vastly and strongly preferred
6. Importance of LGBTQ persons' treatment by Church, Christians – cannot both be a Catholic and an ally to the LGBTQ community
7. Disaffiliation is a serious and difficult and painful decision
8. The disaffiliated are not a generalizable whole of angry atheists or disinterested and apathetic hedonists – Christians need to make a better effort at hearing the stories of the disaffiliated
9. Christians need to listen to learn, not half listen only for the sake of conversion or judging – non-Christians are valuable persons who deserve respect and love as persons, not only as potential Christians