

# Realities Facing Youth and Young Adults in the United States

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*Adapted from the national report developed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in preparation for the Vatican's XV Ordinary Synod of Bishops on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment" that took place in 2017 and 2018; statistics were compiled by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.*

## GENERAL STATISTICS

According to the most recent estimates of the United States Census Bureau, the population of the United States as of July 1, 2016 was 323,127,513. The Census Bureau estimates that the U.S. population will grow to 347,335,000 by 2025 (7.5% growth from 2016). In 2016, there were an estimated 62,363,610 people between the ages of 16 and 29 residing in the United States. This represented 19.3% of the total population in 2016, and this percentage will likely remain constant in the near future.

In 2016, social scientists measured the proportion of adults self-identifying as Catholic at 23.5% in the General Social Survey (GSS). Gallup, a commercial polling group, estimated that 22% of adults were Catholic in 2016. CARA's own polling estimates, through GfK Custom Research, estimate 24% of adults were Catholic in this year. The average of these three estimates is 23.2%. Polls only include those ages 18 and older. It is a fairly safe assumption that the religious affiliation of minors closely mirrors that of adults. Thus, CARA estimates that there were 74,965,538 Catholics in the United States in 2016.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average age of first marriage for men was 29.5 and the average age for women was 27.4. Americans are waiting longer to marry than in the recent past. The average age for men entering religious life in the United States is 29 and for women it is 28. CARA has collected this information for the last two years. The average age of ordination for diocesan priests was 34 in 2016 and for religious priests it was 36. Controlling for time in seminary, it is evident that Catholics tend to marry, enter religious life, or enter the seminary in their late 20s or early 30s.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports on employment and unemployment among young people between the ages of 16 and 24 years of age.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, there were 20.5 million employed in this age range, representing 53.2 percent of this population. This population is most likely to be working between April and July months, thus unemployment varies seasonally. The largest numbers of these youth and young adults are employed in the following sectors: leisure, hospitality, and food services (25%); retail trade (18%), and education and health services (13%). In 2016, 11.5% of youth and young adults were unemployed representing 2.6 million individuals. Of these unemployed, 1.9 million were seeking full-time employment.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also releases a report on young adults between the ages of 18 and 28.<sup>2</sup> On average, those in this age group had seven jobs during this period of their life. As they age, transitions between jobs become less common. Women are more likely than men to attend college (72 percent of women compared to 63 percent of men) and earn a four-year college degree during this part

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary*. August 17, 2016.

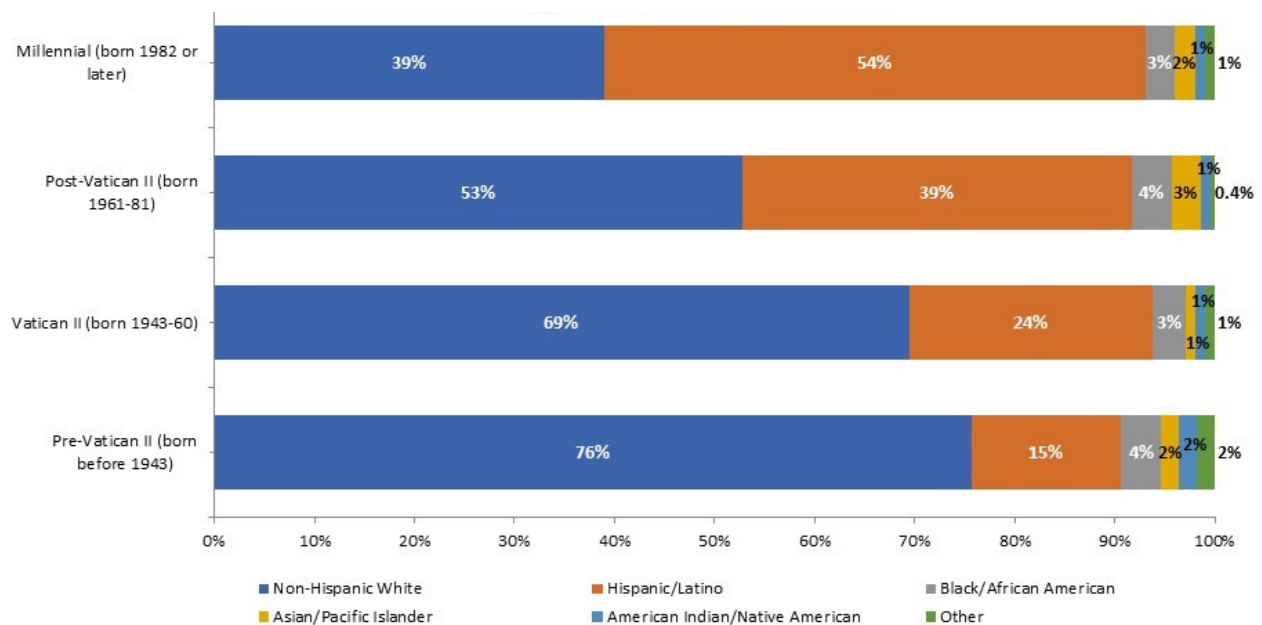
<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. *America's Young Adults at 29: Labor Market Activity, Education and Partner Status: Results from a Longitudinal Survey*. April 8, 2016

of their life (34 percent of women compared to 26 percent of men). The GSS allows for analysis of those ages 18 to 29. Aggregating three surveys from 2012, 2014, and 2016 to ensure sufficient numbers of observations, this source estimates 45% in this age group are working full-time. 22% were working part-time, 1.5% were temporarily out of work, 6% were unemployed or laid off, 17% in school, 8% were “keeping house,” and the small remainder report other working statuses. Only 5% of these young adults indicate they are self-employed. Due to the recent 2020 recession, these numbers are likely to change.

In 2017, only 40.5% of young adults in the United States, ages 18 to 24, were enrolled in a degree-granting postsecondary institution (e.g., a two- or four-year college or university), according to an analysis comparing collegiate enrollment to the U.S. Census Bureau data, collected by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the independent, non-partisan research division of the United States Department of Education. This number (40.5%) is further broken down: 10.6% are enrolled in two-year collegiate programs and 29.9% in four-year programs. This means 59.5% of all U.S. young adults ages 18 to 24 are *not* enrolled in any postsecondary institution.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the data presented above, it is also important to provide some specific statistics relevant to the African American, Asian and Pacific Island, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, and immigrant and refugee communities. This is done to ensure that this report is fully comprehensive and inclusive of the rapidly changing realities regarding the diverse landscape of youth and young adults in the U.S. It is also important to understand that there has been a dramatic change in the ethnic, cultural, and racial makeup of U.S. Catholics from the pre-Vatican II generation until now. Although the Church in the United States has always been diverse, the United States has reached a point (especially among millennials and younger generations) where the majority of youth and young adult Catholics in the United States are no longer of European ancestry.

**Percentage on Race and Ethnicity of the U.S. Adult Catholic Population by Generation**  
*based on a 2013 demographic study by CARA, carried out at the request of the USCCB*



<sup>3</sup> Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics, Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions...1970 through 2015*. July 2016.

Approximately 42.5 million U.S. residents who self-identify as non-Hispanic white are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 21.6% of the 196.8 million people of this race and ethnicity in the country. This represents the single largest racial or ethnic group among Catholics in the United States.

Some 29.7 million U.S. residents who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 58.9% of the 50.5 million people of this race and ethnicity in the country. About 16 million of the nation's Hispanic or Latino Catholics are estimated to be born in the United States. Some 13.7 million are foreign-born.

About 2.9 million U.S. residents who self-identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 19.1% of the 15.2 million people of this race and ethnicity in the country. This includes an estimated 2.2 million Filipino Catholics, 483,600 Vietnamese Catholics, 340,900 Chinese Catholics, 199,700 Korean Catholics, 147,400 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Catholics, 146,400 Indian Catholics, and 56,000 Japanese Catholics.<sup>4</sup> Some 76% of Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander Catholics are estimated to self-identify as Filipino (alone and in combination with other identities).

Approximately 2.9 million U.S. residents who self-identify as black, African American, African, or Afro-Caribbean are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 7.5% of the 38.9 million people of this race and ethnicity in the country. However, about 28% of this Catholic population group also self-identifies as Hispanic or Latino (e.g., most often among Afro-Caribbean Catholic populations). The non-Hispanic African American, African, or Afro-Caribbean Catholic population is estimated to include 2.1 million people, representing about 5.6% of the 37.7 million people of this race and ethnicity. There are an estimated 330,000 Catholics who indicate they were born in a Sub-Saharan African country, representing about 26.4% of the 1.2 million U.S. residents reporting a place of birth in this region.<sup>5</sup>

Some 536,600 U.S. residents who self-identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 18.3% of the 2.9 million people of this race and ethnicity in the country.<sup>6</sup>

The CARA Cultural Diversity in the Church Study (Multicultural and Ethnic Parishes Survey) also identified the following realities:

- Several sub-groups, which also tend to be younger in age than others, are especially likely to report that they are single and have never been married. These include multi-racial respondents

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<sup>4</sup> Some of these individuals identify with more than one Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander group. Adding these totals would double count some individuals. Thus, the total population of Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander is *smaller* than the sum of these sub-groups.

<sup>5</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa includes any country in Africa with the exception of Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt. It is not possible to remove people self-identifying their race and ethnicity as something *other* than black, African, or African American from those in this sub-group based on country of birth.

<sup>6</sup> Using seven waves of the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted from 2000 to 2012, CARA estimates that 18.3 percent of Native Americans self-identify as Catholic. This is based on the religious affiliation of respondents indicating that they are "American Indian or Alaskan Native" on the *first* of three race and ethnicity inquiries made in a survey interview. If one were to use all three references, Catholic affiliation falls to 11.9 percent. However, this broader group likely includes many who would *not* self-identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native on their Census form. If the 11.9 percent affiliation is used as an estimator, the number of American Indian or Alaskan Native Catholics is 348,938.

(30%), U.S. born Hispanic or Latino respondents (30%), other Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander respondents (30%), U.S. born black or African American respondents (27%), and American Indian or Native Alaskan respondents (25%).

- Two sub-groups are more likely than others to say they are not married but are living with a partner. These include foreign-born Hispanic or Latino respondents (11%) and American Indian or Native Alaskan respondents (8%).

Some of the groups consulted, such as Instituto Fe y Vida, conducted important research work over the years. Some statistics worth noting are that the number of Hispanic/Latino Catholics under the age of 30 is estimated at 22.2 million (source: Dr. Hosffman Ospino, Boston College, 2016). Most notably, more than half of all Catholics under age 18 in the United States are of Hispanic/Latino origin. Assuming the trend continues, Latinos are poised to become the majority of all U.S. Catholics in less than 40 years.

Despite the slowdown of immigration from Latin America over the last decade, mostly due to the economic crisis and stricter immigration enforcement practices, the U.S. Hispanic population has continued to grow due to fertility rates. It is estimated that two thirds of the country's current Latino population was born in the United States (source: U.S. Census Data and Pew Research Center), far surpassing the number of Latin American immigrants, though percentages vary from diocese to diocese.

Other interesting data that emerged for the different cultural communities includes:

- Approximately 8% of adult African Americans in the United States are Catholic (2010 U.S. Census). The majority are Protestant, including many former Catholics. Today, 76% of African American Catholics attend predominantly European-American or multicultural Catholic parishes, and 24% belong to historically or predominantly Black Catholic parishes. The latter tend to be significantly more invested in parish life (source: Notre Dame University, Study on African American Catholics, 2011).
- Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Catholics represent a broad spectrum of ethnic backgrounds and languages. Nearly eight in ten are first generation immigrants, born outside of the United States. A similar proportion speak a language other than English at home. Except for Filipino immigrants to the US, Asian immigrants are disproportionately Catholic compared to their presence in their countries of origin. The second generation (those born in the U.S. to immigrant parents, and those immigrants who were raised in this country) make up the second largest share of Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics. Most API Catholics see their ethnicity and religion as equally important to their sense of who they are. For some, these identities work in harmony; for others, they present tensions, especially when relating to non-Catholic co-ethnics in their families and communities. Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics tend to assign strong importance to traditional Church teachings, such as the Vatican's authority, social justice, and a celibate male clergy (source: *Asian and Pacific Island Catholics in the United States, A Report*, by Dr. Tricia Bruce, Maryville College, October 2015).
- People of Asian and Pacific Island descent are the fast-growing segment of the U.S. Catholic populations at about 3 million. The largest segment are Filipinos who are approximately 2.2 million. And on the smaller side of the spectrum are other groups of more recent arrivals, such as

the Hmong. There are between 100,000 and 140,000 Hmong people living in the United States, of which an estimated 10% are Catholics (source: <http://www.hanca.us/about-hmong/>).

- St. Thomas Korean Catholic Center (Anaheim, CA, in the Diocese of Orange) provided estimated ages for marriage and entering seminary or religious life. According to their estimates, the average age for Korean American women to marry is between 26-28 years of age while the average age of Korean American men to marry is 30-31 years of age, and the age for entering seminary/consecrated life is in between 24-27 years of age.
- Native American and Native Alaskan Communities have one of the highest rates of teenagers living at home and the lowest rates of children in Catholic schools. They also have one of the highest rates of individuals living with a partner without being married. Native American Catholics have a high rate of infant baptism, but one of the lowest rates of receiving Confirmation. The communities surveyed also place a high degree of importance in cultural activities and cultural ministry to reach out to Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (source: *CARA Report, Cultural Diversity Study, Parish Phase*, October 2015).

For migrants, refugees and itinerant peoples (not included with the other cultural and ethnic groups mentioned above), some notable data is as follows:

- According to the latest General Social Survey (GSS), in the United States there are 4.8 million European immigrants, 2 million Africans, 1 million Haitians and about 800,000 Brazilians. 37% of the estimated Catholic population born in Europe, the Caribbean, Brazil, Guyana, or Africa living in the United States are non-citizens. This percentage varies within each community. The largest numbers reside within the following arch/dioceses: Miami, New York, Brooklyn, Boston, Newark, Chicago, Orlando, Rockville Centre, and Palm Beach.
- There are 3.2 million seasonal and migrant farmworkers in the United States. They work in food production-related industries such as farming, fishing and crop production. In a travel-related occupation, there are approximately 5.5 million residents. Most are truck drivers (4.2 million). There are an estimated 785,121 residents in the United States who are working in occupations as athletes, coaches, umpires, singers, musicians, entertainers, and/or performers. Additionally, there are about 4 million individuals working in industries related to performing arts, spectator sports, amusement, gambling, and/or recreation.

## **AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUNG PEOPLE**

Beyond the contemporary challenges of youth and young adult ministries commonly experienced in parishes and dioceses, young African American Catholics often struggle to be authentically Black and truly Catholic. To understand this struggle, it is important to understand the current reality and historical context. Approximately 8% of adult (age 18 and older) African Americans in the United States are Catholic, according to the 2010 U.S Census (the most current snapshot of the country's population). Most African Americans are Protestant, including former Catholics.

Historically, the evangelization and catechesis of Catholics of African descent was done through parishes for Black Catholics and often entrusted to religious orders founded for the education and pastoral care of African Americans. Even as recently as 40 to 50 years ago, vocational inquiries (for priesthood or religious life) from people of African descent were often met with reluctance and, at times, not welcome in U.S. seminaries or schools of formation. Though things have significantly changed, the Catholic Church in the United States still has much work to do in reaching out to African American youth and young adults and encouraging vocations from this community.

Today, 76% of African American Catholics attend predominantly European-American or multicultural Catholic parishes, and 24% belong to historically or predominantly Black Catholic parishes. The latter group tend to be significantly more invested in their faith and in parish life, according to a study conducted by the University of Notre Dame in 2011.

African American youth and young adults note that, too often, the Church in the United States fails to address the concerns of their community. Few homilies speak directly to the daily situations weighing on the hearts of the people, particularly the young. In general, leadership and representation in diocesan and national structures reflect little diversity, particularly of African Americans. Frequently, cultural expression in liturgy is suppressed, misunderstood, or not valued. Too often, Catholic campus ministry efforts overlook or do not attract college students who are African American. Like other cultural families, African American Catholics are not monolithic, but the small percentage of U.S.-born Black clergy, including bishops, priests, deacons, religious brothers, and sisters, as well as lay ecclesial ministers, does not encourage vocational discernment within the Catholic Church.

Many African Americans seem affirmed, rise to leadership, and feel more at home culturally and spiritually in Protestant churches. Thus, a major question of faith and vocational discernment for young African Americans hinges on whether they can visualize a place for themselves in the Catholic Church.

There are some successful efforts by African American Catholic organizations attending to the personal and spiritual development needs of African American youth and young adults, such as the Knights of Peter Claver – Junior Division and the ORACLE summer institute, as well as the youth and young adult tracks the National Black Catholic Congress.

However, Black Catholic young people who attend historically or majority Black Catholic parishes often feel they are not exposed to all the offerings or receive late notice of diocesan or national events or activities for youth or young adults. Efforts must be made to improve communication with African American young people and their leaders in those particular parishes.

As to what they ask of the Church, young African American Catholics want assurance that they belong in the Catholic Church. They want to see leaders who look like them. Many young people desire to serve those in need, to help establish just structures/systems, and to engage in global service.

## **ASIAN-PACIFIC YOUNG PEOPLE**

Many youth and young adults of Asian and Pacific Island descent feel they have a very small part in their parish or diocesan communities and do not feel listened to directly. Young people ask for support

and recognition that they, too, are the Church. They see an opportunity to have a voice when they attend weekly meetings of youth or young adults or community events, retreats, congresses, conventions, and training camps with other young people, and that these help to build and strengthen their faith and develop lasting friendships. One major challenge for them is coming to truly understand the Gospel message and how it relates to their everyday life.

The extended family and community play a vital role in the Christian formation and vocational discernment of Asian Pacific young people. The presence and role of men and women religious also is key in encouraging vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Among Asian and Pacific Island heritage young Catholics in the United States, technology is used for evangelizing and enhancing the spiritual life. For example, a Catholic digital application that is very popular with the Vietnamese young people is “Click 2 Pray” through the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network.

Some Catholic organizations or networks that connect with Asian Pacific young people include: the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement; the Hmong American National Catholic Association (HANCA); and Korean Catholic youth and young adult communities. These organizations, among others, see the ongoing need for catechesis and faith formation for youth and young adults that is relevant to their cultural experience, and for the support, encouragement and witness of family, clergy and Church leaders. From pastoral experience, they also see that, after Confirmation and as young people mature and make life choices, they often choose a lifestyle influenced by the secular world.

They note that ongoing fellowship (with other young people) and regular faith formation must speak to their real and constant struggles: to connect the Gospel message to everyday life and to help them know Jesus not only as God, but also as their friend and companion.

## **EUROPEAN AMERICAN YOUNG PEOPLE**

In the United States, the following categories are often used to describe “young people,” used frequently in ministries with those of European ancestry: *youth* (adolescents, teens, and those attending junior high and high school, who are approximately 10 to 18 years of age) and *young adults* (women and men in their late teens, twenties, and thirties, approximately 18 to 39 years of age: in college, single, engaged, and married, with and without children).

These terms were affirmed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) with the release two key statements: *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (1996) and *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (1997). In these documents, as well as in a 1985 statement on college campus ministry, *Empowered by the Spirit*, the U.S. bishops re-affirmed their commitment to engage with young people at these stages of life and presented suggestions on developing effective outreaches and pastoral ministries with them. In White European American communities, the Church developed *youth ministries* for adolescents (in many parishes and dioceses, as well as in Catholic high schools); *campus ministries* for college students (at many Catholic colleges and universities, “Newman Centers” at non-Catholic institutions, and community colleges, as well as at nearby parishes and through various missionary efforts); and *young adult ministries* for those in their 20s and 30s (in a few parishes and dioceses, as well as through ecclesial movements, apostolates, and through consecrated religious communities).

Despite these structures and the network of existing ministries and organizations at the service of youth and young adults, many European American young people have a *mixed response* when it comes to the Church's listening. European-American adults in their 20s and 30s tend to have a more negative perception of Church leaders' ability to listen, while teenagers under 18 are generally more positive. This may be a result of the fact that more intentional ministries exist in the Church for junior high and high school youth than for college students and young adults over 18.

Specific challenges often cited by many European-American young people include:

- *isolation* (a lack of relationships, loneliness, etc.)
- *finances* (cost of living, debt, employment, being "on their own," etc.)
- *relativism* (discrimination for religious beliefs, spiritual uncertainty in a pluralistic culture, etc.)
- *drugs and alcohol* (particularly among high school and college students)
- *pressure and anxiety* (mental health, depression, feeling overwhelmed and overworked, balancing commitments and responsibilities, technological/social media expectations, etc.)
- *a need to be understood* (by the Church, by society, by older generations, etc.)
- *personal/domestic issues* (human sexuality, sexual identity, divorced families, etc.).

The *need for belonging and connection* is also regularly raised by European American youth and young adults. To some degree, the challenge of finding a welcoming environment, a community of peers, or a relevant ministerial outreach in the Catholic Church was noted, especially among youth and young adults who are less active in the practice of their faith.

## **Church Engagement**

The most frequently cited Church activity among European American young people are large-scale faith gatherings on the national, regional, and/or diocesan level for youth and young adults – in particular those with Catholic Mass and Eucharistic adoration, dynamic presentations, music, small group catechesis, and networking opportunities. The international World Youth Day experience, and the parish, diocesan, and apostolate pilgrimages to that global event, are also very popular.

Other significant forms of Church engagement among these young people include retreats on the parish or diocesan level, mission trips, short-term service projects, small groups, and Bible studies. These and other activities are typically coordinated through parish or diocesan lay ministers, or campus ministers in high schools or universities. While youth ministries and high school and college campus ministries have been common for several years, there are less opportunities available for those over age 22, which has directly impacted the faith engagement of European American young adults.

When asked about the faith, many European American youth and young adults cite the need for effective, faith-filled, and reliable mentors who model Christ in sharing their Catholic perspective and foster a relationship with God and the Church. They also want to better understand the teachings of the Church that relate to their daily experiences, and they want to learn this from authentic teachers who live joyful lives of their own. Young people are increasingly asking the Church to be relevant and relatable to those their age, and to use digital tools and social media to be more present in their lives, either in person or online. Young people also seek a safe environment where they can be free to discuss complex issues (e.g., same-sex attraction, marriage, abortion, the death penalty, climate change, etc.); some are



open to being challenged, while others are simply seeking a better understanding of Church teaching, so that they might – in turn – share that faith with their less religiously-active peers.

In the midst of their noisy lives, many youth and young adults ask the Church to be a “spiritual home”: a safe place to belong; a community providing shelter; an opportunity to find purpose in life; and an experience of unconditional love free from judgement. They want Church leaders to be concerned about their lives, to be accepted for who they are, to be listened to, and to be known and appreciated. They want the Church to provide greater support, forgiveness, and healing as they navigate life transitions. They ask for an opportunity to serve, to be trusted, and to have a place in the leadership structure of their parishes and dioceses. They also want the Church to increase resources for youth, campus, and young adult ministries at all levels, as well as an increased presence at colleges and universities.

Looking at technology, European American young people desire that the Church should be more digitally minded and more present on social media, so that relationships and mentorships can be formed and developed. There is a desire that pastoral leaders maintain a high level of diligence and adaptability in their use of social media, keeping an eye on new technologies that are developing. In particular, young people want the Church to look at the digital landscape not as a marketing tool, but rather as an interactive way to accompany them where they are and maintain those connections for years to come.

### **Pastoral Ministries and Ministers**

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing number of lay pastoral ministers, many of European ancestry, who have dedicated their professional careers to accompanying youth and young adults, who – by and large – are also of European ancestry. More have pursued masters’ degrees in pastoral ministry or theology than in previous decades; on college campuses, however, there is an increasing amount of missionary ministry leaders without advanced degrees.<sup>7</sup>

Yet despite theological formation, most note that there has not been nearly enough formation for evangelization and pastoral care of youth and young adults, as well as little training in intercultural competency. Furthermore, these pastoral ministers continue to seek more opportunities for their own spiritual growth through mentors, directors, and continuing education and guidance. In addition, because these ministers are asked to “do more with less,” their available time for such growth is limited.

The training that does exist is often found through online/distance learning, graduate ministry programs, and national organizations (i.e., NFCYM, FOCUS, USCCB, LaRED, CCMA, NCCL, NRVC, Catholic Apostolate Center, NET Ministries, LifeTeen, Center for Ministry Development, among other routes). Some larger dioceses have training centers for lay and consecrated religious to attend retreats and development workshops; however, most dioceses report that formation is often left up to the individual to seek out their own resources and pay for it through their own financial means.

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<sup>7</sup> According to *A National Study on Catholic Campus Ministry* (2017), prepared for the USCCB Secretariat of Catholic Education by Brian Starks, Ph.D., and Maureen K. Kay, Ph.D., 53% of campus leaders are formed through degree programs, 45% through supervised field work, and 35% through missionary training, as many participate in several avenues of formation, with the caveat that “missionary-trained are least likely to experience other formation methods.” (pg. 4)

In the wake of the sex abuse crisis, there has been some reluctance for priests, consecrated religious, and lay pastoral leaders to more intentionally and actively interact with young people, especially those in high school and in college, for fear of being accused of malicious behavior.

While a number of White European American pastoral leaders are full-time paid employees, those who work directly with youth, college students, and young adults receive comparatively lower wages and have an increased workload (relative to other ministerial fields), which has resulted in high turnover rates and an interruption in the ministry efforts with young people in those communities.

### **Ministerial and Social Competencies**

A number of European American pastoral ministry leaders who work with youth and young adults have noted that their ministries' current efforts in the area of intercultural competency fall short, and that they feel poorly equipped to address issues related to violence, racial justice, and immigration, among other concerns that affect cultural communities beyond their own. However, thanks in part to intentional involvement in the recent V National *Encuentro* process, more youth and young adults (and their leaders) of European ancestry now possess a greater awareness of the Hispanic/Latino reality. Furthermore, a growing number are increasingly aware of "dreamers" and younger immigrants in their communities and are taking proactive measures to respond.

Another area in need of further formation was prison ministry, as the ministers' local ministries do not often connect with incarcerated youth and young adults. A few dioceses provide some service and justice programming for young people to introduce their youth and young adults to restorative justice work and addressing systemic injustices; however, most are in need of more resources in these areas. Additionally, White European American ministry leaders feel a desire for greater competency in pastoral care and being able to effectively accompany youth and young adults through mental health matters, anxiety and depression, and substance abuse, as well as referrals for counseling and professional care.

In regard to societal engagement, European American pastoral leaders note that social justice and advocacy are among the smallest portion of their work with youth and young adults. Service and/or immersion experiences, both domestically and internationally, are some of the most common examples when this type of youth and young adult formation takes place (in particular, through college campus ministries); pastoral leaders observe that, when their young people engage in such initiatives, a sense of solidarity with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized is cultivated. More work still needs to be done.

### **Outreach Initiatives**

Many European American pastoral leaders note that their faith communities struggle to keep connected with young people after the Sacrament of Confirmation, which often takes place in the early teenage or pre-teen years in the U.S. Those who work directly with youth, collegians, and young adults are very aware of the concern, and look for ways to counter the trends in their ministry efforts to varying degrees of success. Some examples of these outreach initiatives include, but are not limited to:

- *Forming nurturing faith environments.* This takes place firstly through building up a welcoming spirit in parish communities. It can also take place in intentional and intergenerational ministry

efforts with youth and young adults. Such ministries often have a peer leadership component, and foster spiritual growth through spiritual, service, social, and catechetical activities.

- *Developing transitional support in parish life.* Since many young people are experiencing times of great transition and fluidity in their youth and young adult years, parishes and pastoral leaders work to accompany those going through these transitional moments including, but not limited to: graduation from high school and college; moving into new living environments; career and job change; relationship developments; transition into marriage and parenting; entering or exiting military; long-term volunteer service, among other key moments in youth and young adulthood.
- *Being present during moments of return.* Even if young people should disconnect from the practice of the faith after the sacraments of initiation, local communities work to welcome those who do return at particular moments. These can include Ash Wednesday, Christmas, and Easter, as well as friends' and family weddings, baptisms, and funerals, and times of grief or crisis.
- *Inviting young people to major Catholic experiences.* Direct and personal invitations to young people to larger faith activities is an effective way to continue the journey with youth and young adults. These events may include the March for Life, the National Catholic Youth Conference, the FOCUS "SEEK" conference for collegians, Theology-on-Tap, World Youth Day, etc.
- *Engaging with the world.* With many youth and young adults, especially those who are more globally aware and socially conscious, the Church's work with social justice and advocacy has been an effective tool for evangelization. These initiatives include mission trips, local outreach to those on the peripheries in the community, and working with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Catholic Charities, and Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), among others.
- *Connecting young people to mentors.* The presence of trustworthy adults and Catholic leaders in the lives of youth and young adults has been a key component to effective outreach with younger generations. These adults include parents and families, pastors, deacons, consecrated religious, and to a large degree in European American communities, paid professional lay ecclesial ministers (in many instances: youth, campus, and young adult ministers).

## **HISPANIC/LATINO YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Church listens to the lived situations of Hispanic/Latino young people ("jovenes") first by personal contact of clergy, consecrated religious, and lay pastoral workers with youth and young adults who participate in different Church-related programs, workshops, movements, ministries, and associations. Also, listening takes place through programs and activities oriented specifically to accompany young people during their evolving and delicate stage in their faith journey.

The main challenges for Hispanic/Latino young people in the United States of America are immigration status, access to education, and employment. The mixed immigration status of families, including siblings and parents, can limit Catholic and secular opportunities for many young people, even those who are U.S. citizens or have legal status, due to fear of drawing attention or unwarranted scrutiny to the immigration status of other family members. Lack of legal immigration status prevents many Hispanic

youth and young adults from pursuing a higher education and obtaining better paid jobs. This reality has also been a big deterrent of vocations to priesthood and consecrated life.

Despite the achievements and great work of Pastoral Juvenil Hispana (that is, “Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry”) over the last 30 years, marginalization of Hispanic young people from ecclesial structures is still a reality. Where it has taken root, Pastoral Juvenil Hispana has been very successful, especially with immigrant youth and young adults (who speak Spanish), but a growing gap exists with second and subsequent generation U.S.-born Latinos whose main language may no longer be Spanish.

A big concern currently is the young generation trapped in-between, known as “dreamers”, who were brought to the U.S. as children but lack legal status. This is the only country they know, yet the current immigration system does not allow them to regularize their situation. The Church is fighting to find a permanent solution by advocating to afford those in this situation, the majority of whom are young adults now, lawful permanent status and, if possible, U.S. citizenship. More than 800,000 young people are estimated to be in this situation.

Parish-based ministry programs currently reach only a very small percentage of Latino youth and young adults. With the clear majority of them attending public schools, parish youth or young adult groups (either Pastoral Juvenil Hispana or “mainstream” youth or young adult ministries) continue to be an important way to offer them evangelization and catechesis and to invite vocational discernment to priesthood, consecrated life, and marriage.

However, a more intentional outreach needs to happen that is also culturally sensitive and attractive. Increasing the intercultural capacity of those of all cultural backgrounds working with youth and young adults and promoting and mentoring leaders indigenous to the group (i.e. Hispanic/Latino) are a must.

The most successful ways for Hispanic/Latino young people to gather within the Church are:

- Culturally specific parish youth and young adult groups; the most successful programs distinguish between adolescent, college-age, and working professionals.
- Apostolic movements that involve large numbers of young people.
- Diocesan, regional or national events, such as “*encuentros*” and Hispanic congresses.
- Retreats, Eucharistic adoration, and Christian music concerts

More U.S. Hispanic young people have participated in *World Youth Day* in recent years, most notable at the recent international gatherings in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2013, Krakow (Poland) in 2016, and Panama City (Panama) in 2019; however, this upward trend applies mostly to U.S.-born Latinos, who do not have as many international travel restrictions than those who are immigrants, migrants, and refugees. Recently, there has been a rise in at-home “stateside” gatherings concurrent with the World Youth Day event across the United States, which has drawn a significant number of Hispanic/Latinos regardless of documentation, most especially in locations in the U.S. Southwest and West Coast.

Hispanic/Latino youth and young adults specifically ask the Catholic Church for the following:

- Accompaniment that is constant and not sporadic (e.g. consistent leadership)
- Church leaders fully committed to working with those of all cultural families

- Understanding of their cultural situation and their struggle to integrate fully into a culture that is also theirs, without leaving behind their Hispanic/Latino heritage
- Faith formation opportunities (e.g. catechesis)
- Catholic leadership formation, with access to ministry and servant leadership roles in their Church community and within national structures
- Sports tournaments as a means to connect with the Hispanic/Latino population

Regarding vocational programs, the encouragement of Hispanic/Latino families of their youth and young adults to pursue the vocations of priesthood and consecrated life seems scarce or almost nonexistent. Universities can provide support and orientation on professional vocational topics, but there is a lack of an integral process of discernment. Only a few dioceses with a historically large presence of Hispanics plan vocational discernment activities with and for Hispanic youth and young adults.

Efforts by the USCCB Committee for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations have increased in recent years to work with vocation directors and those ministering to Hispanic young people, but the U.S. Church must do more to cultivate vocations in the Hispanic/Latino community. The number of priests and religious from those communities is also disproportionately low, even in dioceses with a strong presence of Hispanic Catholics. The permanent diaconate seems to be the exception, as there are a higher number of Hispanic deacons (compared to priests).

Many young people in the Latino community are affected by the reality of gangs, violence, and incarceration. Not enough is done to reach out to youth and young adults at risk and to prevent them from joining gangs. Some parishes and Christian associations have an organized ministry for visiting the incarcerated and those in juvenile detention centers. But by and large, the accompaniment of incarcerated youth is at best sporadic, with little follow up. Some lay associations, such as *Jóvenes para Cristo*, work with young men and women that have been incarcerated and try to create a network of support, spiritual and material, to help steer them in the right direction. They in turn often become powerful witnesses to the transformational power of prayer, love, and acceptance.

The *Southeast Pastoral Institute* (SEPI), headquartered in Miami, Florida, includes (in their programs of formation for Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry/Pastoral Juvenil Hispana) several academic subjects in their curriculum geared to the engagement of young people in society and civic life. *Jóvenes para Cristo*'s training plan also contains a special section on understanding and analyzing social realities. The purpose is forming the young person's conscience to accept their social responsibility, and to help them apply Christian values and principles in their daily lives to transform society from within.

The Fifth National *Encuentro* on Hispanic/Latino Ministry, which took place across the United States from 2016 to 2020, has been a national effort coordinated by the USCCB (spearheaded by the Bishops' Subcommittee on Hispanic Affairs), in partnership with local dioceses, to consult and energize the Latino base in the Church of the United States. The *Encuentro* process worked to promote a culture of encounter by following the five steps outlined by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 24: (1) taking the first step, (2) getting involved, (3) accompanying, (4) bearing fruit, and (5) rejoicing.

The Encuentro has had a strong focus on youth and young adults, in particular those at the peripheries. According to its Proceedings and Conclusions of the V National Encuentro, "The hope was that every segment of young Latinos would be reached and represented in the consultation: English-dominant and

Spanish-dominant; immigrations, the 1.5 generation (young immigrants brought by their families who attended school in the U.S.), U.S.-born children of immigrants, and the 3rd+ generation; engaged Catholics, disengaged Catholics, and the disaffiliated.”<sup>8</sup>

Throughout all the stages of the process, there was indeed a strong representation of young people: it is estimated that over 28,000 youth and young adults participated in the reflection and mission sessions in 2017 and 2018, and an additional 32,000 young people were encountered in the missionary visits to the peripheries (along with over 1,000 reached in a 2017 online survey).<sup>9</sup> This incredible participation culminated in a special encounter between the bishops of the United States and young adults at the national *Encuentro* event in Grapevine, Texas, in September 2018. There, the young people and bishops present shared their respective stories over dinner and looked to proactive solutions based on the participants’ experiences in the process.

From the preparation of the parish sessions to the consultation and mission to the peripheries, Latino youth and young adults were both recipients and protagonists of the missionary and evangelization process of *Encuentro*. At the conclusion of the national event, one of the top recommendations was stronger and more intentional outreach to Hispanic/Latino young people, including an expansion of budgets for ministerial efforts to youth and young adults in parishes and dioceses. In particular, five major themes<sup>10</sup> stood out for further reflection:

- *Evangelization and catechesis*, looking at obtaining a proper balance between these components in working with youth and young adults. Suggestions included an increase in Scripture study, mentorship in the art of peer evangelization, practical application of faith concepts such as social justice, relationships, discernment, prayer and spirituality, and Sacraments.
- *Formation for leadership and ministry*, giving youth and young adults an opportunity to take on meaningful roles in the Catholic community and become its “protagonists.” Suggestions included proper training for young people to take on leadership roles, as well as for priests, seminarians, and lay ministry leaders on the challenges and realities facing young Latinos today.
- *Listening, accompaniment, and vocational discernment*, providing dialogue and steering clear of experiences of rejection, judgement, and discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity, language, sexuality, or questioning beliefs. Suggestions included patient accompaniment and a further development on the concepts of vocation and discernment.
- *Casting a bigger net*, offering young Latinos more ways and opportunities to connect with the Church. Suggestions included “*grupo juvenil*” (group for young people) in the parish, providing open spaces for retreats, diocesan gatherings, and rallies, and programs tailed to specific interests (i.e. Scripture, prayer, music, etc.) or needs (i.e. tutoring and education, gangs, addictions, immigration, etc.), better communications online and via social media, and family ministry.

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<sup>8</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Proceedings and Conclusions of the V National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry*. Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2019. “Appendix B: Hispanic/Latino Youth and Young Adults in the V National Encuentro Consultation,” pg. 171.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pg. 172-173.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 176-177.

- *Building on Hispanic/Latino culture and spirituality*, responding to the fact that 91% of young Latinos speak Spanish in their home and that they desire ministries in the Church where their culture, language, devotions, and traditions are embraced and celebrated. Suggestions included developing different catechetical materials, finding bilingual resources, and a welcoming spirit from the pastor and parish staff for gatherings and activities of ecclesial movements.

More information about the role of young people within the Encuentro process can be found online at <https://vencuentro.org/jovenes-young-people/>.

One significant outcome from these recommendations has been the development of the V *Encuentro* Young Adult Leadership Initiative (VEYALI), to equip young adults with Catholic formation so that they might step into greater leadership roles in the Catholic Church on the local, diocesan, and national levels. Structurally, the VEYALI program, coordinated by the USCCB in close partnership with several national organizations and groups, consists of three complementary components: (1) developing and implementing a national curriculum and bilingual formation at the foundational level to usher young Hispanic/Latino Catholics into leadership in Church and society, with a pathway to degrees and other credentials; (2) establishing an online resource center with high quality courses, materials, websites, and other content to help parishes with Hispanic/Latino ministry in order to thrive in their missionary commitments; and (3) forming a national accompaniment and mentorship network for Hispanic/Latino young adults preparing for and/or discerning a call to ministry in the Catholic Church.

## **NATIVE AMERICAN YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Native American youth and young adults who are involved with the Catholic Church, in particular on the local level, report having a positive experience regarding the Sacraments, especially Eucharist and Reconciliation. There is also a positive climate when the Church is willing and able to share common cultural elements with Native American young people. There is, however, a tension with Catholic Native American youth and young adults when the leaders of the Church fail in an attitude of acceptance and appreciation, especially when cultural differences are not acknowledged, and traditions not honored or celebrated.

There also seems to be a need to develop programs, activities, and groups specifically to engage Native Americans in their culture and cultural elements. Much of the successful work in bringing young Native Americans to the Church (and helping them remain) has been attributed to cultural groups that allow their native heritage to engage the Church in familiar cultural surroundings.

Significant challenges, both in society and in the family, are faced every day by young Native Americans. The most significant concern is the loss of communication between youth, young adults, and the elders of the family and community. This loss is significantly high when young people are caught between cultures that have different values from their local community and the broader society. Other concerns that hinder the faith and lives of Native American youth and young adults are the inappropriate use of social media, drugs, alcohol abuse, and violence. Poverty and lack of employment opportunities affect many Native American communities, and especially Native American young people, particularly those who live in reservations and rural areas.

For some, language becomes another obstacle preventing them from escaping poverty and reaching employment. Native American youth and young adults in the United States have a rate of suicide that is seven times the national average. Loss of cultural identity, family ties, and lack of access to educational and economic opportunities are contributing factors. For Indigenous Peoples who come from outside the U.S., such as the Mayans, there is the added concern about immigration issues and the possibility of deportation that could destroy families and family life.

Regarding pastoral guidance, the most important concern is building bridges between young Native Americans and the Church. Native American clergy is singled out as the most important resource for building a connection between the Church and younger generations. Unfortunately, the Church has not been successful thus far in promoting Native American vocations to the priesthood and fewer clergy and religious seem to take an interest in working specifically with native people. A few campus ministry programs in colleges and universities are trying to reach out to Native American young adults, thus creating another bridge with the Church.

The annual national *Tekakwitha Conference* and the annual gathering of Mayan Catholics in the U.S. are also opportunities to pastorally and spiritually accompany Native American and other indigenous peoples of the Americas. The Mayan gathering enjoys the attendance of many young adults and even young married couples and their children.

Outside of the church, some colleges and universities have developed programs to attract Native American young people. Native American organizations throughout the country have youth events, clubs, cultural centers, and schools that help inspire young people and their leaders. This helps Native American youth and young adults feel connected to their culture and tribe. Often, Native American young people feel at home when groups are facilitated by elders, storytellers, and tribal leaders. In this way, ancestral heritage is passed on to the next generation. Contact with young people who do not frequent Church surroundings is made mostly through the secular or tribal school systems. Native American young people often invite their friends to go to Mass, to talk with the elders, or to be a part of the Catholic Church community. Faith is further shared by prayer cycles, especially those that are founded by young Native Americans.

Universities and colleges, especially those which include Native American studies, also offer an opportunity to talk about faith. Some high schools and universities acknowledge the presence of Mayan young people at their institutions and embrace the cultural background of Mayan students. For example, the Kennesaw State University's (KSU) Maya Heritage Community Project embodies this kind of partnership with Pastoral Maya. The KSU Maya Project also has hosted several annual pastoral Maya national conferences, and has provided important linkages with other educational institutions, which have special programs for Mayan college and university students and Mayan Studies Programs.

Native American young people are asking the Church to be respectful of their culture and of the different journeys that young people might take toward faith. They ask for a Church that is non-judgmental and relationship centered. Native American young people seek a compassionate Church where they are welcomed, appreciated, valued, and empowered. They are looking for guidance in spiritual matters and want to grow in their connection to God. Young Native Americans tend to volunteer for the Church when other youth and young adults are involved, when they receive an



invitation to do so, and especially when it is culturally related. A lack of these elements may cause young Native Americans to avoid participation in the Church or its ministries.

They also find that projects, retreats, workshops, and conventions work especially well in addressing difficulties with cultural and religious identity. Having priests, deacons and religious sisters of the same Native American ancestry and culture makes a vast difference in the parish environment. They are very important in maintaining the connection between the Church and the lives of young Native Americans.

Many Native American young people hear about vocation programs by volunteering for the Church, especially in sacramental preparation. In terms of widespread vocational programs for deaconate, religious life and the priesthood, they do not seem to occur on a frequent basis and therefore do not develop much participation with young Native Americans. The Catholic Native American community has in the past developed enduring partnerships with the Knights of Columbus and other organizations to more fully utilize vocation programs. Diocesan and consecrated religious vocation directors could be more intentional in reaching out to Native youth and young adults and could benefit from intercultural training to be more effective in their pastoral vocational guidance.

Native American young people have been hard hit especially by violence, as well as by drug and alcohol dependency. The suicide rate for Native American youth and young adults is several times the national average. The most important counterforces against destructive behavior are the close bonds of family, especially the elders in the community. It is necessary to ramp up one-on-one counseling in schools. Efforts have begun to work with several Catholic schools on reservations to promote the prevention of suicide and drug/alcohol abuse through storytelling, role play, and theater, followed by dialogue.

Another major concern is that some indigenous adolescents from Central America are often apprehended while crossing the border into the United States and spend time in immigration shelters in the U.S. waiting to be reunited with family or returned to their home country. Very few people know they are there or visit them, adding more concern to this delicate situation.

## **MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE MOVE**

Immigrant youth and young adults, as well as families on the move, have a number of opportunities in the life of the Catholic Church, and are encouraged by their parents to love God and the Church. However, the main challenge regarding vocational discernment for these groups is the scarce opportunity for personal interaction or connection with priests and religious. This is extremely detrimental to the Church's desire to promote vocations to priesthood and consecrated life. Most of the time, most of the outreach rests with a lay youth or young adult coordinator (who may or may not encourage vocations to priesthood or consecrated life).

There are some opportunities for young people in the areas of education, mentorship, workshops, seminars, camps, sports gatherings and religious activities, among others. Youth and young adults on the move (farmworkers and traveling show workers and families) have very limited services provided by the Church and they mainly revolve around access to the sacraments. Digital media has benefited ministry with people on the move because it allows ministers to reach out to them and offer pastoral counsel and catechesis, e.g. through Skype and other remote services, complementing the time they spend with them in person through occasional visits.

Successful gatherings within the Church for immigrant youth and families include retreats, Mass attendance and meetings during the weekends organized by the various ethnic communities. Many African immigrant families like to have their youth join parish summer programs for teenagers, and to engage in liturgical ministries (altar service, cantors, lectors, choir, etc.).

When available, young immigrants also enjoy sports activities (e.g., CYO). Outside the church, many young people are attracted to sports, contemporary music concerts, and social gatherings for youth and young adults, as well as activities or groups that offer outreach and support for their lived situations or revolve around intellectual affinities. Young adults on college campuses report that they engage with Greek life (e.g., fraternities and sororities).

### **Developing Young Leadership among PCMRT Family:**

PCMRT youth and young adults could benefit from the following ways to develop leadership in the church.

- a. As with youth and young adults in many cultural families in the U.S., PCMRT youth and young adults likewise need access to quality catechesis, so they may grow in faith, virtue, and the joy of the Gospel, and remain committed disciples of Christ as they grow older.
- b. Young immigrants long to be included in service to our church – for example, prepare them to be effective ministers and leaders in a new culture and help them see themselves as a light to the Church in the U.S.
- c. Encourage them to build a national identity as a viable entity to welcome, reach out and empower those who are on the periphery – immigrants and refugees – and allocate resources.
- d. Focus initiatives on articulating, supporting and empowering gifts and assets that PCMRT immigrant and refugee communities bring to the wider Church.
- e. Mentor new ministers/leaders in a new culture – guide them through steps of enculturation.

### **Outreach and Pastoral Ministries for Youth and Young Adults:**

PCMRT youth and young adults' long to have access to their Church community, national structures and for the ways to increase their ministry efforts.

- a. Engage in conversations with our young adults to empower them through family oriented PCMRT initiatives that are welcoming to the youth/young adult.
- b. Connect with FOCUS to identify potential collaboration opportunities to empower PCMRT youth and young adults going to college in the U.S.
- c. It is witnessed that being excluded from church leadership is a reality, not only a perception. The Church needs to understand better of its diversity and be inclusive across races, cultures, and ethnicities and create a better structure for welcoming those who are traditionally excluded – intentionally or unintentionally.
- d. Create more opportunities to articulate the gifts that PCMRT youth and young adults bring to the table as members of the Universal Church.
- e. Organizing PCMRT youth and young adults' groups with sensitivity to their cultural background and place of origin. For example, the church should focus on integration not on assimilation by acknowledging the cultural diversity of the Catholic faithful in USA.
- f. Engaging PCMRT youth and young adults, in the Church's work with social justice and advocacy - March for Life, etc.

- g. Intentionally create opportunities for youth and young adults to participate in the following: World Youth Day, NFCYM, Catholic Apostolate Center, LifeTeen, etc. Many cannot participate in these national organizations due to lack of resources.

### **Challenges and Needs:**

Many PCMRT youth and young adults are experiencing difficult times and struggles with the following issues:

- a. Refugees lack pastoral care prior to being resettled in a new country. Many feel pastorally neglected by the Catholic Church in the refugee camps and when they are resettled here there is no active outreach to them; therefore, they tend to join Pentecostals/Evangelicals, who welcome and accommodate them in the time of their vulnerability. They need to be welcomed and be provided a sense of belonging in order to start healing.
- b. Young Immigrants with non-legal status living in the USA are under constant fear and threat, making it very difficult to reach out to them. There is need for resources and budget to do outreach and minister to those under PCMRT.
- c. Evangelization starts at home as the family, “the Domestic Church,” therefore, the value of service and reaching out to youths and young adults should be first fostered in our families. Unfortunately, their circumstances make it difficult.
  - i. Therefore, sharing information about marriage strengthening or enrichment ministries through the Church, many which may be available virtually, is encouraged.
- d. The PCMRT Communities are also invisible in many cities and dioceses. Consequently, they lack proper representation both locally and nationally. And so, it becomes very difficult to reach out to transmit cultural values to the younger generation in the emerging ethnic and language communities.
- e. African-born for example are categorized as black and are stereotyped. Like other blacks, the young African-born are challenged daily to find ways to address and negotiate society’s assumptions about them.