

Chapter Seven (alternative) : Welcoming Young People Back to the Church

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, every Sunday, we notice that Mass attendance is down;
and every day, the news reminds us
 that our society is deeply wounded, polarized, and confused.
History reminds us that in the darkest years,
 you raise up saints and heroes from unlikely places.
Today we pray for our own children and grandchildren,
 that they develop steadfast faith and become those saints and heroes.
Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND ALL THAT IS WITHIN ME, BLESS HIS HOLY NAME.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—
 who forgives all your iniquity,
 who heals all your diseases,
 who redeems your life from the Pit,
 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
 who satisfies you with good as long as you live
 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's....
But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting
 on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,
 to those who keep his covenant
 and remember to do his commandments.—Psalm 103, 1-5, 17-18*

Scripture discussion questions:

1. Looking back on your life, and that of your family, what blessings has God given you?
2. Some people avoid the Church because it has "rules." In what way has keeping God's commandments been a blessing to you? Which "rules" of the church (if any) have led to your unhappiness?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

...: Teen girls are experiencing record high levels of sadness and violence, according to a new report published Monday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to the report, 57% of teen girls in 2021 reported feeling “persistently sad or hopeless” over the past year, up from 36% in 2011 and the highest rate seen in the last decade. By comparison, 29% of teen boys reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless in 2021, compared to 21% in 2011. ... About 30% of teen girls said they had seriously considered attempting suicide, up from 19% in 2011 ([Axios](#)).

In listening to those on the peripheries, we should include hearing the pain suffered by adult children of divorce, young people raised without the presence of a loving father, those addicted at a tender age to pornography, and those emotionally scarred by the hook-up culture....

We revere every human being to be of such immense worth that Jesus gave His life on Calvary for each one of us. For this reason, we treat every human being with the highest reverence and respect, no matter age, race, ethnicity, gender, physical strength, intellectual capabilities, or sexual orientation. This is not to say that we respect and reverence every choice made.—Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, quoted in:

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2023/02/10/radical-inclusion-leads-to-moral-confusion/>

Pope Francis has described the church as “a field hospital for sinners, not a museum of saints.” The church offers nourishment for the hungry heart (the Eucharist), healing and forgiveness for our sins and bad decisions (Reconciliation), prayer for our physical weaknesses and addictions (Sacrament of Anointing), and confident expectation of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Pete and Jan LeTourneau recently wrote: “Our world is in desperate need of hope, renewal, and turning back to God. By visiting Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, we take up the best weapon for the battles of our age and contribute to the healing of our culture. Eucharistic adoration also bears tremendous fruit in our own hearts and lives.”—email to OLW CFM, February 20, 2023

OBSERVE

1. What kept you committed to Jesus Christ and the church when you were young? If you disconnected from faith and/or from the church, what brought you back?

2. What opportunities does the parish or the larger church offer for single people to meet one another? To develop faith as adults?
 3. Why do you think that many young people don't attend church?
 4. Many young people discover the relevance of faith as they form their own families; but today, many young people choose not to marry, to marry later; and, if they marry, to have few if any children. What major factors discourage marriage and having children in our culture?
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JUDGE

1. How important is it to you that your children grow up to have friendship with Jesus Christ? How important is it to you that they practice the Catholic faith?
 2. What effect do current sexual mores have on the mental health of young people? Consider, for example, hook-up culture and the prevalence of pornography. What antidotes does the Church have to offer? How might young people find out about them?
 3. How can our parish, and the church at large, support young people in their desire to marry?
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ACT

1. Pray regularly for your children and grandchildren to grow in faith.
2. Talk about everyday experiences of faith with your children. Pray as a family, e.g. before meals, at bedtime.
3. Be alert to opportunities of faith formation and Christian service available to young people, and encourage young people you know to take advantage of them. For example, Youth Ministry offers Kairos retreats and other events. If your son or daughter is interested in science, make solid resources on the interaction of science and faith available.
4. Think about your personal "spiritual autobiography," and be ready to share it when opportunities arise.
5. Give some serious thought to your hopes and dreams for your children, and to how decisions about academics, sports, recreation—and faith—are prioritized on your calendar.

6. Read Brandon Vogt's book, *Return: How to Draw Your Child Back to the Church*.

TAKE CFM HOME

1. Share some of the stories you heard at this meeting (respecting confidentiality) with your children.
2. Encourage your children and teens to pray for their future spouses and to be alert to opportunities that God provides to take their faith to an adult levels.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus,

we entrust our children and grandchildren,
and all young people, to your loving care.

You love them even more than we do.

Each of them is living an adventure,
complete with challenges, joys, sufferings, and decision points.

If we are present in their story, give us wisdom.

If they resist our influence, give us the grace to be silent,
and to expect your own creative miracles
in your own mysterious timing.

St. Paul, pray for us.

St. Helen, pray for us.

St. Monica, pray for us.

St. Augustine, pray for us.

St. John Paul, pray for us.

Our Lady of the Wayside, pray for us.

Amen.