

Tips to Foster Relationships Between Youth and the Parish

These are hopefully some practical tips to help follow up with the MYE Faith Event. I am only sharing some good practices that I see people in our parishes already doing. I intend to share the good things I see. If you have something that is going well for you, please share it with me. –Mark Graveline

Reach out to your local high school and introduce yourself to the principal.

Be encouraged to build a relationship with your local public high school. Find out if there are ways for you to be a regular volunteer. Many schools have opportunities for volunteering. Invite other adults to do the same. This builds relationships and trust. After you have built trust, I am confident other opportunities will arise.

Connect youth to service.

Service to others is good on many levels. First and foremost, it is a direct example from Jesus at the Last Supper. If you have a young person that has expressed to you that Mass is boring or they don't get it, invite them into service. Service opens the heart of young people. Serving another person helps us understand the Mass in a deeper way. The Catechism tells us "the Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we must recognize Him in the poorest." CCC 1397 During experiences of true service, a young person will come to share in other people's needs and sufferings. They will experience injustices due to our incapacities to love like we should. This will create a longing for the heavenly kingdom. Young people have a great attraction towards justice. The Eucharist is an anticipation of the heavenly glory. It is where we pray for the coming of Jesus Christ, "to share in your glory when every tear will be wiped away." CCC 1404. By being intentional and making these connections, it will help young people develop a cyclical Christian life of Eucharist and service. One will feed the other.

Service will also reveal to a young person who God created them to be. St. John Paul II reminded us that "man can only discover himself in the sincere gift of himself..." Serving others will show them the unique giftedness that has been placed in them. Acknowledge this in a young person when you see it and encourage them to develop it. Help them understand that God desires their unique giftedness to be shared with everyone.

Celebrate the lives of our young people.

Often I hear the complaint that young people don't make time for Church or God. I then think to myself, "How much time have we made for them?" It is true that the lives of young people, and families, are fast-paced and full. This often leads to no time left for Church attendance or God. If you have experienced this and are frustrated because you planned a great event and nobody came, I invite you to go and meet them at the place that is keeping them from coming to you. We must begin to care about their lives in order for them to care about living a life of faith.

Acknowledge and celebrate homecoming, getting a driver's license, school plays, band concerts, 4H, academic accomplishments, graduations and much more. This can be done in community or be as simple as sending a card in the mail. This ministry can be done with many people in the parish. We must **show** young people that God cares about their lives, not just tell them. We must reflect the reality that God is a Father who fascinated and proud of them.