



Departing Catholicism

T2-T3 Transfer

GOING, GOING, GONE

THE GREAT DEPARTURE FROM CATHOLICISM

by
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Part 1

On the weekend of October 8-9, I spoke about my vision for our community as part of our annual Offertory Appeal. The comments that have garnered the most feedback and affirmation were those that addressed our need to increase our efforts to reach our youth and young adults. I thought it would be good to take a couple of columns to highlight what we know about what some are calling the “great departure” from Catholicism and what types of strategies are being envisioned to retain more of our youth and young adults. This week I would like to provide some initial data on what the current situation looks like. I expect this topic will involve several columns as the issue is quite complex but I want to start with the reality on the ground that is causing me and others grave concern about this growing phenomenon.

A national snapshot based on statistics from the Kenedy Directory, an annual publication that takes data provided by all U.S. Catholic dioceses and collates them into a book, paints a disturbing picture. Here’s what the snapshot shows comparing the state of the Catholic Church in the U.S. over the past 50 years.

With the exception of the increase in Confirmations, all statistics are trending negative and have been consistently moving in this direction, with few periodic exceptions, for the past 50 years despite the growth in the number of people in the general population who are registered Catholic parishioners. This overall membership growth is due significantly to Catholic immigrants but the overall percentage of registered U.S. Catholic parishioners when compared to the overall growth of the general U.S. population is declining. If not for immigrant Catholics, the overall picture would be much starker.

The statistic that is most concerning to me is the decline in sacramental marriages. Marriage in the general population is also declining but a nearly 68% drop in sacramental marriages is quite disproportionate to the decline in all marriages in the general population. Sacramental marriage is a key factor to the other sacraments traditionally celebrated by the children born of these couples and to life in a parish. This downward trend has a domino effect regarding parish life, at least in terms of sacramental participation, one bellwether for the health of the Church. The factors contributing to this particular decline are many, but the statistic nevertheless is startling.

In the next column, I will address a couple of the leading reasons contributing to this general downward slide from the myriad dynamics in play.

Category	1970	2019	% of Change
U.S. Catholic Registered Parishioners	48 million	65 million	35.4% increase
Infant Baptisms	1.09 million	582,331	46.6% decrease
Adult Baptisms	84,534	35,138	58.4% decrease
Full Communion	76,176 (1995 data)	54,655	28.3% decrease
Confirmations	491,360 (1990 data)	556,418	13.2% increase
Marriages	426,309	137,885	67.7% decrease
Goes to Mass Weekly	54.9%	21.1%	33.8% decrease
Goes to Mass at least Monthly	71.3%	45.3%	26% decrease
Strong Catholic Affiliation	45.8%	32.2%	13.6% decrease

Part 2

If you read my column last week, you saw some startling statistics around the declining numbers of Catholics celebrating sacraments over the past 50 years. Over the next few weeks, I will delve into the main issues that are contributing to this decline, especially among our youth and young adults who are increasingly leaving the Church earlier in their lives than previous generations or simply not becoming baptized Catholics at all despite the fact that at least one of their parents is a baptized Catholic.

This week I want to focus on one major issue contributing to this phenomenon that is internal to Catholicism in the U.S. according to several major studies. It is by no means the only major issue, but it is one with a lot of data to support it. The issue may be described this way: lack of a personal relationship with God and Jesus; not aware that God and Jesus are personally invested in my life and long to have a relationship with me. The expression we use to describe this is a lack of initial or basic evangelization. Interestingly, this is not the situation in the developing world. Catholicism there is growing rapidly, especially among the young, and some preliminary studies indicate that one of the major factors contributing to this is that youth and young adults have a personal relationship with God and Jesus. They live in cultures where there is still an inherent belief that the spiritual world is an intrinsic part of life and therefore belief in and a relationship with divinity is commonplace. I will address how secularism, a strong feature of American culture, is influencing people away from the spiritual world, in a future column.

In the U.S., our Church and our parents have a generally good reputation about two things with our children: preparing for/receiving first sacraments and religious education. We have lived for generations in the U.S. as a Church that could depend on parents baptizing their children and integrating them into a Catholic world through the sacraments and education. We have a long history of doing a good job of sacramentalizing our children, preparing them for and celebrating the sacraments, but studies tell us we don't do such a great job of evangelizing them, namely, helping them to develop an explicit, personal attachment to God and Jesus. Our Catholic educational structures around religion skew significantly in the direction of providing religious instruction but more often than not do not also invite children into an explicit, personal encounter with God and Jesus.

While both sacraments and religious education are good and important, there is a growing need to introduce our children to a relationship with God and Jesus during their formative years. Without this relationship, more of our children go through the motions and their parents check the box indicating this task is done. The sacraments and religious education in these situations become milestones rather than thresholds to the ongoing grace God wants to share with them over a lifetime.

Exacerbating the problem is that more than a few of those who are forming these children (e.g., their parents, teachers, catechists) do not have a personal relationship with God and Jesus themselves. As the saying goes, "You can't

give what you don't possess." If those responsible for forming our children are not evangelized, it becomes difficult for our youth to be evangelized. If our children are not developing an explicit, personal relationship with God and Jesus, then the sacraments have a greater tendency to be viewed as commodities, something to "acquire," a benchmark or milestone, rather than as a source of regular, continual, lifelong grace meant to help them deepen their relationship with God and Jesus and sustain them in an increasingly difficult world over a lifetime.

As an example: 160 children celebrated their First Communion last spring at St. Francis. I don't see many of them on the weekend at Mass, the normal time we come together as a faith community and as families to celebrate the Eucharist. I realize life is busy and complicated, but I wonder to what extent lack of a personal relationship with God and Jesus is also a factor. There are indications that this is increasingly the case.

We have much work to do at St. Francis to help our parishioners of all ages develop an explicit, personal relationship with God and Jesus. The good news is that we have parishioners for whom this relationship is real. Those falling into this category will become critical to our efforts to spread the good news of God and Jesus to those who have yet to meet them. I'm counting on them for their help.

Part 3

Departures from Catholicism in the U.S. are outpacing arrivals at an estimated 6-to-1 ratio. What is contributing to this decline and what can we, as parishioners and a faith community, do to stem this flow out of a faith community, especially among our youth and young adults? This is the third in a multi-part series addressing this issue.

This week I would like to look at the culture in which we live and how it shapes our worldview. I note that these observations are generalizations distilled from several scholars but are considered descriptive of our modern western world.

I will focus on three points: 1) the modern world and its influence; 2) the post-modern world and its influence; and 3) the influence of consumer culture.

We take for granted that we live in a modern world but what actually characterizes it and what influences might it have on faith and religious affiliation? There are many good things about modern culture. Here are just a few: 1) equality for all is a high value; 2) one's status in society is significantly based on one's potential/ability rather than in what state of life one is borne into; 3) a middle class has emerged; and 4) democracy is a given. Here are some of its main attributes that have negatively impacted faith and organized religion: 1) empirical evidence (e.g., science) has dislodged religion as a source of truth; 2) interest in material things has overtaken interest in spiritual things; and 3) what I think/believe has become increasingly more important than what an institution/religion thinks/believes. To the extent that the latter three have become almost second

nature to us, belief in divinity and religion and being part of a faith tradition have receded in importance. This has contributed to the progressive departure of people from organized religion.

The post-modern world has emerged within the past 70 years and is likewise increasingly influential and subconsciously impacting the choice for or against faith. For the sake of brevity, I will only illustrate some of the negative influences of post-modernity: 1) the priority of pleasure over what is perceived as the prohibitive morality of religion; 2) freedom without restraints; 3) a sense of equality that eliminates any sense of a hierarchy of truth; and 4) an increased distrust of those in authority. A religious tradition like Catholicism is viewed as "old-fashioned" and therefore not relevant to those who live under the influence of post-modern culture.

Consumer culture also influences us subconsciously and has negative consequences for religion and faith. The term used by the scholars is "commodification." This means we treat everything, including faith, as having equal value and can be replaced by something else (e.g., Sunday youth sports is equal in value to Sunday Mass). It also means treating the journey of faith and sacraments as objects, as commodities which are disconnected from their larger meaning, especially a sense of belonging to a community. For example, baptism is experienced more and more as an "event" with photos and a party than the beginning of a relationship with Jesus Christ and a faith community.

When faith, which is transcendent, mysterious, and eternal, is no longer in vogue because of our preference for empirical evidence we can see with our own eyes, it decreases in value. When what I think/believe is increasingly considered superior to what a group/institution thinks/believes, organized religions suffers. When pleasure and freedom without restraints are considered more important than a morality that places legitimate boundaries around us for the sake of the common good and the outcome of our life after death, a faith tradition with a morality is increasingly dismissed as quaint and irrelevant. When sacraments are viewed as something to obtain rather than as thresholds to a deeper faith and a more meaningful life, grace, salvation, and one's mission in life are not taken into consideration as an outcome of the sacrament celebrated.

This is the world western Catholics inhabit and it is having an increasingly negative impact on Catholicism as a community of faith and tradition. As a result, more and more people shun Catholicism, whether consciously or not, because it is increasingly perceived as having nothing to say to the modern world. Our youth and young adults inhabit this world and these cultural markers significantly influence their choice regarding faith and religion.

Next week, I will explore how the Church has struggled, even failed at times, to make its case to the modern world, which has also contributed to the departure of many.

Part 4

Departures from Catholicism in the U.S. are outpacing arrivals at an estimated 6-to-1 ratio. This is the fourth in a multi-part series describing some of the major factors contributing to this phenomenon, and what are some positive steps we as a community of faith can take to remediate this departure, especially among our youth and young adults.

This week I would like to examine how dynamics within the Church have contributed to the problem.

I will focus on three points:

1) the struggle by the Church to accept modernity; 2) the struggle to accept Vatican II after the Council; and 3) the disillusionment the Church has inflicted upon its members by its failure to address internal problems.

All these issues are very complex and I hope that this simplified snapshot does not create the impression that what I am saying is the definitive word on these issues.

I need to say from the start that there is so much good found within what the Church believes and does. Due to space limitations, I will only highlight a few. We believe in the inherent dignity of everyone without exception as someone made in the image and likeness of God. We believe in a Trinity that is perfect love and who knows and loves each and every one of us personally and ceaselessly. We have scripture, sacraments, community, and a care for our neighbor, especially those most in need, that are meant to help us live out our mission and to thrive. We believe in a Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to restore us to our best selves by removing what keeps us from being our best selves, sin. All of this and much more are what keep me in the Catholic fold.

But there remain challenges. Until recently, the Catholic Church was living in a world that largely separated itself from the contemporary reality that surrounded it. It held on tightly to a very hierarchical view of life, what some have described as a “pray, pay, and obey” world for its laity and unordained vowed religious. Those in authority were not to be questioned, and it was not unusual that those who challenged the Church were silenced or even expelled.

Two world wars that began in Christian Europe within 25 years in the last century and the horrors that emerged from those wars contributed to Pope John XXIII’s decision to convene the Catholic bishops of the world in an attempt to move the Church out of isolation and into the modern world. That gathering is known as Vatican II (1962-1965). What emerged was epochal and brought a wholesale blessing to the Church and also some serious growing pains. Historians tell us that while there has been some resistance to the renewal brought about by the council, overall the outcome has been positive. We now have worship in the living languages of the people, ecumenical and interfaith relationships have flourished, and the Church reoriented the way it sees itself by starting first with our collective identity as People of God rather than starting with the traditional hierarchical view of the Church with the Pope and the bishops as the center of our identity. These are only a few of the developments that emerged under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at Vatican II.

There have also been some strong pockets of resistance to the implementation of Vatican II. While there have been legitimate challenges to those who have taken unwarranted liberties with the renewal brought by Vatican II, by and large, the

main resistance has been around being a Church in a living relationship with the modern world rather than apart from or against it. Pope Francis is attempting to steer the Church to a more intentional embrace of the vision of Vatican II, something welcomed by a lot of Catholics who have become marginalized by what they perceive to be a resistance of some to embrace “the signs of the times.”

The largest damage to the Church’s credibility, especially in the past 20 years, has been the clergy sex abuse crisis, the delayed incorporation of women into meaningful roles of leadership, and the lingering clericalism that keeps the baptized from claiming their legitimate right to be partners in building up the Church. From my perspective, the Church currently has little credibility to speak a word to the contemporary world that can heal, inspire, and bring more people to Christ. The Synod process has raised these very issues by laity throughout the world. It remains to be seen what the institutional Church will do in response to the pleas of so many to fix our internal problems so we may become a credible institution again. The lack of this credibility and the wounds that have been inflicted by some who lead the Church and its communities have not made the Church a place where people are drawn in, especially our youth and young adults.

Next week I will look at how our teens are bearing the brunt of these collective cultural and ecclesial problems I’ve described in Parts II-IV of this series.

Part 5

Departures from Catholicism in the U.S. are outpacing arrivals at an estimated 6-to-1 ratio. This is the fifth in a multi-part series describing some of the major factors contributing to this phenomenon, and what are some positive steps we as a community of faith can take to remediate this departure, especially among our youth and young adults.

This week I will look at the world of adolescents who are bearing a heavy weight living in the perfect storm of a culture and a Church that are not helping them. I should note that these observations are generalizations distilled from several scholars who have been studying adolescents for over 20 years but who, in my opinion, accurately describe what is going on in the lives of many of our American youth today.

I made the case in Part III of this series that the cultures of modernism, post-modernism, and consumerism are not very helpful to today's youth. I made the case in Parts II and IV that the Church has also been increasingly ineffective in helping today's youth. Adolescence has always been a strange and mysterious experience. One goes through it in order to leave childhood behind and enter an adult world. While I enjoyed some of the thresholds I experienced as a teen and am forever grateful to the adults who mentored me, I'm also happy that it is behind me. Today's youth face challenges that go far beyond what

most earlier generations of adolescents have faced. They live in the crosshairs of a world that is increasingly detrimental to their well-being and a Church that is not helping. As a result, many have a lot of fears, experience deep loneliness, are insecure, frequently have shallow friendships, and are influenced to believe that performance, achievement, and image are the name of the game. What is perhaps most painful to me is that they generally feel abandoned by adults and the Church, people who are essential to their successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

Youth tell us that, generally speaking, they want their parents and other adults to be more present to them, more involved in their lives, and to guide them. They also show us that when this doesn't happen, they increasingly turn to their peers who do not possess the maturity and experience they need to help them negotiate the challenges of adolescence. They also turn to the culture that surrounds them with its "promise" of happiness in materialistic consumerism, pleasure without consequences, and the freedom to be the final arbiters of their own choices. Based on the studies that tell us that our youth are facing unprecedented challenges, we shouldn't be surprised that they find themselves really struggling.

Sadly, the Church is ill-equipped to help given its own lack of credibility. Two major issues among several that contribute to this lack of credibility are the untold damage of the clergy sex abuse crisis and the resistance by the institutional Church to engage in meaningful consideration of the role of women in leadership.

We are also largely a Church that still struggles to help its members of all ages develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that is of critical importance to our youth as they negotiate their way through the turmoil of adolescence into adulthood and their parents who are so critical during this time in their children's lives.

If our youth are looking for meaningful relationships with adults, it is imperative that we equip those adults, especially parents and mentors, with the tools they need to foster those relationships. Catholicism has a lot to offer our young people but we have to do a better job of helping them develop that critical relationship with the Lord and showing them by our example and integrity and with skills and credibility that we are invested in their well-being and want to equip them so they may live well in the challenging world of adulthood.

Next week I will begin to lay out what might be some paths forward in helping our youth and young adults become and remain Catholics and be instrumental in leading us forward.

Part 6

Departures from Catholicism in the U.S. are outpacing arrivals at an estimated 6-to-1 ratio. How do we stop the bleed, especially with regard to our youth and young adults? This is the sixth in a multi-part series describing some of the major factors contributing to this phenomenon, and what are some positive steps we as a community of faith can take to remediate this departure.

This week I will begin to lay out some things we may find helpful in attracting and retaining our youth and young adults.

The good news for our community is that we are growing and have much that makes us attractive, including our youth and young adults. I will explore this in greater detail in a future column in this series.

Today I would like to pass on an important insight from two national studies of teens and emerging adults that may help us do a better job of forming them into a stronger relationship with the Lord and a faith community.

One of the major conclusions from a multi-year national sociological study of Catholic youth is that having at least one Catholic parent who goes to Mass regularly with their child/ren is far more likely to result in those children continuing to be active in the practice of their faith when they become adults. This is not a failsafe solution, but interviewing thousands of youth indicate this is something to pay attention to. This study also revealed that

the home and parents are the most effective means of initiation into the Christian faith, while many other costly things, like Catholic schools and mission trips, seem to have little impact on the future faith life of a young person.

The second national study reached a similar conclusion. It also found that the home and parents have the greatest influence on faith, belief, and practice. This stands to reason. The home is one of the few places of long-term, consistent involvement. We change schools, churches, cities, but one's membership in a family usually does not change. It is in the context of the home and family that we become habituated to many things that stay with us for life, for better and for worse.

This raises the question about how parents are themselves equipped in the realm of faith, belief, and practice. One of my responses is, "How can we, as a faith community, better equip our parents as spiritual and faith role models for their children?" One of those opportunities is connected to evangelization, that is, developing a personal relationship with the Lord and becoming awakened to the truth that they themselves are infinitely loved and personally known by the Lord and that the Lord is waiting for them to open their hearts to Him so they may become aware of how much better their lives will be with the Lord than without the Lord.

It is in this vein that we launched the KBL (To Know, To Believe, To Live) series on our parish website. This is why we have started an adult formation program on select Sunday mornings throughout the school year to address topics of importance in an adult context. This is why we offer opportunities to learn about our Catholic faith through educational programs like Just Faith. This is why we are starting an annual parish mission and will continue offering an annual convocation day to grow in an adult understanding of our faith. There are other things we can do, but these are starting places. One challenge is convincing parents that these opportunities are critical, not only for their lives, but ultimately for their children's lives as well. In a crazy-busy culture like ours, prioritizing adult faith formation can be a real challenge for parents, but the benefits are well worth the investment for them and, in turn, their children.

The U.S. bishops noted over 20 years ago that the ongoing formation of adults, especially parents, needs to be a high priority in parishes. We are embarking on a journey to provide opportunities to grow in faith, belief, and practice. In the next column, I will address how we can do this in the midst of a post-modern secular culture that heavily influences our youth, young adults, and parents.

Part 7

Departures from Catholicism in the U.S. are outpacing arrivals at an estimated 6-to-1 ratio. How do we stop the bleed, especially with regard to our youth and young adults? This is the seventh in a multi-part series describing some of the major factors contributing to this phenomenon, and what are some positive steps we as a community of faith can take to remediate this departure.

This week I will present some ways we at St. Francis are having a positive impact on our youth and young adults and attracting growth in general.

We live in a secular world. Some believe that the best way to deal with that world and retain/grow in faith is to inoculate ourselves against the secular world, even withdraw from it. Historically there have always been groups who have chosen that route. History also shows us that the vast majority of people have tried to figure out how to live in a secular world (think about the time of Jesus and the early Church, which existed in a very secular environment). Some churches today, both Catholic and Protestant, are pursuing the inoculate/withdrawal approach. At St. Francis, we have elected to figure out how to live in the secular world. We do not believe the major struggle is between belief and secularism. We believe the major struggle is between cynicism and hope. This is why the environment we have created and are trying to develop takes a more a positive approach.

The adults of our community, especially parents, are invited to a collaborative venture with us to approach our faith and how to live it out based on principles that post-moderns, especially our children, youth, and emerging adults find attractive. What does that look like? Ronald Rolheiser, a well-known priest, described this vision based on a conference he was a part of on secularity and faith. I find his insights compelling and highlight some of them now because they capture so well what we at St. Francis are doing.

He says that a vision, attitude, behavior, and language that speaks to post-moderns has at least seven components: 1) radically simple without being simplistic; 2) deeply personal yet profoundly universal; 3) clearly committed yet never hard, judgmental, exclusive, or doctrinaire; 4) contemporary without being full of cliché, fad, or hype; 5) invitational yet respecting freedom and not proselytizing; 6) radiating the joy of the resurrection as it leads us deeper into the fuller mystery of Jesus' passion and death; and 7) sensitive to human weakness even as it challenges that weakness and invites us to something better (*Secularity and the Gospel*, 25-26).

The Franciscans who led us for 33 years helped us to develop this vision, attitude, behavior, and language. They called our community to reflect the life of St. Francis, simple and deeply grounded in the Gospel, and to a commitment to inclusion and justice that is never hard, judgmental, or exclusive. We take a contemporary

approach to being church, one example among many being our approach to worship, another our emphasis on the role of the laity to live our their priestly, prophetic, and royal offices received in their baptism. We welcome everyone and do our best to radiate the joy of our faith in a positive manner.

As diocesan clergy, we have embraced this worldview and are exploring ways to build upon it. One of those areas is evangelization, awakening those who are part of our community to the invitation from the Lord to a personal relationship that goes beyond what religious instruction generally offers. We are building on a resurrection vision that also acknowledges our ongoing need to embrace the Lord's suffering and death, both redemptive for the world and for us. We remain committed to our community's embrace of Catholic Social Teaching and the outstanding pastoral care we extend to both those within our community and those beyond our walls.

This call extends to the households of our faith community. Look at these seven points and see how you are living them out in your home with those who live with you. Our younger members live in a world filled with cynicism, even despair. We offer hope, encouragement, and relationships that build up rather than tear down. If we can do this in our faith community and our homes, we stand a better chance of attracting and keeping people of all ages closer to the Church.

Part 8

Departures from Catholicism in the U.S. are outpacing arrivals at an estimated 6-to-1 ratio. How do we stop the bleed, especially with regard to our youth and young adults? This is the last in an eight-part series describing some of the major factors contributing to this phenomenon, and what are some positive steps we as a community of faith can take to remediate this departure. These articles are by no means the last or exhaustive word on this important topic but have been offered to raise awareness of major issues we are currently facing and propose some possible ways to address them. In this final article, I would like to look at how critical it is for us to become better at sharing our faith with others even in the midst of the obstacles we find ourselves facing as an institutional Church and invite you to join me on our quest to make a difference at St. Francis.

Pope Francis is big on inviting all of us to see ourselves as missionaries. When we hear that word, many of us think about going to some remote corner of the world to bring the Christian faith there. Pope Francis has a different vision. He believes that by virtue of our baptism, all of us are missionary disciples, called to share the good news of our faith with others by word and deed in our homes, where we work, and where we recreate. Among the challenges we face in becoming better missionary disciples, two stand out. First, according to one national study, only 21% of adult U.S. Catholics believe sharing the good news of our faith by word and deed should be a priority. Another national survey of Christians from all denominations found that Catholics are the least likely across all Christian traditions to share their faith. This implies there is largely a lack of missionary impulse by these adults who have the potential to influence a lot of

people, especially our younger members. Strengthening our missionary impulse will be an increasingly high priority for me as your pastor and I pray this will become more normative among our adults in the coming years.

The second large challenge is tied to obstacles that have emerged both within our Church and its relationship with the modern world. Here are the two biggest obstacles we currently face. 1) While we have made great strides to rid our Church of the ordained who have sexually abused minors and adults, we still have some way to go in putting this firmly behind us. But we are making significant progress. 2) While lay ministry has flourished over the past 50 years and women have been placed in greater leadership roles in parishes and dioceses, we still have many miles to travel to become known as a Church that values women as true partners in ministry across the board. Pope Francis is taking institutional steps to elevate women to leadership. He has set up two consultations during his pontificate to explore the possibility of a women's diaconate. He has recently opened instituted ministries, pre-requisites for diaconal ordination, to women. He has also placed more and more women into leadership roles in governance of the Church in Rome, one example being the recent appointment of women to the committee at the Vatican that processes the appointment of bishops. There are other areas where a wide range of perspectives are in need of greater openness to dialogue. Pope Francis has begun a process, a synodal process, in the hope of creating space for us to engage one another in dialogue to see how we might together find a way forward on these various perspectives.

While these issues are real, frustrations are a fact, and developments are occurring, we have also been called by the Lord to share the good news of our faith with others and to lead others to Christ, especially our young people. The Church will never be perfect. But as the saying goes, "We strive for the perfect while we live with the imperfect." Indifference and cynicism are understandable consequences emerging from frustration with any institution, especially a global one that claims to have something important to say about things eternal and our well-being. Nevertheless, I invite you to join me in doing what we can and not get too caught up in what we still need to do.

Someone who has been studying the hearts and lives of youth for many years puts in fairly stark terms what he has learned about today's youth that cries out for attention. His most important insight is this: Youth sense they have been abandoned by adults. Abandonment is a major issue. Youth need adults, especially their parents, who care and are willing to mentor them. They don't want to be seen as a commodity that is shipped out to someone else for attention. I invite parents to step forward about developing their faith so our young people increasingly have a sense that their faith matters and that we are here to help them. I invite other adults to join us in accompanying our youth and young adults.

Someone has said that a friend is someone who has seen us at our worst and still loves us. Jesus Christ is that kind of friend and proved it by dying for us, seeing us as our worst, and still loving us. My goal is to help us discover and deepen this friendship with our best friend, Jesus Christ, and to show both those within our community and beyond what a difference that friendship makes for us and for them. Will you step forward and join me?

Fr. Michael