

Fruits of the Regional Listening Sessions



Diocese of
Green Bay

Introduction to Listening Sessions

The goal was to assess the realities of parish life in response to the following questions:

- What is keeping you up at night?
- What are your joys?
- What is one thing you can do to address challenges?
- What can we do as a diocese to better support you?
 - Specifically, the Offices of Religious Education and Youth Ministry



General Disclaimers...

- This report is in no way a judgement or a 'report card' on your ministry. Rather, these are merely observations and interior analysis of reality as described in our listening sessions.
- This report is not meant to assign blame on any diocesan office, parish, pastor, leader, or volunteer.
- We understand that change takes time; we are on this road together.



When? Where?

Throughout the Fall, we hosted 10 Listening Sessions for pastors / catechetical leaders / catechists from across the eight vicariates of the Diocese. Sessions were also held in Spanish for all Spanish-speaking leaders.

- Hebrews 10:25
- St Hyacinth, Antigo
- St Thomas the Apostle, Newton
- Diocese of Green Bay
- St John the Baptist in Howard
- St Thomas More, Appleton
- Corpus Christi, Sturgeon Bay
- St Therese, Appleton
- Spanish-speaking catechetical leaders
- DASA Executive Committee Meeting

What did we hear from catechists?

1. Parental Disengagement in the Area of Faith Formation

- Students are simply dropped off on Wednesday nights in a spirit of delegation on the part of parents.
- The disengagement of parents in the faith formation of their children is further reflected in their lack of attendance at the Sunday Eucharist.
- The unfortunate reality is that parents do not understand their role as primary catechists – they are operating on a grade-level understanding of their faith.
- Families are prioritizing sports over evangelization / catechesis.

2. Strained / Ill-equipped Catechetical Leaders & Youth Ministers

- There is a great number of ‘slashers’ – leaders who are serving as BOTH catechetical leaders and youth ministers. Many in this situation expressed frustration in the face of the amount of work that is expected of them.
- While desiring to work for conversion, the overwhelming demands of ministry have lead many to opt for programs instead of processes of conversion. Many feel they simply do not have the bandwidth to go beyond classroom model catechesis.
- Leaders articulated their great need of support – both from their pastors (with many of them articulating they do not have effective formation on the parish level) and from the diocese (many desiring clear policies / curriculum / ongoing formation).

What did we hear from catechists?

1. Lack of Investment in the Area of Youth Evangelization

- Initiatives meant to accompany students through the thresholds of conversion are often overlooked, underfunded, or ignored.
- The powerful methods of evangelization so often seen in thriving youth ministry programs are rare in our diocese due to the great lack of youth ministers dedicated to the mission of evangelization.
 - We are not hiring youth ministers to focus on outward evangelization – focus is on grade level RE.
- There is a lack of understanding in terms of the difference between youth ministry and catechesis.
 - Youth Ministry is pre-catechumenate or mystagogy – Youth Ministry is discover / share
 - Catechesis presumes faith – it is still kerygmatic, but it is building upon an initial encounter – follow / worship

2. Emphasis on the Transmission of Doctrine over Lived Faith

- The focus in this approach is not primarily conversion to Christ, but an academic understanding of the teachings of the Church devoid of personal encounter with Christ.
 - The Diocesan focus on grade level standards for religious education has contributed to a misunderstanding in catechesis as a primarily academic endeavor.
- Nevertheless, well-meaning catechists shared their feeling the need to rely on the reading of their catechetical textbooks or the presentation of video lectures as they feel ill-equipped to present the faith in their own words / witness.
- Catechists do not feel they have the necessary pedagogical formation to transmit the faith in new and creative ways that lead to personal encounter with Jesus Christ.
 - Catechists struggle with classroom management / technology use / developmental needs / not knowing how to address hot button issues

What did we hear from catechists?

1. Models of Formation Based in Requirement, Not in Conversion

- There is a pervasive “requirement” mentality – we speak in terms of what is ‘required’ to receive the sacraments instead of an invitation to a process of conversion.
 - What determines readiness for the sacrament is participation in class – not signs of conversion
 - We see cases of young people who are forced to participate in RE and come forward for Confirmation Prep without lived faith or desire to live as a disciple.
 - We are seeing classroom models of formation that are proving to be ineffective for many young people who arrive at RE exhausted from school / sports.

What did we hear from youth?

Young Peoples' Challenges and Concerns

- Mental Health / Anxiety
- Excessive demands on their time (school / sports / extracurriculars / RE)
- Relationships – friendships especially are hard
- Attention Spans / Addiction to technology
 - Demonstrating in low attention span / disengagement with Netflix (long forms of story-telling) / zoning out
 - Lack of sleep is another indicator
- Confidence / Lack of self-esteem

What did we hear from youth?

Young Peoples' Perceptions of Christ and His Church

- Struggle to name sin; misunderstanding of God's Mercy
- Mass / Prayer – How to pray? How does God answer? What is happening at Mass?
 - I want to get to Mass, it is important, unless I have something else
- RE as obligation - “It is hard to feel loved when you're forced to be here”
 - Some nights are 'fun' when they're doing activities; lectures are boring – desire depth / authenticity
- Missionary discipleship – only when it is safe / unoffensive
- No interior life / Lack of self-reflection
 - Lack of commitment – revealing desire for instant gratification (swipe-left mentality)
 - Slave to endorphin hit / desire for constant numbness

Signs of Hope from Catechists / Youth

- The Joy of Conversion
- The Faithful Participation of Devout Catholic Families
- The Community of Catechists Committed to Mission
- The Resiliency of Leaders
- The Witness of Grandmothers

Small Group Discussion

- Do you feel like these findings reflect your parish reality?
- Which of the findings stood out, or was most surprising to you?
- What do you find most challenging? Is there anything you're struggling to wrap your mind around?
- What brought you the most joy / hope / excitement?

Proposed Next Steps – RE / YM / OCIA

Cast a vision for evangelizing catechesis

- Catechesis that is center on personal encounter with Jesus Christ

OCIA as inspiration for all catechesis

- Seeking the signs of conversion as indications of readiness for participation in the sacraments

Explore new models of implementation for RE

- Small group / family / experiential / readiness based

Renewed Focus on Adult Faith Formation

- We need to evangelize parents

Reimagine the *Catechist Certification Process* / Formation of Leaders