

Archbishop Lori's Remarks: Opening Remarks; "Connect" Young Adult Gathering

"Connect" Young Adult Gathering

St. Mary's Seminary and University

Mar. 16, 2019

A Word of Welcome to St. Mary's Seminary

My friends, I am very happy to be with you today. I am Archbishop William Lori and I serve as the Archbishop of Baltimore – a territory, a local church, that includes the City of Baltimore and nine counties of Maryland. And I would also like to say a word about St. Mary's Seminary which is so graciously hosting us. The building we're in was constructed in 1929 – so it is 90 years old – but St. Mary's Seminary was actually founded in 1791. It is the oldest seminary for the formation of priests in the United States. The Archdiocese of Baltimore has about 40 seminarians studying for the priesthood and about 17 of them study here at St. Mary's. So I hope you will enjoy the hospitality of this very special place.

The Importance of Listening

I also thank you for allowing me to be here today at this gathering of young adults, even though I barely miss the age requirement! Actually, I speak as an aging baby boomer. Back in my day, our elders thought that we were the worst generation yet. They said that our music was loud and vulgar; that we were way too informal; that we had no respect for authority; that we were sex and drug ridden; that we were spoiled and overly sensitive; that we were unrealistic; and that we would be the ruination of the country and the Church. I came today in hoping that your generation doesn't share the same low opinion of my generation.

A lot has been said and written about your generation as well. And while it is important for church leadership to be aware of research and opinion, it is even more

important that we spend time with you and listen to you. That is why this “synod” is such an important gathering for the Church in our area, our local church. It is important because of what you will share today with one another; and by listening to what you have to say the Church here in Baltimore and beyond will be able to improve how it engages you – how it ministers to you and with you – as we move forward. The fact is, we really can’t move forward, we can’t engage in any ministry worthy of the name, unless we take time to listen to you, to understand better your life experience, unless we listen to your stories and appreciate your perspective.

In our current culture, I don’t think there’s a lot of desire to listen. Think about what you see every day on social media. Think about what passes for news and entertainment these days – not to mention all those talking heads on T.V. – but, then, you don’t watch T.V., do you? People really want to speak first, to dominate the conversation, and if that doesn’t work then they try to speak louder. Unfortunately when we approach others that way nobody really ends up understanding each other. Only by listening, we can understand the other person – and we can be in friendship and relationship with others.

Relationships in the Church

Sometimes we think of the Church only as a large institution, a lot of buildings, a heavily hierarchical structure, a business with schools, charities, & hospitals. And there’s no doubt about it, the Church still has a major institutional presence. For example, in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, some 30,000 students attend Catholic schools and Catholic Charities is the largest social service agency in Maryland, bar none. These institutions and programs do an immense amount of good, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable among us and their mission is carried forward by a lot of very good and dedicated people. But it would be a mistake to think of the Church merely as an institution.

You will remember that Jesus spoke of his followers as friends. We are Jesus’ friends if we are of one heart and mind with him, and if we grow in relationship with Jesus and with others thru conversation & prayer. The Church should be more like a web of relationships of those who share Christ’s love and strive to walk in his footsteps. You might even say that our whole faith is built upon relationships – relationships

with Jesus as our friend and Savior – relationships with others in the Church, others who have gifts that differ, different roles to play, different ministries to fulfill, different outlooks to share. And in our relationship with Christ and with others in the Church, we are surrounded by the wider culture, a global culture, that offers us opportunities but also sometimes creates pressure in our lives.

But to be in relationship requires that we take time to listen. Listening to hear the good things going on in a person's life, the things that bring lots of joy that we can celebrate. But also listening to hear the pain and struggles of another's life, things that need understanding and healing. If we would be friends with Christ and with one another in the Church, then we must take time to listen and that is particularly true of me as your Archbishop.

And sometimes, frankly, as a Church leader it's all too easy to do all the talking. Years ago, when I was serving in Connecticut, I came to Johns Hopkins for a one day comprehensive health assessment. When I returned, my assistant asked what the results were. I answered, "Everything is fine, except for some loss of hearing." She smiled and said, "I'm not surprised!" Of course, she really meant listening, not hearing!

Moving Ahead

Now, obviously, I can't be everywhere to hear every story. I do try to get around and I do like to engage in conversation but in a meeting entitled "connect" – I think we're aiming higher. We're aiming to create conditions in which we can listen to and hear one another, conditions in which we can speak from our hearts, tell our story, but also listen to others as they tell their story. So I'd ask you today to share honestly and openly with them – not the story you may think you 'should' tell just because this is a faith-based gathering, but what you honestly think and feel, stories that are authentic, so that we can meet you where you are and walk along side of you. Walking along side of people – this is how Jesus lived his life and this is how we should live our lives as well.

Again, I want to thank you for participating in this important day. I see this not as a one-and-done deal but rather as a beginning of a warm dialogue of which I truly hope to be a part as we move forward. For now, I assure you of my prayers, I ask for

your prayers and I would suggest that, after I offer a few words in my very imperfect Spanish, we spend a moment now in prayer, asking the Lord to bless the day that lies ahead.

Aprovecho también para dar la bienvenida a los jóvenes adultos hispanos que nos acompañan hoy.

Esta es una reunión importante para nuestra Iglesia local en Baltimore. Su aporte a estas conversaciones es vital para el ministerio hispano y para toda la Arquidiócesis, ya que esto ayudara y mejorará nuestro ministerio hacia los jóvenes adultos. Pero antes de que podamos avanzar, debemos tomarnos el tiempo de escuchar sobre sus experiencias de vida, sus sueños, esperanzas y sus historias.

La comunidad inmigrante hispana ha bendecido con su presencia, su cultura y tradición católica, la vida y el ambiente en nuestras parroquias. Queremos escuchar de sus experiencias tanto en su comunidad de fe, la parroquia, y también en el mundo secular.

Sepan que los mantendré en mis oraciones y les agradezco que esten participando en este sínodo local.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning with hearts both searching and hopeful. In searching for meaning and authenticity in our experiences, we are ultimately searching for you in hope and trust, for you have revealed yourself to us in your Son, Jesus Christ, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, let the light of your face and the glory of your Name shine upon us and upon these young adults as together they search for authenticity in their experience of the world, their relationships, their work and their worship.

Enable us in your goodness, Lord, to use this day to listen to one another, to build relationships of trust and friendship, to grow in understanding of ourselves and our experience of life. Give us the patience and courage needed for our conversations and above all, O Father, please root and ground them in the loving Presence of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came unite himself with us and with every human being, who

came to draw us together as friends and disciples. We thank you, O Father, because your Son shared fully our humanity. He is the key to our dignity, our destiny, the meaning of our life, the answer to the question which is every human life. Help us to find in Your Son, crucified and risen, "the way, the truth, and the life."

Be with us, Lord, throughout this day in the power of your Holy Spirit and when the day is done may we praise you again for your goodness, for you live and reign with Your Son, Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.