

Caught Between Two Worlds? - A Place for Hispanic Youth in our Church

In recent years within the Archdiocese of Baltimore, we have learned much about welcoming various groups of people who have immigrated to our state from around the world. In doing so, we learn of the obstacles and drawbacks of current immigration laws, the need to reach out to welcome new members of our church and the impact that the newly arrived have on our faith communities.

Among the issues that we face is the necessity for continuing religious education for our young people. For our Hispanic youths, there can be particular challenges as they seek to deepen their faith life and stay connected to the Catholic Church.

Our young people of Hispanic origin bring an enthusiasm for living our Catholic faith. It is evident in their gatherings and meetings that faith is central to their lives. The celebration of prayer services and Masses is integral to coming together and supporting one another in their commitment to the Lord Jesus. For many of our Hispanic youths, it is difficult for us to realize the great responsibilities that they have taken on in their lives. For our young people who are in formal religious education programs in our parishes, there are particular challenges. While most of our Hispanic youths have a masterful command of the English language, many times their parents do not.

Communication with religious education teachers may be hindered and it is up to these very same youths to be the bridge between the church programs and their parents or guardians. Some parishes have hired directors of religious education who are bilingual and have recruited teachers who are fluent in both English and Spanish, which has greatly aided in fostering good communication with parents. But for others, the youths themselves remain the touchstone between the education programs and their parents. I am conscious of their efforts to continue their religious education and to keep their parents informed about their progress, sacramental preparation and studies about our faith.

Over the past few years in working with our Hispanic Ministries Council, composed of representatives of a number of our parishes with Hispanic members, I hear the concerns voiced about keeping the youths close to the church, alive in their faith and equipped to pass the Good News to the next generation. As this group of Hispanic youths matures and grows in an atmosphere of secularization and competing values, there is great concern that they stay rooted in the faith that has been so central to the lives of their families for many generations.

One does not have to search far to see the influence of our secular society upon our young people and the various problems that occur when there is a lack of religious, moral and ethical direction. The council has been creative in various ways to foster the involvement of Hispanic teenagers in the life of the church. Retreats, days of prayer and faith sharing as well as providing opportunities for social gatherings are crucial in supporting our youths and keeping them rooted in our faith.

Five years ago, in his inaugural address as our holy father, Pope Benedict XVI stated that our church is forever young. Indeed, our faith is ever renewed in the enthusiasm of our young people who seek to become closer each day to the life of the Lord Jesus. May our efforts continue to bear fruit and may we all learn from our young people the importance of embracing the good news and living it with joyful hearts.

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