

Pope: Adults owe youths values that give foundation for their lives

ROME – Adults have a debt to pay to today's young people; "we owe them real values that will provide them with a foundation for their lives," Pope Benedict XVI said.

In a June 11 evening address to participants in the Diocese of Rome's annual pastoral convention, the pope said all Catholic adults have a role to play in addressing the "education emergency" found in Italy and in other developed nations.

For parents, teachers and religious educators "a growing difficulty is encountered in transmitting to new generations the basic values of existence and of correct behavior," he said.

"It is an inevitable emergency in a society and culture that too often makes relativism its creed. Relativism becomes a dogma in such a society. The light of truth fades, or in fact it is considered dangerous to speak of truth," because a claim of truth is seen as "authoritarian" or intolerant, he said.

In response to such claims, the pope said, many schools and universities focus on transmitting information and technical skills while many parents seek to ensure their children's happiness by giving them material goods and pleasant experiences.

Such a response does not and cannot satisfy the needs of the young nor can it prepare them for a future in which they not only will want jobs, but will want meaning from their lives and from their relationships, the pope said.

Education must aim at "the formation of the person to give him or her the ability to live fully and to make a contribution to the good of the community," the pope said.

Pope Benedict spoke to the diocesan conference for 40 minutes, frequently departing from his prepared text, on ways to educate Catholics in the faith, in following Jesus and in giving witness to the wider society.

While he emphasized the primary role of parents in transmitting God's love and the Catholic tradition to their children, he also focused on the need for young people to

have relationships with other strong witnesses of faith.

“Little by little as young people grow, naturally their desire for personal autonomy increases, which – especially in adolescence – easily becomes taking a critical distance from their family,” he said.

At that moment, the pope said, it is important that a priest, religious, catechist or other believing adult helps them see that they are loved by God and are important members of the church.

In addition, he said, the “intellectual curiosity” of adolescents and young adults must be taken seriously along with their generosity and idealism.

While Catholic schools have an obvious role to play, the pope said, public schools do as well, especially when parents are involved in their children’s education and when public school teachers and students who are Catholic behave and interact with others in a way that makes faith attractive.

Pope Benedict said state schools, like other public institutions, can have a “healthy secular character” when they do not deny the existence of the transcendent and when they do not embrace “a false neutrality with respect to those moral values that are the basis of an authentic formation of the person.”

In his concluding remarks, the pope urged members of the diocese to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

He said that while the past 20 years had seen large numbers of young people from Rome entering seminaries and novitiates, allowing the church to fill positions left empty by a vocations crisis in the 1960s and ‘70s, “more recent signs seem less favorable.”

“In a manner that is always delicate and respectful, but also clear and courageous, we must make a specific invitation to follow Jesus to those young men and young women who appear most attracted to and fascinated by friendship with him,” the pope said.