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Research among Catholic Young Adults
in England and Wales: How to Disrupt
the 'Limbo of Non-Belonging'

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Research among Catholic Young Adults in England and Wales: How to disrupt the ‘Limbo of Non-belonging’

Abstract

‘You young people need to know that someone truly believes in you: please know that the Pope has confidence in you, that the Church has confidence in you! For your part, have confidence in the Church!’ⁱ

This report on behalf of the Aquinas Centre at St. Mary’s University explores some of the key factors which make the transmission of faith successful among Catholic Young Adults within a contemporary milieu of cultural and creedal interruption. It is hoped that it will prove a complementary and timely contribution to initiatives taking place throughout dioceses in England and Wales and at the national level – all of which have been given further impetus by the upcoming Synod on Young People and Vocation called by Pope Francis for October 2018.

This report is the fruit of a research project supported by the Archdiocese of Southwark in collaboration with the late Prof. Michael Hayes of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and Dr. Maureen Glackin at St. Mary’s. Having studied issues pertaining to lapsation for my M.Phil., the task pursued during my PhD. was to find out what *young people themselves* identified as key to their faith development and sense of ecclesial belonging. Since the relevant survey and interview data proved necessarily extensive, this report summarises the findings under four somewhat stylized headings, which in terms of pastoral mission, are clearly complementary rather than mutually distinct.

- Parents, Family *The Domestic Church*
- Parishes and Schools *The Local Church*
- Peers, Retreat Centres & Chaplaincies *The Transitional Church*
- Movements, Pilgrimages and Popes *The Global Church*

In terms of the *Domestic Church*, the project confirmed that parents and family were most often identified as the most influential factors for the transmission of faith. The Baptismal prayer and promise that parents be ‘the first teachers of the faith’ⁱⁱ remains at the heart of *transmission*. Yet the enquiry also noted that faith maturation was augmented by the witness value of other significant *adult role mentors*, whether extended family or otherwise. In other words, there may be a generation *gap*, but it is not a *chasm*.

In terms of the *Local Church*, there was less *explicit* attribution accorded to the role of parishes and schools, but a constant undercurrent of *implicit* appreciation for lived sacramental life and (with some caveats) facilitated faith formation, in particular by means of retreats. Hence, while this may be a classic case of being ‘taken for granted’, it would

appear that it is the *rare* rather than the *regular* moments of catechetical encounter that stand out in the faith testimony of young adults.

More revealing was the level of importance attributed to university chaplaincies, diocesan youth services and residential centres which for the purposes of the research I have referred to as the *Transitional Church*. The appreciation of ecclesial presence through these 'outlier' ministries was marked, in particular the way they seem to facilitate belonging such that young adults can make the transition from being a 'guest' of the Church to being a 'host' for the Church.

Fourthly, the many references to ecclesial movements, retreats, pilgrimages, deep affection for the papacy and World Youth Days led to my clustering a set of responses under the heading *Global Church*. The differing ways in which international pilgrimages convey a tangible sense of the universal church along with the faith affirmation of being around sometimes millions of other Catholics their own age, was a common factor. On a more intimate scale, this kind of intensity was also provided by some specific young adult groups and new ecclesial movements which likewise offer a combination of community, belonging and prayerful experience.

The final section of this report reflects on significant themes running throughout the findings such as conversion, faith, vocation and ministry. By their nature, the young adults in this research were highly committed and voiced specific recommendations for a more intentional Young Adult ministry involving witness and evangelisation, teaching and formation, prayer and spiritual direction. If these sound demanding, such requests at least alert us to a hunger among our most committed young people that we would do well to nourish.

Section 1: Contours of the Research

1.1 Aims and Purpose

It is evident that there is a problem when it comes to the transmission and sustaining of Catholic faith. Various commentators increasingly predict a gloomy picture pertaining to the practice of Christianity in the West. This is combined with a culture that is characterised as post-Christian and averse to ecclesial identity, whereby young adults find themselves adrift in what the late Michael Paul Gallagher has described as ‘an undramatic limbo of non-belonging’ⁱⁱⁱ. This report centres on findings from my recent doctoral research together with considerations for positive pastoral solutions. It was designed to facilitate an enhanced understanding of the reasons why Catholic young adults become (and remain) involved in the life of the Church. This was not about those who are on the edge or occasionally practise their faith but about those who are ‘highly committed’ or ‘super core’ and actively engaged in discipleship or ministry themselves. The main focus was to identify the *characteristics* of successful ministry by means of examining the faith experience of such people aged between 18 and 39 who were without parental responsibilities. Since this entailed finding a *purposive sample* it is important that the findings be understood in the first instance as affirmation of good practice rather than a partisan critique of ecclesial pastoral priorities.

1.2 What is a ‘Catholic Young Adult’?

For years sociologists have been talking about different subsets of generations, the most famous example being the ‘baby boomers’ and more recently ‘Gen Xers’ or ‘Millennials’. As part of this picture the terminology to describe young people has evolved over the past few decades and now includes categories such as ‘young adults’ or more recently ‘emerging adults’. Naturally, part of the challenge here is to establish what is generally understood by the term ‘young adult’ as it is not simply a matter of identifying an age range, not least since the word ‘adult’ has different connotations for different cultural traditions and societal roles. For example it is a largely unchallenged observation that most young people today are slower to complete the ‘youth’ stages of their lives than those of previous generations. This may be due to increased numbers choosing to study at university, vocational choices tending to take place much later in life, basic financial strictures delaying ‘flight from the nest’ or some combination of all three. The upshot is that in the United States the age range covered by ‘Young Adult’ tends to be broader than in Europe and the UK. The US Bishops conference presents them as ‘people in their late teens, twenties, and thirties; single, married, divorced, or widowed; and with or without children’^{iv}. By contrast, since those in their twenties are much less likely to have settled into life patterns such as marriage and family, other commentators such as Smith et al, move in the opposite direction. Drawing on the work of Jeffrey Arnett,^v their focus is 18-25 year olds whom they describe as ‘Emerging Adults’^{vi}.

The ambiguity regarding 'young adult' is evident closer to home whereby in the UK, different young adult groups and organisations delineate a range of age parameters, e.g. the current Carvalho/ Jamison Home Mission Office survey of young people/adults for the upcoming Synod on Youth ranges from 16-29 but sometimes in pastoral provision, those in their 30's' can be very much part of the picture.^{vii} Hence in this research, certain discrete choices were made:

- a) Informed by legal and ecclesial realities, 18 years seemed to be a natural lower limit. At this point in our country, individuals are free to determine their actions, whether that be to drink, vote or contract their own marriage independently from their parents.
- b) At the upper limit, despite the change in age patterns for life-commitments, both in terms of Church and Society, 40 remains a watershed age, a distinction very much reflected in pastoral practice and literature.
- c) In terms of role, the major distinction was found to be 'parent/ non-parent' since *de facto*, the pastoral provision of the Church for everything from family Masses to nursery provision takes on a different complexion for parents/ guardians.

1.3 Catholicism in our Context

Part of the painful pastoral adjustment familiar to all those in ministry is that until the end of the 1950's the meta-narrative of society was not hugely different in terms of lifestyle to that of the church. Fidelity, stability, morality and conviction were all watchwords which remained important to everyone. Now, however, not only has society parted company with many of these Christian ideals, in many quarters those same ideals are regarded as hostile to individual freedom and an unnecessary burden on the young.

So what can be learnt from these Catholic young adults who are confident in their faith at this time and in this context. As Lieven Boeve observed, it simply cannot be assumed that faith will be passed on from one generation to the next in the way that it did in previous generations^{viii}. The symbols and practice of faith have been ruptured or obscured, leaving too many of the baptized in Gallagher's 'limbo of non-belonging'. And yet clearly, it remains possible even in this context that belonging *can* be fostered. The majority 141 (78.8%) of the Catholic young adults in this research described themselves as feeling very much part of the Church.

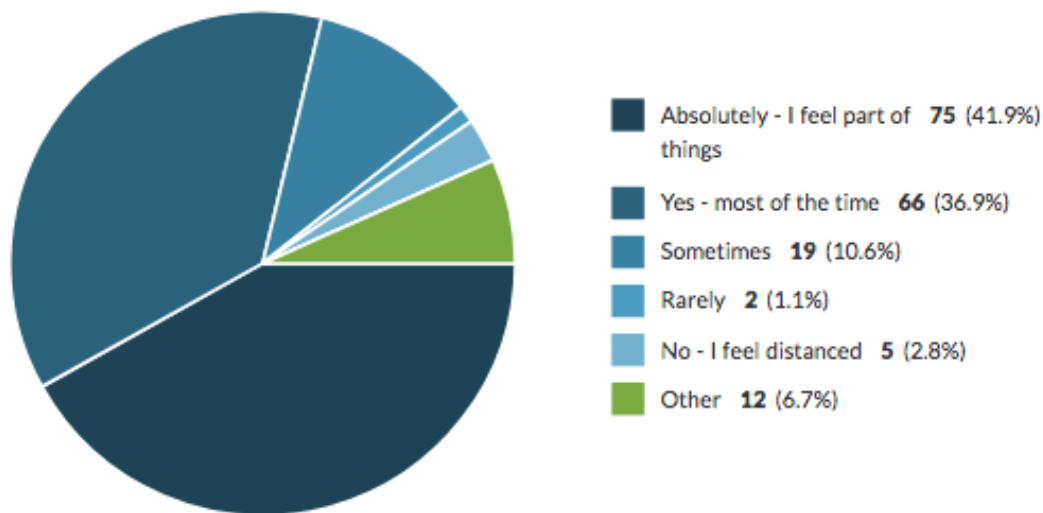


Chart 1: Belonging

Establishing identity is intrinsic and integral for young adults and religious and spiritual identities are closely linked to one another. This identity is clearly evidenced in the family, and even if there is a certain ambiguity in relation to experiences of school and parish, as we shall see, it is clear that places where Young Adult ministry is prioritised such as Chaplaincies, retreat centres, ecclesial movements and global gatherings can be efficacious. The consequence is an empowerment of Catholic social identity, a distinctiveness which is concomitant with being ‘salt for the earth’.

1.4 The Empirical Investigation

Empirical research was employed to build a picture of what makes for successful faith transmission for Catholic young adults. The Catholic Church in England and Wales makes a huge investment in faith education through its extensive school system, but once outside that framework, Catholic Young Adults do not necessarily have any systematic connection with the faith. With the best will in the world, education is not necessarily evangelisation, as Pope Paul VI’s 1975 encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* memorably observed:

Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.

The task then became to identify the loci of such witnesses and the points of faith transmission. In order to facilitate the investigation, I chose to pursue a mixed methodology using two distinct but related research techniques. An online survey of 160 young adults was used to map the terrain and establish the sample set, together with 21 in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews. Bristol Online Survey was used for the quantitative work

and the qualitative interviews were systematically transcribed, interpreted and analysed using the software package MAXQDA. The reasons for making these choices were to enable a larger amount of Catholic young adults to share their faith experience through the survey and specifically to delve further into some of the main areas identified via the individual interviews. As a theological investigation into the nature of the transmission and practise of faith of Catholic young adults, an abundance of data was generated by this inquiry.

The data management and analysis tool MAXQDA was used, with specific focus on the coding and retrieval aspects of the package. 'QDA' stands for qualitative data analysis and 'Max' was added in honour of the famous sociologist, Max Weber (1864-1920). As seen below, each Section was allocated a specific colour to allow for a quick identification of material in a specific area – e.g. anything pertaining to schools was coloured orange, or key influences in pink.

Question ID	Question	Response
7	K: How did you first become involved in the Church?	
8	IM5: I was a cradle Catholic, I'm a cradle Catholic, but it sounds a bit funny but it's daily conversion really, there's been times that I've drifted and I've come back, so that has been instances of conversion but essentially I'm a cradle Catholic and always come back to my roots. It's never really left me is the point I'm making.	
9	K: Do any of your friends or family go to Church?	
10	IM5: It's mixed, my family, the majority of them are all church goers - my friends have been involved with the New Dawn Conference - the Charismatic renewal, youth 2000. I lived in a community in Scotland for a couple of years when I was a kid, so I had Catholic friends in those settings but my day to day life, school things like that no, which was a real struggle because the community aspect is so important especially as a kid. I struggle with that a great deal. Family were my main support group, I was always involved in the parish and always have been.	
11	K: Did you attend Catholic Schools?	
12	IM5: I went to a Catholic primary school in Manchester and attended the parish there. Then as I say when I was six we moved to Scotland and I was part of a prayer community and the school I attended wasn't a Catholic school but it was funny - my faith developed more in that school than it did in the Catholic school I was in before. I don't know if it was something mystical about the mountains or what? Then I came back to Manchester – back to the same primary school and high school and I went to a different Catholic sixth form. So all the way through until I went to college and again that was totally different being in a secular setting with posters about saying 'I'm gay and so what' and I'm like, 'yeah nice one', I'm somewhere different.	

Chart 2 - Data Coding

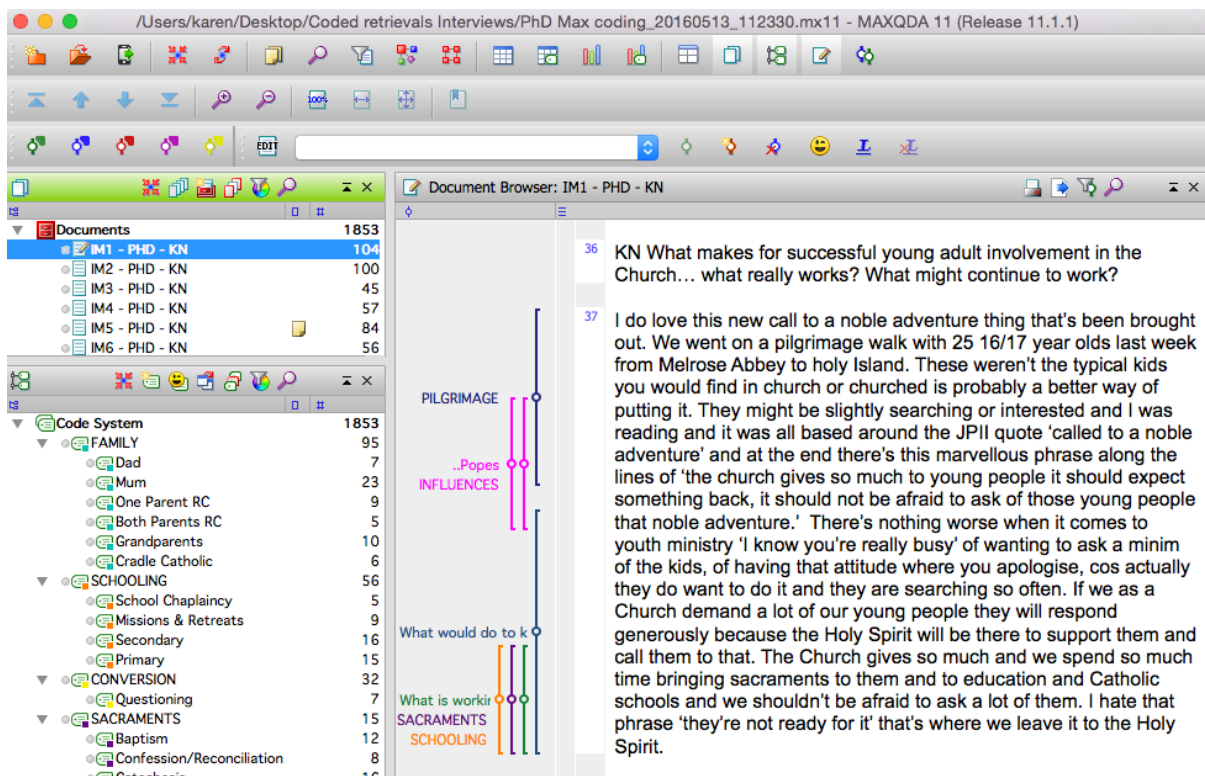


Chart 3: Data Coding

Once categories, codes and sub-codes had been created, key themes could be identified and viewed on the summary grid. From here it was possible to condense and summarise each piece of coded text and export the findings into Word files. Findings from the data were likewise useful in assessing metrics such as age, gender, ethnic origin and relationship status. E.g. Pertaining to gender, it was no surprise that 109 (68.1%) of the survey respondents were female, taking into consideration that two-thirds of all weekly or more Mass goes in England and Wales are women.

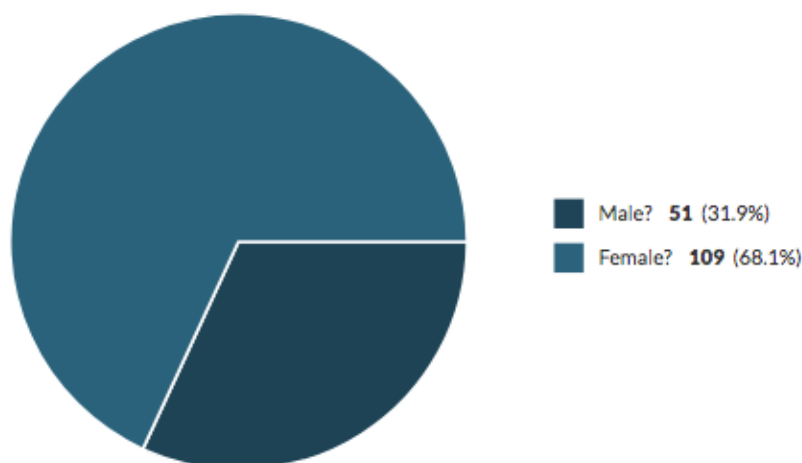


Chart 4: Gender of Participants

A further example regarding ethnicity might suffice to demonstrate how this kind of data works. Rather than choosing from a list of options, respondents were simply asked to identify their 'ethnic origin'. Naturally, there was a certain amount of variation in how they classified themselves, with the overriding profile predominantly 'White' or 'White British', with (60.8%) in these categories. Further replies were sixteen 'Irish/British Irish', eight 'European', five 'Indian/Anglo Indian/Asian', four 'Black African', four 'American/Latin American', and three 'British Filipino'. This might seem surprising in light of the impact of inward migration, particularly in London and larger cities – indeed the BOS survey revealed that of the one hundred and fifteen who answered the question on ethnic origin only five (4.3%) presented as Asian and four (3.5%) as black. However, recent work by my colleague Stephen Bullivant here at St. Mary's suggests that less than one in fourteen of the general population delineates himself or herself as Asian, amongst Catholics this is only one in thirty and among all Christians, less than one in sixty^{ix}. Thus it is possible to conclude that in light of the RFRCC report that the sample is to a certain extent representative.

Section 2: Church in Four Perspectives

2.1 The Domestic Church: Parents & Family

This research, consistent with that of most other studies, found that the domestic church through the influence of family was undoubtedly the most critical reason for the transmission of faith of Catholic young adults. The majority of the respondents (96.6%) named their “parents/ being brought up in the faith” as the most influential factor, with the small exception of (4.4%) who converted at a later stage. To break this down further, for faith transmission to take place, the witness and support of parents is key - whether two married practising Catholic parents or one practising and the other who was supportive. There is a sacramental truth here, parents are significant as mentors and as the first teachers of faith, insofar as they provide a place of religious nurture which is the foundation for other influences to have an effect. Naturally, a combination of parental/family support and other influences was by far the most significant.

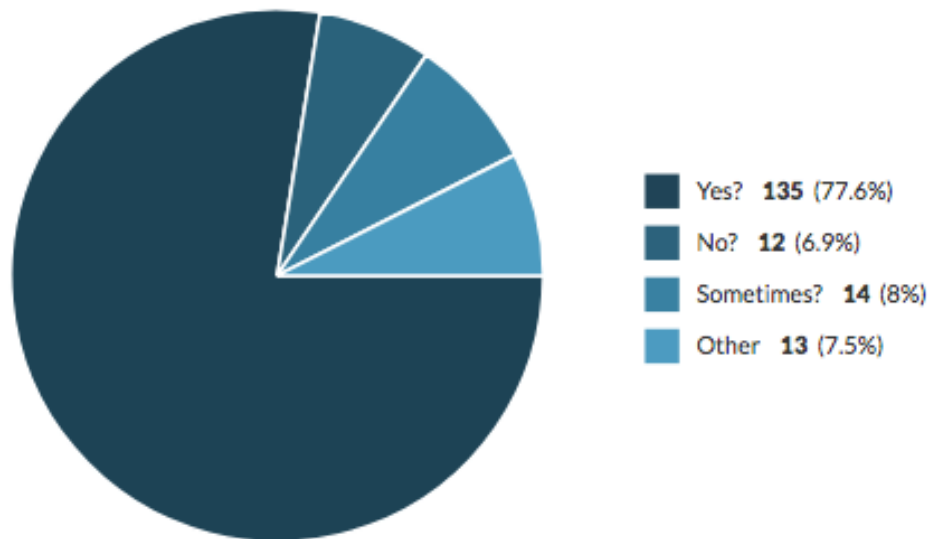


Chart 5: Brought up as a Catholic

This data - that a vast majority (over 95%) of responses revealed that the witness of parents is imperative if young people are to grow up practising the faith - is consistent with other studies in the field. Furthermore, given that over three quarters of the respondents 77.6% indicated that they had been brought up to go to Church regularly with a further 15.5% saying that they were taken ‘sometimes’, it is evident that the overriding majority of these now committed Catholic young adults were brought up being ‘familiarized’ (*sic*) with Church.

One of the interviewees (Megan) is fairly typical of the young adults who had been brought up to go to church as part of a close-knit family. At the time of interview she was volunteering as a team member in a Catholic youth residential centre, providing peer ministry through retreats for young people. She talked about being 'born into' her faith, which has thus become an assumed central part of her life. Megan clearly demonstrates a huge appreciation and affection for her family and the support they have offered her, particularly with reference to the nurturing of her faith.

I was born into a Catholic family, so it's always been a part of my life. I am 25 now, and was baptised at about 14 days old. I have always been a part of that, and I am very lucky to be in a family who have actually nurtured my faith. They started me off as a child; going to mass weekly, and holidays and class mass etc., and to Catholic schools. And the people around me have definitely helped me in encouraging my faith, but also allowing me to nurture my own faith as well.

In terms of the research, going beyond general responses pertaining to family, more specific answers indicated that the witness of both parents, mums and then dads were highlighted in order of significance. Next was the influence of the wider family grandparents, siblings and with just one person mentioning godparents as a significant positive influence. For some the death of a grandparent provided the catalyst moment whilst for others it centred on the general culture of family. Hence, whilst the focus of this study is not centred on the nature and religiosity of parents and family, it does therefore register the key significance and essential role of parents in the initiation and support of their children in faith, the vast majority of the respondents being already baptised as infants

Section 3. The Local Church – Parishes & Schools

3.1 Parish Practice

At its best parish community is a place where old and young are most at home, but it bears reflection that Church was founded by young people and it is important to have some sense of the tidal patterns that are at play in the contemporary sea of faith. The parish is the place where most people attend Mass and thus one of the strongest indicators of affiliation and commitment. Most of the Catholic young adults indicated that whilst parishes were helpful, they also needed the support of family, significant role models/mentors, retreat and pilgrimage experiences or the sustenance of faith groups. Even some of the most committed young adults said that 'parish' on its own was not enough to nurture their faith, with the crux of the issue appearing to be the lack of peer support available.

The Catholic young adults in this study reflected a strong sense of belonging, identity and tradition. For the committed Catholic the Eucharist is the 'source and summit' so high levels of attendance were not unexpected. 139 (86.85) attended weekly if not several times a

week 47 (25.5%) or daily 9 (4.9%). A further 16 (8.7%) said that they attended at least once a fortnight, whilst twenty provided other responses, mostly being that they went to church twice a week or when health or practicalities allowed. As mentioned previously, this is a highly engaged sample somewhat in contrast to the reported 10% of 16-29 year old Catholics who identify as Catholic in the UK and the 17% of those that say they attend Mass weekly^x.

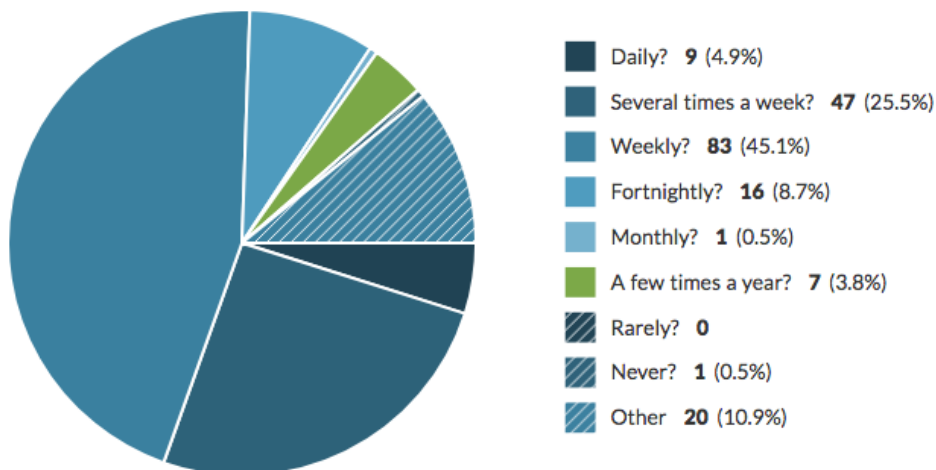


Chart 6: Attendance at Mass

With respect to being a ‘cradle Catholic’ or raised in the faith, this is understood here both in the sense of sacramental initiation and also in terms of self-identification. All the young adults said that they had received their First Holy Communion, with over half prepared in the parish (55%), over a quarter (26%) in school and a fifth saying it was a combination of school and parish (20%). Almost all the respondents had been confirmed 157 (98.1%), mostly taking place between the ages of 11-15, with 14 being the most common age. The remaining 15 (9.3%) were confirmed later on as adults - aged twenty and above, some because they were received into the Church at a later age and others because they felt more able to actively commit to their faith at this time.

3.2. Priesthood

I think it worth dwelling on the significant and treasured role that priests have played in faith transmission especially given the somewhat negative publicity that has surrounded ordained ministry since the emergence of historic abuse scandals in the 1990’s.

Benjamin^{xi}, one of the young adults interviewed, tells of the value of nurture and the importance of being recognised and accepted. He articulates that everyone wants to feel special and that their presence matters. He said, ‘the priest, the name, the calling you out, you are important you are loved, you have purpose and all young people want that’. Patrick, who is in seminary training also speaks positively about the place that clergy at all levels have played in his life:

My parish priests have been wonderful role models for me; they have been kind and gentle pastors who have always spoken the truth to me. Many priests and bishops and the last few Popes especially have all encouraged me by their example of life and their words of wisdom. I think that living witnesses are always the most encouraging - those who really live the gospel - those who make you think that God is really living within them, and then you think 'why not in me too?'

The corollary to priestly centrality is the tendency to look to priests as the 'solution' to everything. A significant number of the young adults in this research were keen to offer opinions as to what the Church should be doing for young people and it is interesting that this was *only* in reference to priests and did not pertain to other role models or mentors. This is noteworthy in two ways since it suggests that the perceived 'cultural ownership' that many Catholics have towards clergy remains strong. However, it also means that in terms of pastoral expectations, there are perhaps unrealistic ideals about sacerdotal availability which demands an *involvement* which many clergy may struggle to fulfill. For example, Freya remarks:

I think it makes a huge difference when parish priests get involved with young people and seem more personable, I know from whenever I was teaching kids, even the kids that didn't want to be there, or didn't believe in God or whatever, any time one of our priests would come down to talk or play games or going on a field trip or something, it would always have a huge impact on them. To see them more in a more human way, more as just people, regular people, as opposed to authority figures, so I think that is really important.

In practical terms, age, time-scarcity and any number of things can run counter to such a picture. However, this issue of priestly mentoring is clearly important since it seems not only the key to whether the parish 'works' or not, it is also key to the world of Chaplaincy and Young Adult specific ministry. This touches on what the writer John Cornwell has called 'gregarious solitude' the enduring expectation or 'double demand' that priests be different and 'set apart' while being at once, similar and 'involved'.

3.3 Schools

The majority of the young adults in this research had attended both primary and secondary schools, (with some also going to Catholic universities). 68.8% went to a Catholic primary school with a further 5.3% revealing that they had they had been for a period together with other Christian schools. A slightly smaller number 61.1% attended Catholic secondary schools.

At first glance, then, it is somewhat troubling that there seemed to be little in the way of specific praise for the effect of schools in much of the data. It is beyond the scope of this

analysis to establish whether (as suspected) that the contribution of schools is somewhat taken for granted. Part of the reason why schools may have 'transmission ambivalence' is because unlike parish attendees, the members of a school community do not necessarily make faith choices and commitments in the same way. In many places, the school is trying to be Church in a largely lapsed context which at the extreme leads to an inversion of expectations which can leave its mark:

I think the word Catholic didn't really come into my secondary school, to be honest. There wasn't anything Catholic about it in a lot of ways. We never did mass together. There wasn't a chaplaincy. Well, there was no chaplain while I was there. The only things that were religious were RE lessons, which was quite strange because I think I expected it to be a lot more ... I can remember being in Year 7 and one of our teachers said to us, so who's Catholic here, and about 15 out of 30 put their hands up. And she said, who goes to church every week? And I was the only one that put my hand up. And I was like, whoa, that's weird.

The 'mixed-signals' given by the respondents in terms of their general experience of Catholic schools do persist throughout, despite testimony to the role of teachers inspiring and informing their faith. One mentioned that her teachers made faith 'realistic and applicable to real life' whilst another said that her teachers 'never pushed religion' but always tried to help her understanding and grow in faith. This again, returns to the idea of witness and living by example, Rachel affirms the importance of teachers as the catalysts for igniting her faith:

It was through a teacher at school that I first went to Lourdes, and it was through another teacher at school that I first did the ecumenical camps as well, with children. So it was those two events were a turning point and they were both through teachers.

Rachel is now a teacher herself having spent time studying Theology and also working as a school chaplain. She remains committed to running Christian summer camps for children in addition to helping out at Lourdes at least once a year. Her evidence directly points to a phenomenon discussed further below – namely the impact of retreats and pilgrimage. Meanwhile Olivia who is now an RE teacher in a Catholic school also cautions against hasty judgements giving Catholic schools a hard press. 'I think sometimes we get a bit disheartened that Catholic schools aren't churning out practising Catholics but I think I am a practising Catholic as a result of many things, my Catholic education being one of them'.

From another perspective, there is the possibility that the Generation Y/Millennial young adults to a large extent assume a certain level of support and chaplaincy provision that was simply not available for many of the older young adults in this research. By its nature it is difficult to assess the impact that Catholic schooling has on the transmission of faith of this age group because each school is different and each young person will respond in their own way to what is provided (or not). What cannot be denied is that unless there is good

mentoring from priests, schools chaplains and key role models, the research seems to imply that sermons and RE lessons will play second fiddle to experiences of faith such as retreats and pilgrimage opportunities fostered by parish and school communities. In other words, what were once regarded as 'the extras' in schools should perhaps be regarded as 'essentials' in terms of faith transmission.

As an example, Eamon, identifies in classic fashion that although he didn't necessarily appreciate the chaplaincy provision in his school at the time, if it had not been there, things might have been very different.

I don't think it was anything ground-breaking I didn't hear the voice of God when our chaplain would make us lie on bean bags and listen to a musical reflection but it was something which if it wasn't there I suppose there would be a really big void. It's something, which helps our culture and helps us be who we are. Even now, I'm hoping to become a R.E. teacher and I'd always only ever teach in Catholic schools because it's something which I think is very important, it hasn't had a fantastic effect on me but I suppose if I didn't go perhaps I'd be saying something different.

Clearly, the purpose of our schools is broader than just faith transmission. Indeed, they are educationally so successful in promoting the life chances of pupils that our era has begun to witness a sort of 'catchment Christianity' whereby as Cardinal Nichols has observed, parents become attracted to 'our fruits rather than our roots'. Yet they remain an invaluable place of encounter, as one of the interviewees evidences when recalling a school mission. It was 'amazing' she said. It provided 'something new' which in turn enabled her to see things from 'a completely different perspective'.

Young adults are an age group that have a particular enthusiasm and energy to be missionary both in the local community and to the '*ends of the earth*'. Hence my personal opinion is that without our schools, Catholicism and Christian culture would be immeasurably weaker than it currently is - they provide a lifelong link to our most basic ecclesial mission.

Section 4. The Transitional Church

4.1 University Chaplaincies

Two needs identified in the qualitative data are perceived to be crucial to Young Adults and faith transmission, namely, faith mentoring and community belonging. Ironically, this seems to be exactly what is found in the next ecclesial context under review, which I have chosen to call the 'transitional Church'.

Whilst the influence of family is key for the transmission and nurture of faith, the ecclesial zones that young adults may 'pass through' rather than necessarily remain within - such as university chaplaincies and retreat centres - can also play a significant part. These might be

particularly important because they are most often encountered at a time when this age group are making life choices, leaving home and at risk of feeling that they do not belong. In this context, the influence of peer ministry and friendship was found to be genuinely significant for the young adults in my research. Frequently, it is being at university that enabled them to think differently, and to be around other like-minded 'normal' people who are practising their faith is not just attractive but almost essential for young adult faith transmission and maturation.

One of the interviewees, Joe, exemplifies the value of the 'mentor-peer' combination identified previously, the importance of seeing other people his age in church and the importance of the chaplain.

What keeps me involved, I think is seeing people my age, young adults in my church. I think seeing this in the university and the chaplain, an active chaplaincy, I think to have a great chaplaincy you have to have a very good priest in there because it starts from the top, if you don't have a great chaplain everything else falls like a house of cards it just goes down.

While University Chaplaincy is hardly a new phenomenon – the Dominicans and Franciscans have been doing it since the thirteenth century – it is a mottled picture across the sector. With well over 40% of pupils leaving our Catholic schools going on to University, it calls for careful consideration. John Sullivan and Peter McGrail evocatively spoke of this ministry as 'Dancing on the Edge' – but perhaps it should not be considered such a liminal concern.

4.2 Retreat Centres

Though not so common as University and College chaplaincies, most dioceses have Youth Services that whilst having the 11-18 age group as their main target *audience*, also entail the *staffing* of youth teams and retreat centres which draw on the skills talents and ministries of young adults, typically aged between 18 and 25. These provide not only a point of contact with Catholics of school age, but also, almost as a side-effect, seem to be important for the fostering and encouragement of faith for the Catholic young adults themselves. There are currently 16 places in England and Wales that offer young adults the opportunity to spend a year or more working and living in community, some run by dioceses - others by religious orders. In terms of trends within England and Wales, one of the most notable changes in recent years is that young adults who previously embarked on a gap year volunteering at one of the centres, now tend to spend several years engaged in this work. Possibly, this is because they aspire towards a career in ministry within the church and spending time on a peer ministry team is a valuable springboard for other roles such as Deanery Youth Worker or School Lay-Chaplaincy - many of which did not exist twenty years ago.

Not only did retreat centres feature highly in the responses of the Young Adults in both quantitative and qualitative phases of this research, it is also noteworthy if accidental that the seminarians interviewed for this particular study each spent time volunteering in residential centres prior to training for priesthood. Arguably, retreat centres are therefore

not only providing a place for young people to come to, but they are also an increasingly well-trodden path towards ministry.

This is probably the experience which has had most impact on my emotional growth. It was a year of many trials, but thanks to the support of the community with whom I lived, I pulled through and I reap the benefits of that experience, even 5-6 years later.

Michael, likewise identifies his time volunteering at a residential centre as ‘the biggest thing to impact on my faith’, where the transmission and development of his core beliefs were the most sustained. He continues by describing the centre as a place that he trusted, ultimately saying that it had become his spiritual family.

I ended up living in a beautiful house with 12 other relatively young people between the ages of 18-30 and that was by far the biggest thing that impacted on my faith. All of a sudden there was more than just going to Mass on a Sunday, this was a communicative faith, a call to evangelisation. The family that I found there has become my spiritual family where I go back to for support and trust in their prayers for me and I always pray for them. That’s really the only group that I could say that was where I really found support as a young adult Christian.

The value and support of peers is a theme that runs across a lot of the key influences in this research and even more so when Catholic young adults are living in community and sharing their lives with those who affirm and support their faith.

Section 5: The Global Church – a New Catholicity?

5.1 Ecclesial Movements

Another key area impacting the lives of Catholic young adults is the evidenced effect of ecclesial movements, pilgrimage experiences and the particular way that World Youth Days emphasise the international nature of the Church. If ‘catholic’ is understood as ‘universal’ then it is perhaps a blessing that in a world shrunk by travel, social media, and communications, it has never been easier to have a sense of global ecclesial belonging. According to this study, the new movements which melt regional and national boundaries, the experiences of pilgrimage and the global phenomenon of the Papacy all play a significant part in faith transmission.

Analysis of the survey responses in this research, reveal that just over 75% of the Catholic young adults said that they were involved or associated with groups, movements or organisations within the church. Some of the ‘other’ responses revealed a plethora of groups not provided on the list, demonstrating that many young adults belong to more than one organisation or movement. It would appear from the survey that by and large this age

group are not loyal to one particular movement, but are attracted by the life and vitality they find therein. The evidence from this sample is simply that global movements seem to help Catholic young adults take root and become fruitful in the local Church.

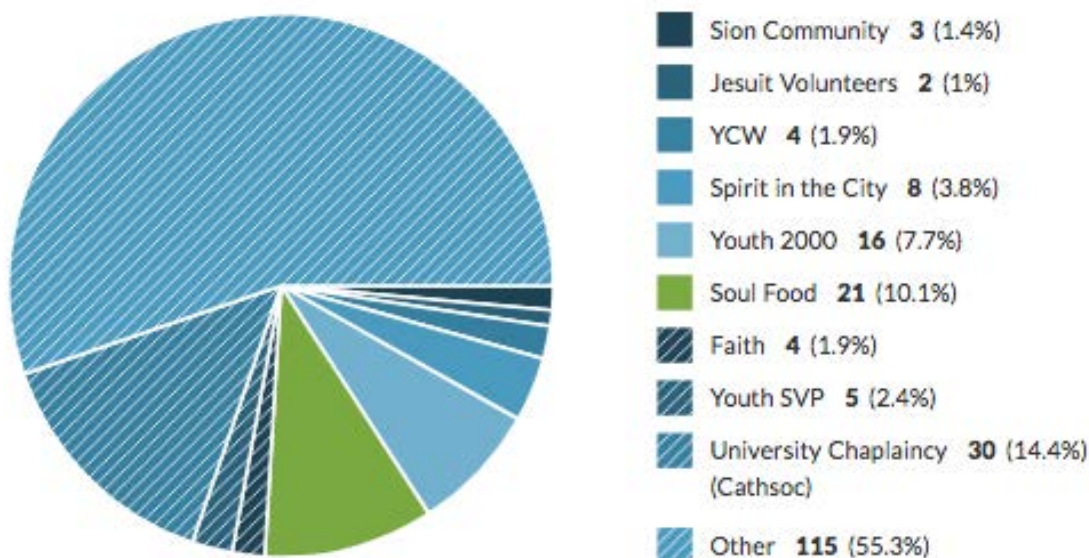


Chart 7: Ecclesial Groups, Movements and Organisations

5.2 Pilgrimage, 'WYD' & Retreats

Perhaps the most obvious way that Catholic young Adults experience the global church is through pilgrimage. When asked if they have been on a retreat or a pilgrimage in the last five years, the chart below expresses that the majority have engaged in a mixture of experiences with World Youth Day and Lourdes being the most noteworthy examples. It is interesting that the 120 'other' responses were mainly additions of going to Lourdes or World Youth Day with many of these listing a catalogue of places that were visited or attended with regularity. Other places of pilgrimage that featured with regularity were Taizé, Medjugorje, Walsingham, Knock and the Camino at Santiago. Places of retreat were varied including those run by religious orders and diocesan retreat centres, various monasteries and religious houses such as Ampleforth, Worth, St Bueno's and Douai. In addition, a range of retreats run by various groups and movements were mentioned such as *Soul Food*, *Opus Dei*, *Youth 2000*, *Maltfriscan Community*, *Verbum Dei*, *Celebrate*, *Cor Et Lumen Christi* and *Sion Community*.

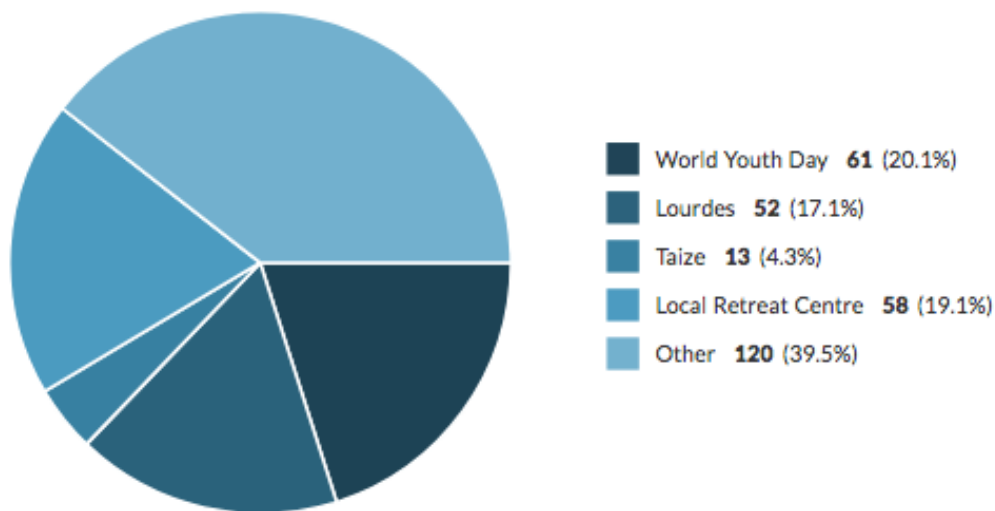


Chart 8: Pilgrimages and Retreats

It is clear that Catholic young adults are seeking experiences where they encounter *life*. Pilgrimages and retreats can provide the opportunity for catalytic moments, time to reflect and personal transformation. Lourdes in particular with some of the older young adults was cited as their first experience of the universal and wider Church. Another feature of Lourdes is that it is a place where young adults not only spend time with one another, but also where they experience helping others. Similarly, World Youth Day also offers the possibility of transformation by fostering a sense of being part of something ‘bigger’, a sentiment that is echoed numerous times throughout the survey and the interviews. The experience of being part of the wider universal ecclesial community is not only an occasion for connection and community but can also be a time for conversion.

5.3 Testimonials

Hearing the kind of testimony which weaves together the faith nurture fostered by such experiences, one of the interviewees Siobhan attests to the power of this witness, reflecting on a previous visit to Lourdes with her father.

I remember saying to my dad, I want to come to Lourdes, but I want to do what they’re doing, because I’d seen a group of young people there on pilgrimage with their school and I was like, I want to do that. And then the year after I got the opportunity to do it and I did it two years running. I wanted to be part of something and it was something I could be part of and help people... if I’d have never gone to Lourdes I’d have never be where I am now. I would have never moved away from just being a young person in a parish. Because some young people think that all their faith is, is just going and sitting there. There’s more to it than that. That’s because they’ve not been shown it’s any more than that.

In addition there can be powerful connections with other like-minded young people, the opportunity for evangelisation (in some cases conversion) and the affirmation of a shared common vision. Particularly the effect of being with so many people of a similar age sharing faith, together with pride in being Catholic and being a part of something 'greater than ourselves.' For example, Olivia acknowledges the inspirational nature of the wider Church that she experienced at World Youth Day:

It was just the pure size of it as well, like you know even being in amongst that many people I still can't comprehend how many people were there and the joy, just pure joy to be there to you know to greet the Pope and to be at mass and you know queuing for adoration and confession with hundreds of young people that is an incredible experience.

Once more, the evidence from our sample suggests they are about experience *and* reflection. Robert attended the world youth day in Sydney. There, an address by Pope Benedict XVI helped him to reflect on some of life's classic questions that triggered thoughts of a vocation to the priesthood:

At World Youth Day there were Australians and half a million [other] people there, so many young adults. It was that really that made the universal Church tangible for me. I remember the opening statement where Pope Benedict said that life was a search for truth, beauty and goodness. And I thought yes, that resonated a lot with me at that time, I was 19 and I thought that was what life was about. So that was quite a moment really for me and I think it was that moment that I started wondering if the priesthood was for me.

In short, the identity of the universal Church and the witness value of huge numbers of young people gathered together is evidently both very attractive and has a transformative power. Moreover, 'WYD' also attests to the influence of the Papacy as a significant 'global mentor' – complementary to the faith nurture adverted to in domestic, local and transitional contexts.

Section 6: Disrupting Non-Belonging - Pastoral Proposals

6.1 Proposal 1 = Mentors – Seeking Role Models

Turning then to a number of recurring themes, this study has identified that after family and peer support, adult role mentors were cited as the most important factor influencing the faith of Catholic young adults. The combination of family together with adult role mentors, provided the most valuable vehicle for transmission. The witness of various Popes was influential but besides parents, individual priests and other adult role mentors, held even more sway. Whether these findings suggest that more *conscious* formation of faith mentoring should be undertaken in school and parish contexts is a moot point. Reassured that the Church has developed safeguarding protocols second to none, it may be opportune to do so. Perhaps an integral part of it is the need for the ‘new evangelization’ and formation of the adults who are the first teachers of the faith. The final document for the ‘Pre-Synodal Meeting of Bishop’s’ also attests to this, highlighting that young people are seeking ‘authentic witnesses’ who will encourage others to ‘meet, and fall in love with Jesus themselves’. It continues by suggesting that the Church needs to ‘better support families and their formation’^{xii}.

6.2 Proposal 2 = Catholic Young Adults - Seeking Life

This is an age of ‘live experience’, together with a culture of the immediate or of the ‘grab and go’. A number of the respondents and interviewees in the empirical sample were involved in discipleship or mission initiatives in a variety of contexts, not necessarily limiting themselves as a specific ‘New Movement’ or type of retreat. Likewise, it should not be seen as a surprise or threat to parochial life that many of the sample set were seeking life in liturgy, many going to specific young adult masses instead of or in addition to their own parish. WYD in many ways becomes the symbol of this *par excellence* providing not only a global experience of the Church but also the affirmative energy of being with hundreds of thousands of Catholic young people. To repeat, this study suggests such experiences in the current disrupted context are *essential* rather than optional and every bit as key to understanding Catholic Young Adults today as Corpus Christi processions and Whit Walks were for previous generations.

6.3 Proposal 3 = Hospitality – Welcome in Their Own Home

The place of hospitality cannot be underestimated, because Young Adults (and arguably people in general) will only avail of hospitality if they find themselves in an environment that they want to be in or they feel that they belong to and are welcome. This study has already noted that transitional communities of faith such as residential centres, university chaplaincies and ecclesial groups and movements on the whole are somewhat expert at making a conscious effort to welcome and offer hospitality *away from home*. More than this, for some of the young adults in this research they offer a training ground for ministry - for young adults to develop their role as *host* rather than *guest*. There should be no surprise

in this since it is rooted in both Old and New Testament tradition whereby Christians have long been encouraged to 'make hospitality your special care'^{xiii}. Among the aspirations voiced by the Young Adults in this study, the desire to be authentic witnesses, to be able to teach the faith, to work with like-minded others, 'to take it in to take it out' are all signs of discipleship and a hunger for faith transmission. Such things can only be facilitated properly by intentional and strategic pastoral initiatives.

6.4 Proposal 4 = Seeking Eucharistic Belonging

The gathering of believers on 'the Lord's Day' has, for most of Christian history, been the repeated moment of 'belief-belonging' and the key indicator for both Catholic identity and practice. Yet it is precisely here, that the crisis in Young Adult faith formation is most visibly evident through the absence of those in their twenties and thirties from the Eucharist. Since Mass is understood to be the 'source and summit'^{xiv} of Christian life, the need for a renewed sense of their belonging at what Catholics understand to be the banquet of life could not be more acute. Whilst Mass was clearly a central feature of the faith life of the Young Adults surveyed, the sense of peer group/ community connectedness was more important than particular features or style of the liturgy. Where faith is vivid, Young Adults are attracted to liturgies celebrated by communities that were full of life, whether that be *Opus Dei*, *Night Fever* or *Youth 2000*.

An intentional approach might entail a conscious letting go of young adults on the part of the parishes that make up the local Church. This would allow for more deliberate and systematic arrangements to be made at deanery and/ or diocesan level that would facilitate celebrations which need not presume that any given liturgical style be preferred, but rather that a sense of peer belonging in a Eucharistic context be experienced. This might also be supported by appropriate homiletic content within the liturgy aimed at the 'catechetical deficit' deemed to be an issue by those interviewed during the research. Social events and gatherings further support a sense of community and belonging and expand the opportunity for mentoring. Moreover, the opportunity to avail of the Blessed Sacrament was a strong theme/voice for the young adults that took part in this survey. A number said that it provided the opportunity for a powerful transformative encounter with the Lord.

6.5 Proposal 5 = Faith Formation - An Apologetic Solution?

It is sometimes suggested that in terms of faith transmission, the greatest need is for better catechesis. While this research emphatically recognises there is *certainly* a need, there is a degree of ambiguity if we are tasked with finding the *correct* way forward. An appeal for 'more education' may come as a surprise in a pastoral context where the English Catholic Church has invested so heavily in schools at primary and secondary level. Clergy, teachers, pupils and *Ofsted* inspectors can confirm the 'success' of that system insofar as Religious Education in Catholic schools is often commended for its educational quality and classroom appeal. However, a possible negative side effect of religious information without religious inspiration is that pupils can know *about* the Lord, without actually *knowing* the Lord.

It is evident, that after the initial evangelisation, conversion, making a choice for faith, that there is a need for formation and catechesis. Though this is something that has been recognised at World Youth Days where such teaching/formation is very much part of the picture, this thesis would advocate a further step. In an era more ready to watch than read, the work of international figures such as Bishop Robert Barron through *Word on Fire* is an exemplar of what can be achieved. Closer to home, initiatives such as *Evangelium, Life in Christ*, the *Sycamore* project likewise take video and/or blog methodology very seriously^{xv}. In whatever form, it is necessary for the Church to maximise opportunities for Young Adults to have access to good catechesis and to resource its most gifted clergy, teachers, catechists and theologians to provide it.

6.6 Proposal 6 = Intentional Resourcing of the Transitional Church

Again, in term of pastoral resourcing, University Chaplaincies and Retreat Centres can sometimes be seen as optional extras precisely because the constituent congregation are 'passing through.' Yet with an increasing percentage of Young Adults taking gap years and nearly 40% attending University, it is perhaps more urgent than before that a strategic approach be taken regarding the 'transitional Church' since its contribution is anything but transient. Yes – many of those who benefit from Chaplaincy in a given diocese are just 'passing through' – they are not from the locality nor may they remain in it. Yet in a biblical tradition that extols welcome of the stranger, diocesan pastoral strategies must be generous in this regard.

That said, the increasing trend of students living at home means that provision of a Chaplain to the local university may also offer a 'second chance' to those emerging from youth into adulthood from the home diocese. While it might be difficult for smaller dioceses in terms of finance and logistics, their work can complement the huge investment that the Church rightly makes in its schools. Notwithstanding, they can also be places that can build upon the foundational experience of parish life. Young people clearly need more than one opportunity to discover belonging, either for the development of their faith or to foster community and an experience of a church that they want to be a part of. And since the employment of Young Adults as Chaplains and mentors in Schools is likewise on the increase, it may be that it is timely to consider imitation of the Health Service and Education and increasing the sense of 'professionalism' in that area.

6.7 Proposal 7 = Global Church - Catholic *means* Universal

There is a 'global crisis' of disruption in faith transmission, so it stands to reason that young adults will be hungry for 'global solutions' to that problem. The vivid symbolism of World Youth Day seems particularly geared to help heal a sense of isolation or non-belonging in a resounding way, gathered as millions around one shepherd - a global family, a truly global Church.

The phenomena of pilgrimage experiences of the universal church at places such as Lourdes and World Youth Day proved to be significant features of the data collated from the Young Adults surveyed in this study. Such moments, such encounters can prompt vivid consideration of vocation to priesthood or religious life. Of course, this does not deny that that occasionally 'mountain top' experiences can be counter-productive, yet wherever they have had these experiences or pilgrimage moments, they are recalled as times of *special* grace, which have strengthened them on their *daily* journey of faith. Moreover, beyond what might be termed pure 'experience' of Catholicism as truly universal, truly young and truly potent, there is testimony to the undoubted power of the Pope as 'Global Mentor'. The role of 'Peter' and the special gift that is to a sense of Catholic identity cannot be underestimated (even with two popes!).

In affirming the need to subsidise the pilgrimage costs of Young Adults going to Lourdes and their travel costs to 'WYD' this proposal is in one sense merely affirming the good practice that is evident throughout the dioceses of England and Wales, and among a number of religious orders and chaplaincies. These experiences of *global* belonging are frequently the necessary antidote to the surrounding cultural indifference and even disruptive hostility to faith so familiar to Catholic Young Adults today.

6.8 Proposal 8 = Intentional Discipleship and Vocational Mentoring

A noteworthy aspect of the findings of this research is the high number of young adults who are engaged in mission or ministry work within the Church. This is, of course, another manifestation of vocation or a life lived in faith. Analysis revealed that just under 35% were working in a pastoral capacity either in youth ministry, school chaplaincy, university chaplaincy, priests, seminarians and adult formation. To break this down further, of those that participated in this research, 35% indicated that they were engaged in active ministry in the Church, and over 65% of this number specified that they were working with young people or young adults. Some of the young adults were either school chaplains or involved in parish pastoral work, the majority were either volunteering or working as programme leaders in residential retreat centres.

At a stage of life, therefore, when this age group are thinking about their life plans in terms of career, vocations and life choices in general, it behoves the Church to be a player in these decisions that young adults need to feel that they belong and that theirs is a voice worth listening to. Vocation is understood here as thinking about one's meaning and direction in life, whether as a single person, a consecrated single, married, in a relationship, as a priest or in religious life. To consciously and actively live out one's Christian vocation is a choice for discipleship. Through the Christian lens, vocation is about a holistic life of faith lived out in service of others. In short, the evidence of this research suggests that Catholic Young Adults who are active in their faith are also aware of their missionary duty to transmit the treasures of that truth.

Section 7: Concluding Remarks: 'Hosts *not* Guests'

In James Mallon's influential *Divine Renovation* he suggests that most people today do not join, stay or leave a Church because of belief or doctrine, but rather for a sense of belonging or because of community.^{xvi} This view is resoundingly reflected by the young adults who formed the sample set for this research. Once evangelised and feeling that they belong, there quite naturally follows the plea for more informed and accessible catechesis. By their nature, the young adults in this research were highly committed and had specific recommendations for a more intentional Young Adult ministry involving witness and evangelisation, teaching and formation, or to quote one of the respondents directly, the desire to 'take faith out and pass it on'.

Among the aspirations voiced by the young adults in this study, the desire to be authentic witnesses, to be able to teach the faith, to work with like-minded others, are all signs of discipleship and hunger for faith transmission. To disrupt the limbo of non-belonging, Catholic young adults need to feel welcome in their own Church. To this end, ecclesial leaders would be wise to maximise opportunities for hospitality and mentoring, to enable young adults to make a choice for faith as Church and exercise leadership today rather than in some postponed tomorrow. In short the task is to enable Catholic Young Adults to become *hosts* rather than *guests* of the Church, as mentors of a 'found' generation.

Endnotes

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- ⁱ Pope Francis, 2018, Message for the Thirty-Third World Youth Day 2018, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco_20180211_messaggio-giovani_2018.html, para. 4.
- ⁱⁱ Pope John Paul II, 1994, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, §1251.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Gallagher, M.P, 2003, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, New York: Paulist Press, p. 131.
- ^{iv} USCCB, 1996, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults*, Part One: The Young Adults, para. 9. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/young-adults/sons-and-daughters-of-light-part-one.cfm>, Accessed 29th April 2016.
- ^v Arnett, J, 2004, *Emerging Adults: The Winding Road from Late Teens Through the Twenties*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Arnett argues that Emerging Adulthood is now a distinct period in the life of young people who have moved beyond adolescence but who are not fully adult.
- ^{vi} Smith, C, 2014, *Young Catholic America – Emerging Adults In, Out have, and Gone from the Church*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 1.
- ^{vii} There is some variation in the way that different groups in the UK define ‘Catholic Young Adult’. Youth 2000 and the Faith Movement delineate 16-35 as their range, whilst the Salesians, Redemptorist Youth Ministry, Samuel Vocations Groups, Pure in Heart, the Oratory Call to Youth and a number of parishes (e.g. St. Joseph’s Wembley, Our Lady of Victories) cite 18-35 as the magic numbers. Further to this, national groups such as First Sunday – *Magis* – Jesuit Young Adults, Soul Food, London Catholic Young Adults and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart outline the scope to be those in their twenties and thirties. The Report on ‘Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment in England and Wales’, Catholic Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales, 2018, Carvalho T & Jamison, C. Later revised to 16-29.
- ^{viii} Boeve, L, 2007. ‘God Interrupts History – Theology in a Time of Upheaval’, London: Continuum
- ^{ix} Bullivant, S, 2016, *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Data*, Catholic Research Forum Reports 1, Twickenham: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, p. 10.
- ^x Bullivant, S. 2018, *Europe’s Young Adults and Religion: Findings from the European Social Survey (2014-16)*, St Mary’s University: Benedict XI Centre for Religion and Society, p. 6 & p. 8.
- ^{xi} All names of interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity.
- ^{xii} Synod of Bishops - XV Ordinary General Assembly, 2018, ‘Young People and Vocational Discernment’, Pre-Synodal Meeting, Final Document, Rome 19-24 March, para 5. NB. Rev. Dr. Gareth Leyshon has pioneered a notable mentoring programme for Confirmation, see www.saintphilipevans.co.uk
- ^{xiii} Romans 12:13
- ^{xiv} *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963.
- ^{xv} *Word on Fire* is focused on ‘Proclaiming Christ in the Culture’ using a range of media resources <https://www.wordonfire.org/>. *Evangelium* centres on providing resources to teach, explain and defend the Catholic Faith <http://www.evangelium.co.uk/>. *Life in Christ* is a media/DVD catechesis resource, <http://scys.org.uk/lifeinchrist>.
- ^{xvi} Mallon, J., 2014, *Divine Renovation*, New London: Twenty-Third Publications - Our Sunday Visitor, p. 139.



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