

# Calling the Next Generation of Catholic Evangelizers

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Our Catholic faith is lived around a table. Each Sunday, we gather at the Eucharist to be nourished together by the Body and Blood of Christ. However, we are also called to go out from that table and into the world. As vital members of the community, young adults belong at this table and gather to satisfy their hunger for a deepened relationship with Jesus, their hope, so they can share that hope with others. Seven other hungers in young adults provide opportunities for becoming the next generation of Catholic evangelizers.

## **Hunger to be Noticed**

We **are** present at your parishes, and our faith matters to us. We are at mass on Sunday, even if irregularly. We are getting married in Catholic churches. We are bringing our children to be baptized and catechized in the Catholic Church. We attend funerals and marriages of our relatives and friends in Catholic Churches. We are volunteering our time by helping with events and programs. We are chaperoning youth ministry activities and activities at our children's schools. We are catechists and Catholic school teachers. We seek guidance from faith-filled people not only at church, but also at parties, coffee shops, and other non-church gatherings. We yearn for someone to notice our hunger to belong, our desire to connect our faith with every day life, and our eagerness to learn about our faith. All of these are moments ripe with opportunity to begin building relationships with us and to begin noticing that we **are already** a part of your communities.

## **Hunger to be Supported**

Throughout our young adult years (18-39) we are inundated with transitions and decisions. We discern vocations, life-style choices, and careers. Many of us make the move from student to professional; from single to married; from a couple to parents. We make life-long commitments to marriage, to a celibate single life, to religious life and to priesthood. Our careers often require moves away from our family and friends, to cities with no community. These transitions create questions about our identities and our beliefs. So we seek support as we answer life's deeper questions. Pray for us and support us during our times of transition. Welcome us at our moments of return. Create communities that are aware of and respond to the needs of a busy, mobile, searching generation.

## **Hunger for Hope**

We hunger for hope in a world that is constantly changing, sometimes joyful, sometimes complicated and full of choices. We seek something permanent that offers us hope. We want to root our lives in something that affects all other aspects of our lives. We seek "more".

Acknowledge our hope and help us articulate the bigger purpose in our lives. We often know we need hope, but we do not always know where to root our hope.

### **Hunger for Conversion**

As Catholics, you can help us root our hope firmly in Jesus Christ. This is the hope celebrated every Sunday around our Eucharistic table. Jesus' death and resurrection reveal the root of hope: the transforming power of God. But we don't always see that in Jesus, life is ultimately an ongoing cycle of death and new life. In order to help us discover this for ourselves, offer us conversion experiences. This is done first and foremost through personal witness. We need to see examples of people living faith-filled lives. More concretely, offer programs for us such as retreats, prayer, and small Christian community experiences, all of which help deepen in us the hope we find in our Catholic faith. These opportunities awaken us to Jesus' presence in our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. Conversion experiences move us to deepen our relationship with God, inviting us time and time again to our Catholic table.

### **Hunger to Deepen Our Relationship with Christ**

We desire a constant strength. Our Catholic faith is wide and deep, and it offers many avenues to build and sustain a relationship with Jesus. Expose us to and teach us about the elements of our Catholic faith: our rich tradition and rituals, our variety of methods of prayer, and our diverse spiritualities. We seek to find the tools of our faith that we can use to foster and strengthen our relationships with Jesus and connect our faith to our every day lives. Nourishing us in this way helps us build a personal faith life and acquire knowledge of the faith that we can use as we share Christ's message of hope.

### **Hunger for Companionship**

We long for companionship as we attempt to connect our lives and our faith. Please take the time to mentor us, to answer our questions and to empower us with tools for prayer, for building a relationship with Jesus, and for discerning our individual calls. The best gift you can give us is to walk beside us as we journey through life. We do not need you to provide all the answers; but to, walk with us as we become aware of God already at work in our lives. Journeying with us allows for us to teach each other and to share our experiences, our hopes, our reality, and our culture. Together, we can bring hope to others of all ages.

### **Hunger for Full Participation**

Our faith calls us to go out from our Eucharistic table. "Go, therefore, and make disciples!" (Mt: 28:20). Let us go with you and use the unique gifts that we possess. Acknowledge our gifts and empower us to take ownership of our faith. We are capable of leadership beyond youth ministry programs. We are willing to work on committees of all sorts: pastoral councils, faith formation committees, social justice and outreach committees and finance councils. When you invite us into leadership, give us the room and space to lead, as we often bear the same responsibilities in our professional lives that servant leadership in the church requires of us. The bottom line is we are hungry to use our talents and gifts outside of our professional lives.

We have a desire to give back to Jesus Christ and the Church, to belong, and to fully participate in our faith.

The cycle of the Catholic faith invites all of us to come to the table, to be fed and nourished, to deepen our relationship with Jesus, and to go out and evangelize. We belong in this cycle and want to be fully a part of it, to join people of all ages who sit at the table, being transformed and strengthened, and we then go out into the world and share the message of hope: the joy of a relationship with God in Jesus Christ our Lord!

### **Reflection Questions for Sharing in Small Groups:**

1. Recall someone who influenced you or called you as a young person to gather at the Eucharistic table in the Catholic Church. How did that person encourage you?
2. Make a list of all the places young adults are already present or gathering in your town, community, or parish. How can you offer companionship to young adults in one of these places?
3. Where do you see young adults hungering for hope today? For hope in Jesus?
4. What young adults might be invited into leadership roles in the parish or diocese right now? In the future?
5. How can you help young adults to be successful in their personal faith journeys? In their leadership roles in the church?

### **Take an Evangelization Challenge:**

1. Go out and observe young adults in a place they gather such as a coffee shop, a school meeting, a parent gathering, a sporting event, a service project. Take notes and observe ways in which young adults express their hunger for hope and for faith.
2. (*Specifically for young adults with children*) Seek out several parents and have a conversation about why they want to pass, or don't want to pass, on the Catholic Faith to their children. What challenges do they face in doing so, and how can the parish help? This could be done at a Baptism seminar or during a religious education class.

### **Excellent Tool for working with Young Adults:**

*Charis Ministries* offers retreats that are rooted in our Catholic Faith and Ignatian Spirituality for those in their 20s and 30s. The retreats operate out of an incarnational theology and the lived experiences of the participants. These can be adapted to meet the needs of a parish, diocese, retreat house, or campus ministry. Retreats include: peer talks, reflection, small group discussion, Catholic prayer, Catholic teaching, and Catholic ritual. For more information go to: [www.charisministries.org](http://www.charisministries.org).