

Editorial

Challenges and Prospects for Youth Today

Youth are in a period of transition from being a child who is dependent on their parents or caregivers to be an independent and self-reliant adult. The transition period is extensive and involves a lot of challenges and opportunities for the youth. The July 2022 Editorial wants to focus on the transition of youth within the psychological and spiritual setting in the world today.

The world is still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and is threatened with new viruses like Monkeypox over a short period. The present generation is coming to terms with viruses and understanding that these threats are a part of life. The world is also swimming against the tide concerning the economic crises and the rising cost of living worldwide. Open wars are still going on in Ukraine, and silent wars like the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria remain conscious in the minds of the youth. Rising global temperatures, unpredictable weather variations, and increasingly common extreme climate conditions like strong winds, cold and hot temperatures, dust storms, and heavy rains are also present in the youths' reality. Some offshoots of the new normal are the work-from-home situations, events and reality going digital, online learning and teaching, and social media usage.

Youth faced a set of general crises during the COVID-19 pandemic. The restricted mobility, deepened learning crisis, massive closures of education institutions abruptly, stunted growth of skill development, constraints in job opportunities, minimized business ventures, sudden reduction in income through salary cuts, and disruption in economic opportunities, to name a few. There was also the risk of domestic abuse, uncertainties about the future, delay in settling down in career, academic year loss, gaps in digital connectivity, diminished youth productivity, family stress,

and social isolation. The current pandemic can be a lingering stressor that can cause long-term health consequences. Professional physical and mental care personnel and other stakeholders could proactively prevent psychosocial crises, foster psychosocial wellness, and develop cost-optimal accessible interventions for youth in trouble.

From a psychological perspective, one of the issues close to the youth is the socio-behavioral changes in families, family values and resilience during troubles, and community-related risks for mental health. The American Psychological Association (2020) reported that these effects could potentially have longstanding difficulties because of how these contextual risks permeate the structures and processes of family systems. Prime, Wade, and Browne (2020), based on the systems model of human development and family functioning, purported that the social disruptions from the pandemic will generate increased levels of psychological distress for caregivers, impact the quality of relationships among marital couples, parents and their children, and indirectly, siblings. Adversity in the family social context can negatively affect the children's level of adjustment through the difficult times the family is facing (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002).

On top of this, the youth also faces a constantly changing world. To keep up with the latest information and knowledge, they must spend extra time and resources studying and up-skilling themselves. In such circumstances, close relationships within the family can help weather unfavorable circumstances within the family system. Research has found that maintaining a robust parent-child bond helps promote healthy development in children and youth, particularly among low socioeconomic status (Milteer, Ginsburg, & Mulligan, 2012). Distinctive patterns of family engagement through family organizational processes- routines, rituals, and rules- can help through the pandemic-related disruptions in the family. Routines emphasize a pragmatic function, while rituals are symbolic and can carry an emotional significance. Participating in daily routines like creating a schedule for morning habits and exercises can have a utilitarian function. Rituals like gathering for meals or family prayer can strengthen the family unit and its shared values. Rules can refer to any unspoken emotional and relational patterns that govern the interactions in a family or the limits of standards of behavior. Rules are necessary to ensure family members stay connected and checked even when frustrated. People in pastoral care and Church authorities can use this knowledge to encourage families in the accompaniment and formation of youth at home.

Good and Willoughby (2008) indicated that the decline in adolescents' religiosity and spirituality could be associated with the emergence of abstract thought and the development of complex skills for self-regulation in adolescence. The decline in spiritual connectedness may contribute to the rise in suicides, substance abuse, or other mental or physical health problems during this developmental period. At the 20th Latin American Meeting of National Youth Pastoral Leaders, Pope Francis gave the message to encourage the young people to deepen their knowledge of the person of Jesus. Pope Francis reflected on how he was open to being inspired by the wealth of reflections and conversations around him.

Youth can get a way out of their world of conflicts through affirmation, appreciation, affection, availability, and accountability. Formators, mental health professionals and counselors can focus on youth transition into productive adulthood by helping families have effective rituals, routines, and rules. Spiritual leaders and pastors can identify families with youth that require guidance and support. *Amoris Laetitia* mentions that "parents always influence the moral development of their children, for better or worse. They should take this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably, and appropriately."

In the address of the II Vatican Council to Youth (1965) was a final message and warning to the youth who are to bear the torch from the elders, live in a world of historic transformation, and are the future of the society- "You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it."

Reflections from Pope Francis

The *Christus Vivit* (Christ Is Alive)- Pope Francis' post-synodal apostolic exhortation in Rome is one of the recent efforts of the Pope to address the youth. The Holy Father, in the document, encourages the youth to live lives of holiness, "dream great things," and listen to the wisdom of the elderly. His advice to the Church is to heed the concerns of the young people and be cautious in dilemmas that require you to encase in the past or accept all the world is offering.

It is time for the Church to take action to help the youth as they are the world's future. Pope Francis uses the metaphor of the young generation as the fertile and new soil God gives to Christian communities. The point insists one reflect on how much accompaniment is required in their journey of personal maturity so that they can be "strengthened in faith and grace of the Lord: and "bear fruits of love and hope" (Pope Francis, 2019).

To the youth, Pope says that if they at any time find that they have reached an ideological juncture that the Church hasn't reached yet, they should "have the patience to wait for us." He insists that the Church become one that 'listens' and not 'condemns' so that the youth would not feel like their concerns are falling on deaf ears. Age, according to Pope, does not establish privileges, which implies that being young does not put less worth or dignity on the youth.

Pope Francis also describes the youth as "the age of choice." He understands that the generation's young people should take chances and not be afraid of making mistakes. He calls for young people to be "protagonists of change" and "courageous missionaries." He also encourages the young and the elderly to combine their dreams and visions to peer into the future. His final words to the youth were to "keep running the race before you, outstripping all those who are slow or afraid."

Tactics and Implications

As a psychologist, spiritual leader, formator, or psycho-spiritual therapist, there are various ways in which parents, youth, and the Church can be driven to provide the environment required for efficient and holistic youth development. From the literature on psychology to the message of Pope Francis, it is clear that for the youth to develop, there needs to be a sufficient accompaniment, opportunities to be develop, and guidance equally through challenges and prospects in their life. The Church can one source through which this can be provided to the wider community. The youth, the parents, and caregivers also need to be inspired and challenged to see their perspectives on youth development. One that accompanies, nourishes, and gives a listening ear to the youth would have a better connection with them than one that condemns them. Writing blogs, regular meetings, professional camp and interactive sessions help parents to reflect on their behavior and modify them to one that will help the children thrive. There are successful cases where books for parents were given away in camps or other occasions that helped parents and youth gain a better perspective of what they are required to do. Especially with the advantage of the software and online resources, Church members should not be hesitant to use the resource to connect with the parents and youth of the Church.

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