

Last but not the Least: Youth and Formation

Last but not Least would like to bring into perspective a lot of the factors required for efficient youth formation and ask the reader to reflect on how they can use this knowledge to practical implication. The factors are a combination of various literature, articles, conference publications, and knowledge from veterans in the area of Youth formation and accompaniment.

Accompaniment cannot and should not happen in an elitist or exclusivist environment. An ‘open door’ concept that reflects inclusiveness and belongingness (*Christus Vivit*, 234) is essential in youth ministry. Accompaniment with the youth in their journey should reflect the journey that the disciples had on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-32). Even though Jesus understands that the lack of belief in the two men had closed their eyes to reality, He accompanied them in their journey. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus told stories from the time of Moses, the prophets, and how it is now being fulfilled. It was when Jesus gave thanks and broke bread with them that they realized who He really was. This is a relevant passage for the Church leaders and formators. The goal of school or university-level campus ministry is to be “an expression of the Church’s special desire to be present to all who are involved in higher education” (Empowered by the Spirit, 13). Here, the peer-to-peer ministry has the advantage of spreading the Gospel to a broader group. It would be easier for them to find common interests and goals to strengthen their bond of trust and spiritual friendship, worship, and faith fellowship. The following points focus on formators who accompany the youth in ministry with a focus on psycho-spiritual development- building resilience, identifying vulnerability and protective factors, and skill building.

Resilience can be traced back to pioneering research on children with schizophrenia during the 1960s and 1970s (Luthar, Lyman, &

Crossman, 2014). With new research, it was noticed that numerous protective factors among children distinguished well-functioning at-risk youth from those faring more poorly. These factors included strong, supportive ties with the family, informal support systems outside the home, and dispositional attributes such as sociability (Werner & Smith, 1982, 2001). Significant adversity in the youth's life and positive adaptation are often not directly addressed but are two subsumed constructs in resilience.

The formators' role in building resilience begins not with the youth but with young couples or families that are building up their families. They should realize the importance of helping young couples develop a psychologically and spiritually nurturing family to ensure that the children who grow up there will later form efficient youth.

Various factors around the child, like alienation from parents or a negative school or social climate, can be viewed as vulnerability factors or markers that can exacerbate the adverse conditions of the youth. In contrast to that, promotive or protective factors that reduce the effects of risk in a positive direction include support from caregivers and peers. Even support from extended family can be important in helping at-risk youth. Barnett and colleagues (2010) studied how among children exposed to harsh maternal parenting, high levels of grandmother involvement can reduce the risk of maladjustment in grandchildren.

The formators and Church pastors, along with various Church authorities, can keep an eye out for vulnerability factors and protective factors that the youth in their Church are exposed to. Open discussion about the vulnerability factors and active involvement with the Church congregation to increase protective factors can considerably reduce the risk of the youth falling into the wrong trap. Parents are also highly vulnerable to stress in a chronic community (Jain et al., 2012). Hence, it is essential to focus on youth and the environment they will return to at the end of the day. Positive personal characteristics and emotionally supportive caregiving during the early development years can pave the way for children to identify factors that will enable or hinder their growth.

The social psychologist Goleman (1995) developed the idea of emotional intelligence and integrated a range of skills in three critical areas of soul development and practice at work and in life. For a long time, research has focused on the deficit models of adolescence. Researchers

started arguing for developmental plasticity and diversity in adolescent development (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). The nature-nurture debate is a long-going topic of discussion, especially regarding the development of children and youth. For example, Bronfenbrenner's approach to understanding development from multiple perspectives using interpersonal contexts of human development and trans-contextual environmental factors beyond the family setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1970) was essential in understanding development nested in the different systems. The role of the community and the interaction the community has with the members of the family, will have an impact on how the youth progresses over time. In a study published in the American Psychological Association, provided the perspective of social contexts' influence on religious and spiritual development during adolescence and the role of religion and spirituality in the broader aspects of adolescent development like health, subjective well-being, education, risk behaviour, and civic engagement (King & Roeser, 2009).

Benson (1997) asserted 20 internal and 20 external assets or positive traits of an individual. The internal assets include the individuals' commitment to learning, positive values like strong guiding principles, social competencies, and positive identity including a sense of control, purpose, and recognition of strengths and potentials. The external assets includes support including and not limited to emotional support, family support, positive family communication, caring neighbourhood, and caring culture; empowerment, which includes feelings of empowerment and value to their contribution; boundaries and expectations mentioned through clear regulations for youth conduct and consequences for violating them; and constructive use of time made possible through opportunities to develop skills. Research on youth revealed that with higher levels of assets, there were lower levels of multiple risk behaviours and higher levels of thriving irrespective of various factors like present location, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011).

The main practical implication of these findings for the Church is understanding that empirical literature is available to help understand the relevance of interaction and involvement with the youth. Research based on scientific study design with outcome measures and evaluation of effects have shown that positive youth development programs have created considerable effects on the youth. Of these, skill-training and mentoring have been identified as effective programs to promote

positive youth development. Thus the aim of formators would be to update themselves with the latest research in youth development, be effective practitioners of culturally valid and reliable interventions and tool to measure youth development, and have peer systems of formators who can have dialogues on youth development progress. Publishing the results of such programs and providing proof to the community of the result of youth engagement also encourages more families to join in the effort to provide opportunities and challenges to the youth. A few words for thought:

“The youth say stupid things and they say good things, as we do, as everyone does. But hear them, speak with them, because we must learn from them and they must learn from me, for us” (Pope Francis, February 18, 2016).

“They are our future, and we must have a dialogue. This dialogue between the past and the future is important. Because of this I underline so much the relationship between the youth and the grandparents. They must speak with” (Pope Francis, July 31, 2016).

“Dear young people, do not be satisfied with anything less than Truth and Love, do not be content with anything less than Christ” (Pope Benedict XVI).

“It is Jesus who stirs in you desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal” (Pope John Paul II).