

Witnessing Faith

Be a Witness

“When we meet Christ and accept His Gospel, life changes and we are driven to communicate our experiences to others. ...the Church needs genuine witnesses: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others.”

Pope John Paul II, World Youth Day – Toronto, 2002



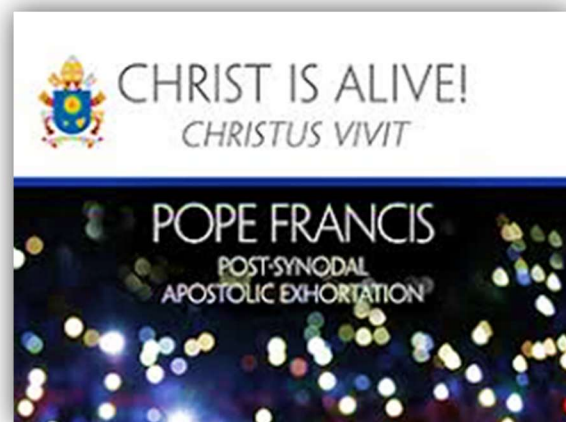
A witness is someone whose life has been changed through an encounter with Christ and is able to share that experience.

Who is someone that has been a witness to you?

How did they witness Christ to you?

Those of us who are no longer young need to find ways of keeping close to the voices and concerns of young people. **“Drawing together creates the conditions for the Church to become a place of dialogue and a witness to life-giving fraternity”**. We need to make more room for the voices of young people to be heard: “listening makes possible an exchange of gifts in a context of empathy... At the same time, it sets the conditions for a preaching of the Gospel that can touch the heart truly, decisively and fruitfully”. 38

The importance of witness does not mean that we should be silent about the word. **Why should we not speak of Jesus, why should we not tell others that he gives us strength in life, that we enjoy talking with him, that we benefit from meditating on his words?** ...176



Quotations are drawn from the papal encyclical: *Christus Vivit – Christ is Alive!* by Pope Francis, April 2019
http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html

Living the Joy of Adolescent Catechesis

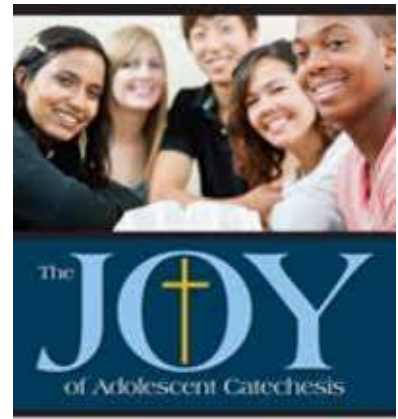
The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis is a document that seeks to challenge and inspire each of us who are called to share faith with youth. It is a collaborative document for the national organizations that share a common commitment and mission in adolescent catechesis as the Partnership in Adolescent Catechesis:

- The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry
- The Catholic Educational Association, and
- The National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

Quotations in this handout packet are drawn from *The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*

A publication of the Partnership on Adolescent Catechesis, which consists of The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, The Catholic Educational Association, and The National Conference for Catechetical Leadership. Copyright 2017.

1. For two thousand years, the Church has flourished from generation to generation because of people like you who are willing to take the time to share with others the faith and love you have for Jesus Christ. Page 1
2. We may never see the results of ministry with young people, because often we are seed planters but not harvesters, joining a chorus of others who have planted or will plant the seeds of faith and love in the lives of our young people. Page 2
3. We are privileged to share the love of Christ with others, and to share with them the reason for our faith and our hope in Christ's promises of abundant life. Page 3
4. The Church has no shortage of words; what she needs are more witnesses. Page 3
5. ...our mission is not just to inform for to form and transform. Jesus is not a subject to study but a person to encounter. Page 2
6. Jesus is not a subject to study but a person to encounter. Page 2
7. This ministry (of catechizing adolescents) gives us the opportunity to invite young people to have a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church. Page 1
8. We make a profound difference in the lives of teenagers by sharing with them, in words and deeds, the beauty of the Catholic faith. Page 2
9. Grace empowers us to be witnesses of faith, and the grace of the Holy Spirit works in the lives of young people to invite them to conversion. Page 2
10. Our young people not only desperately need to see and hear what it means to be Catholic: they need to be apprenticed into the faith. Page 2

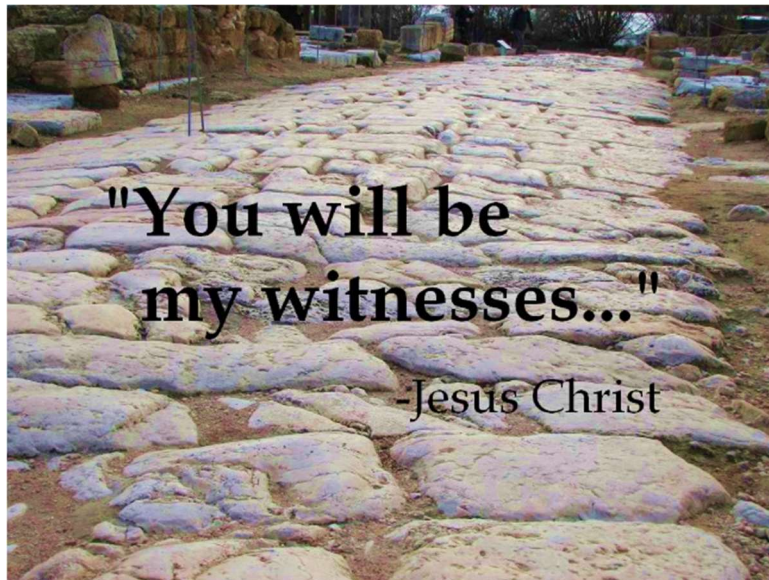


Witnesses

- Are centered in Christ and rely upon the Holy Spirit
- Collaborate with others to plant seeds of faith
- Share Christ's loves
- Share a reason for faith and hope
- Lead youth to encounter Christ
- Invite youth into intimate relationship with Christ
- Share a living faith
- Invite youth into conversion
- Mentor youth in the faith

Summarized from *The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*

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Be Witnesses of Joy

“This is the essence of witnessing: simply sharing your personal experiences regarding the Lord. In a courtroom, a witness is not expected to argue the case, prove the truth, or press for a verdict. That is the job for attorneys. Witnesses simply report what has happened...You may not be a biblical scholar, but you are the authority of your life. And it's hard to argue with personal experience.”

Rick Warren, *A Purpose Driven Life*, Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, 2011, 2012, page 288

Share the story of God in your life. Witnessing is about telling the story not about convincing or teaching. We've experienced God's presence, God's mercy, and God's assistance in little ways and in big ways. We witness to everyday faith by sharing glimpses of these experiences.

Your life is your witness. The primary way you witness to your faith is the way you live your life. Youth have heard a lot about faith; they yearn to see faithful living in action. What does it look like to be a person of faith, hope, conviction, and joy? How do we show that we trust God and that we see purpose in our lives that is part of God's plan?

Be true to your values. Little things (and big things) matter. Youth may not always be listening, but they are always watching. Our witness is our authenticity: we strive to be faithful in the way we treat others, the way we treat students, the way we handle challenges and successes, and the way we rely on God. Youth notice kindness and integrity.

Sometimes our witness is subtle and sometimes we are called to be bold. We can witness in subtle ways by connecting our faith in God in conversations, in the environment in our home, or referring to prayer. There are occasions when the context of the conversation and the relationship may invite a bolder response such as sharing a story of how we experienced God in a personal challenge, or by offering to pray with or for a young person.



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Who is someone that has been a witness to you?

How did they witness Christ to you?

Tips and Resources for Witnessing

If you understand witness as testimony, we can take a cue from our rites, especially the Rite of Election. When the godparents testify to the readiness of their companions, they are essentially asked to name how they have seen God at work in their companions' lives. To testify is not to laud or eulogize a person but to be attentive to the action of the Holy Spirit at work in the world, in the lives of others, and in one's own life. To testify—to witness—is to say, "This is how I have seen God at work in this person, in my life, or in our communal lives right now," then to name in specific ways the action of Christ's Spirit they have seen.

Diana Macalintal

Codirector and Cofounder of TeamRCIA.com, a free online resource for catechumenate ministry.

<https://teamrcia.com/>

Short, simple witnesses are very effective. An example is sharing an experience that reinforces a truth, and then stating that truth. To my kids, I explained how I have been working on getting the heater working for hours (which they have been watching and have been under foot). I was lost, confused, frustrated. I said a prayer for help, and God has just given me the answer. Now we have heat for our home. I know God answered my prayer because he loves me, and he loves you. Over the last four months my kids have recounted this witness to me. It witnesses to several truths. This way of witnessing is effective for children but also easy to work into everyday conversations.

Greg Kelley – Parent

I use the elevator pitch concept: you should be able to explain who you are (a Catholic Christian) and how your faith and relationship with Christ has transformed you.

"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope"
1Peter 3:15

Christina Davis, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Diocese of Reno

7 PRINCIPLES FOR TELLING YOUR FAITH STORY

Whether you are preparing to give your faith testimony in a witness talk or in a more informal setting, these seven principles will help you articulate the stories of grace in your life.

Tell it as a story.

Begin with what happened.

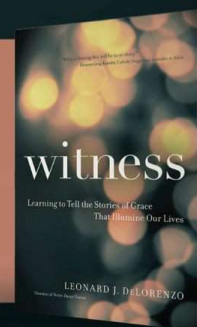
Express it in style.

Modify it for your audience.

Ensure there is sufficient closure.

Embrace natural emotions.

Pray and practice.



Read more about each of these principles in *Witness: Learning to Tell the Stories of Grace That Illuminate Our Lives* by Leonard J. DeLorenzo

Available at
www.avemariapress.com/witness.

Being a Witness

We can provide a witness when we teach and evangelize. We can also provide a witness in our conversations with an individual or group.

We witness to the truth that God is incarnate in our life. God takes flesh in our problems and our celebrations. He breaks into our world. We experience God in moments when we recognize our love for God and our dependence on him.

When we witness, we are telling the story of God in our life. God breaks into our life, we experience God's constancy and presence, and it reminds us of a truth about who God is for us.

A witness sometimes has this pattern:

- I was feeling (blank), then God broke into my situation.
- Then, I felt (blank) and
- I learned that / or was reminded that God (is always there for me, always calls me back, is merciful beyond my imagination, loves me...).
- I felt called to grow in (blank)

To prepare for a witness, recall the situation when you experienced God's presence.

- What was happening before? What is the background or context for the story?
- What were you feeling?
- How did you experience God's presence? For example:
 - I experienced God's friendship when I was feeling all alone.
 - I experienced God's mercy when I was feeling ashamed.
 - I experienced God's love and care for me when I was feeling unlovable.
 - I experienced God's power in the beauty of creation when I was feeling depressed.
 - I experienced God's reassurance when I was feeling overwhelmed and anxious.
 - I experienced God's call to me when I was feeling lost.
 - I experienced God working through me when I was feeling empathy for someone in need
- What happened? What were you feeling? What did you notice?
- What did this experience help you to learn about God or remember about God?
- How did this encounter call you to change and grow?

Reflection

Tasks of a Witness

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Summarized from *The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*

Which of these tasks come easily for you personally?

Which of these are challenges?

What is one thing you can do to grow as a Witness?





A Witness of Faith

- Engaging a faith witness element
 - As a catechist
 - As a faith companion to youth
 - Bringing in witnesses from the community
 - Engaging and preparing youth as faith witnesses
- Providing faith witnesses and engaging youth in faith sharing and affective prayer throughout catechesis and ministry with youth.

Family Witness

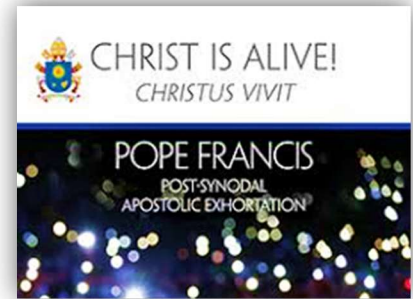
- Consider all family relationships
 - Parents
 - Grandparents
 - Aunts / Uncles
 - Siblings
- Empower parents and family to listen and witness faith
- Engage families in service and ministry for shared witness



The Whole Community Accompanies and Witnesses to Youth

“...we need a Church capable of walking at people's side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; ...”

Pope Francis, World Youth Day, 2013.



Young people) will be better integrated into **(parish) communities that are open, living their faith, eager to radiate Christ, joyful, free, fraternal and committed**. These communities can be settings where they feel that it is possible to cultivate precious relationships.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 220

Rather than listening to young people attentively, “all too often, there is a tendency to provide prepackaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing their real questions to emerge and facing the challenges they pose”. Yet **once the Church sets aside narrow preconceptions and listens carefully to the young, this empathy enriches her**, for “it allows young people to make their own contribution to the community, helping it to appreciate new sensitivities and to consider new questions”.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 65

The community has an important role in the accompaniment of young people; it should feel collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging and challenging them. All should regard young people with understanding, appreciation and affection, and avoid constantly judging them or demanding of them a perfection beyond their years.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, #243

Young Catholics are not merely on the receiving end of pastoral activity: they are living members of the one ecclesial body, baptized persons in whom the Spirit of the Lord is alive and active. **They help to enrich what the Church is and not only what she does. They are her present and not only her future.**

Final Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, 54.

The Synod insisted that **“the family continues to be the principal point of reference for young people**. Children appreciate the love and care of their parents, they give importance to family bonds, and they hope to succeed in forming a family when it is their time.”

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 262.