



The Summary of the Piarist Synod in the Province of Poland

This document presents a synthesis of information and opinions gathered during the Piarist Synod in the Province of Poland. It consists of two parts, the first being a statistical summary of an Internet survey and the second describes key issues highlighted during the Provincial Synod.

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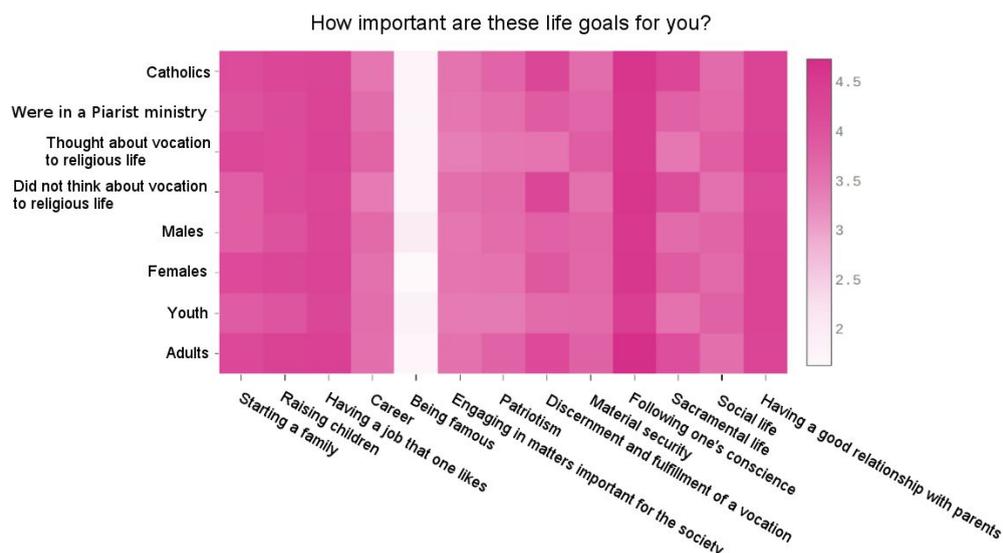
1. Survey

The Province of Poland has conducted a nationwide survey to learn about people's views and opinions about faith, the Church, Piarists and vocation. It was carried out online via Google Forms and was open for a period of several months up till the 31st of March 2018.

The survey has collected responses of 431 individuals. More than a half of respondents were youth (239 respondents, 55%) and also slightly more females than males took part (244; 57%). Majority of people were practicing Catholics (292; 68%) and had contact with any kind of Piarist ministries during their lives (343; 80%).

This work presents proportions of answers given in particular questions as well as lists statistically significant differences in answers between various groups of respondents as found by appropriate tests.

1.1. Hierarchy of core values



Respondents were asked to assess their core values and life goals on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates a value of very little importance for an individual and 5 indicates a value of a significant importance:

- Starting a family
- Raising children
- Having a job that one likes
- Career
- Being famous
- Engaging in matters important for the society
- Patriotism
- Discernment and fulfillment of a vocation
- Material security
- Following one's conscience
- Sacramental life
- Social life
- Having a good relationship with parents

Following one's conscience through life surfaced as the most important goal. Having a good relationship with parents and having a job that one likes were also crucial. A little less important were raising children and starting a family. Further down on the importance scale were discernment and fulfillment of a vocation, sacramental life, material security, social life. Patriotism and engaging in matters important for the society were less important. Being famous was clearly the least important life goal.

Starting a family and sacramental life were more important for women than for men. For practicing Catholics more important were starting a family, raising children, patriotism, discernment and fulfillment of a vocation, and sacramental life. For the rest (non-practicing Catholics, other faiths, non-believers) more important were material security and career.

Starting a family, social life and having a good relationship with parents were found to be less important for people who were discerning a vocation to religious life. Moreover, engaging in matters important for the society were more important to these people as compared to those who did not discern a vocation to religious life.

1.2. Ways of expressing faith

The most popular way of expressing faith was definitely prayer - 50% of respondents mentioned prayer in their answer to this question. 19% of people pointed to the Eucharist and sacraments as primary ways of expressing faith, 16% underlined living according to Church's teachings, 10% express their faith by reading and contemplating the Holy Bible. Engaging in a local community was the best faith expressing method for 7% of respondents, volunteering for 5% of them.

Prayer was found to be significantly more important for people who had contact with a Piarist ministry as compared to those who did not.

People who were discerning a vocation to religious life were very often mentioning the Holy Bible and the Eucharist.

1.3. Attitude towards the Church

Positive attitude towards the Church was expressed by 45% of respondents, although 17% of them noted that they have some issues with Church's activities. A negative opinion was expressed by 15% of respondents. A significant portion of respondents (35%) described the meaning of Church in their lives (most answers - the Church as a home/community, a sacred meeting place with God, churches, an authority in the matters of faith and morality). The rest of respondents (5%) described their attitude towards the Church as neutral.

Help for the poor and guidance in faith were the most common reasons for respondents' positive attitude towards the Church. There were only a few answers that described causes behind negative attitudes - among those were statements that the Church is focusing on other aspects of the faith than on loving God and neighbors (8 persons), and some express their irritation that the Church is sometimes interfering in politics (5 persons).

Respondents who were discerning a vocation to religious life and practicing Catholics had much higher rate of positive opinions towards the Church as compared to the rest of respondents. Respondents who were discerning a vocation to religious life more often viewed the Church as a home/community and underlined their feelings of belonging to it.

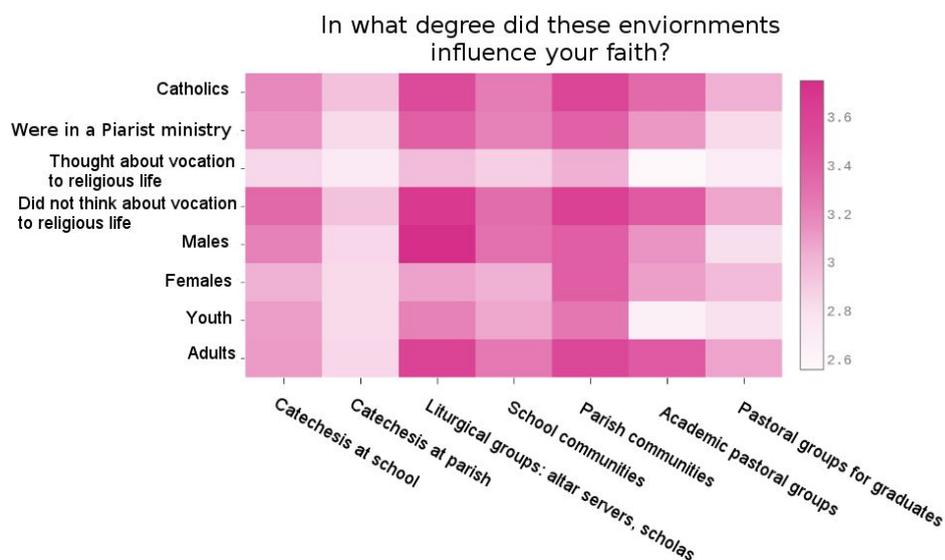
1.4. The most challenging state of life

Priesthood and religious life were seen as the most challenging states of life by 49% of respondents. 33% of respondents viewed marriage as the most challenging, whereas only 18% saw being single as the hardest path of life.

Religious life was not as challenging for people who were discerning a vocation to religious life - those people more often indicated that being single is more demanding.

1.5. Non-Piarist ministries

1.5.1. Faith development



Respondents who had contact with non-Piarist ministries were asked how these ministries influenced their faith. They rated this influence on a scale 1-5 (the higher the score the greater impact on one's faith a particular ministry made) or they indicated that they did not have contact with a particular activity/ministry.

75% of respondents took part in catecheses at schools and/or at parishes, whereas 60% were altar servers and/or a part of a schola. Community gatherings at schools or at parishes were attended by about a half of all respondents. 36% of adults were in academic pastoral groups, and 20% of adults in groups for graduates.

Ministries that were most influential and helpful in the process of faith development were altar serving and scholas, and attending gatherings of parish communities. Less influential were school communities and academic pastoral groups. The least helpful were catecheses.

Altar serving and being in a schola was much more helpful for males than for females, which might suggest a significant influence of altar serving (which is a male-only function in Poland) as compared to playing in scholas (where there are typically more females than males). People who were discerning a vocation to religious life found school catecheses and meetings of various communities more helpful than the rest of respondents.

1.5.2. Missing aspects of ministries and communities

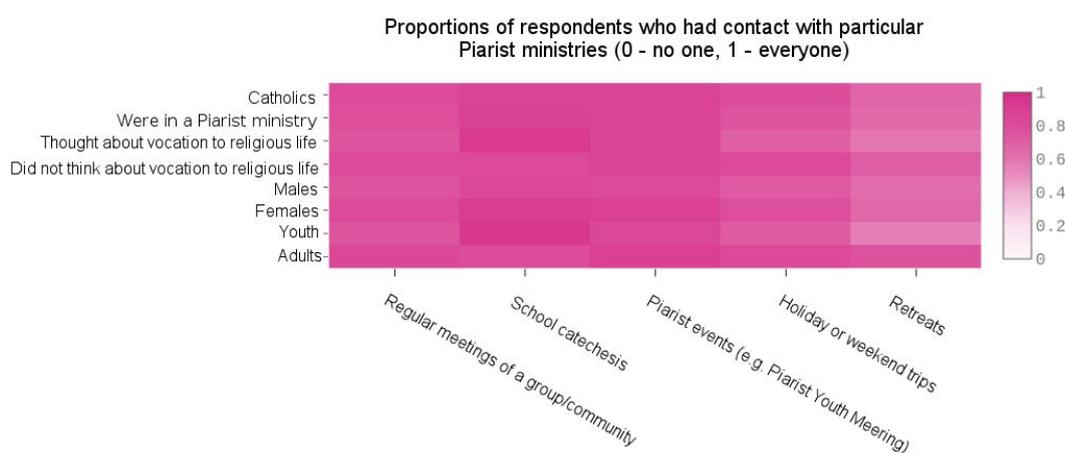
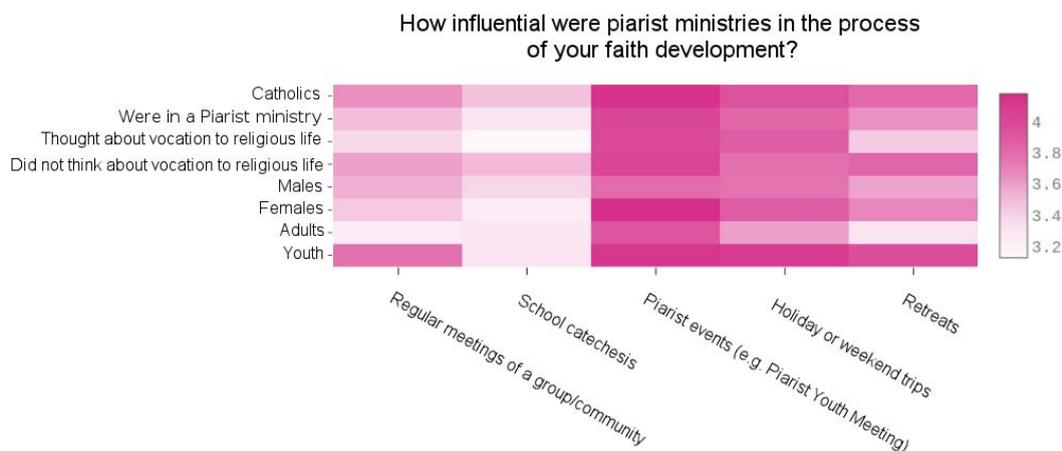
114 respondents described what was lacking in their experience of ministries. Conflicts and not being open to new people were the most common issues of communities and ministries (16 responses). Several other respondents mentioned a lack of being understood by the community and a lack of honesty of community members. Others were missing a greater emphasis on faith development, regularity of meetings, and greater involvement in meetings of both the members and the priest/minister.

1.6. Piarist ministries

1.6.1. With what forms of Piarist ministries did young people have contact and which were the most influential in the process of their faith development?

Respondents who had contact with Piarist ministries were asked how these ministries influenced their faith. They rated this influence on a scale 1-5 (the higher score the greater impact on one's faith a particular ministry made) or indicated that they didn't have contact with a particular activity/ministry.

About 70% of people had contact with Piarist events (e.g. SMP, it means Piarist Youth Meeting in Poland), 63% with regular meetings of a Piarist community, whereas 60% took part in weekend and holiday trips. A half of respondents attended retreats.



Regular meetings of a Piarist community and trips (retreats, holiday trips, weekend trips) were significantly more influential in the process of faith development in adults than in youth. Piarist events (e.g. Piarist Youth Meeting) helped develop faith much more in females than in males. People who were discerning a vocation to religious life valued retreats and school catecheses more than the rest of respondents.

Other forms of ministries, that were not specified in the questionnaire, but the respondents found especially useful in faith development, were conversations with priests and spiritual direction (4%).

1.6.2. Activities in Piarist ministries that help with discerning a vocation

147 persons expressed their opinion in this open-ended question. Almost a half of respondents (45%) pointed to conversations with a priest or a nun as the most important aspects of discerning a vocation (spiritual direction, talking about religious life, testimonies of faith, discussing vocation). Retreats (24%), prayer (16%) and community meetings (15%) were also listed as important activities in discerning one's vocation.

1.6.3. Missing aspects of Piarist ministries

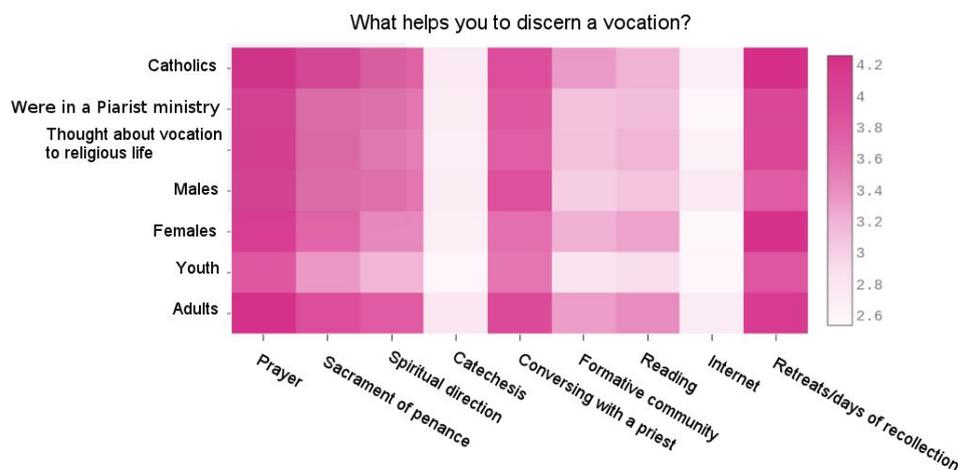
82 persons answered an open-ended question to describe what was missing in their experience of Piarist ministries. Most numerous remarks: a lack of formative meetings/retreats (29%), a lack of understanding of youth by priests (28%), too few conversations about faith (21%), meetings were not carried out on a regular basis (15%).

1.7. Vocation

1.7.1. Support in discerning a vocation

Those who considered a vocation to religious life were faced with a question whether there's someone who helps and supports them in the process of discerning their vocation. Out of 145 persons who responded 66% said that they indeed have someone who supports them - most often these people are priests (20%), family (7%) and friends (6%).

People considering a vocation to religion life were also asked what helps them in the process of discerning it. Prayer was the most important method, the second was participation in retreats and in days of recollection. Conversing with a priest, the sacrament of penance, and spiritual direction were also very helpful. Next were reading and being in a community that focused on vocation. The least helpful were catecheses and the Internet.



For adults of particular importance were sacraments, spiritual direction and reading. Females found retreats and days of recollection to be especially valuable in discerning a vocation. Practicing Catholics often mentioned prayer.

1.7.2. Difficulties and fears faced when one discerns a vocation to religious life

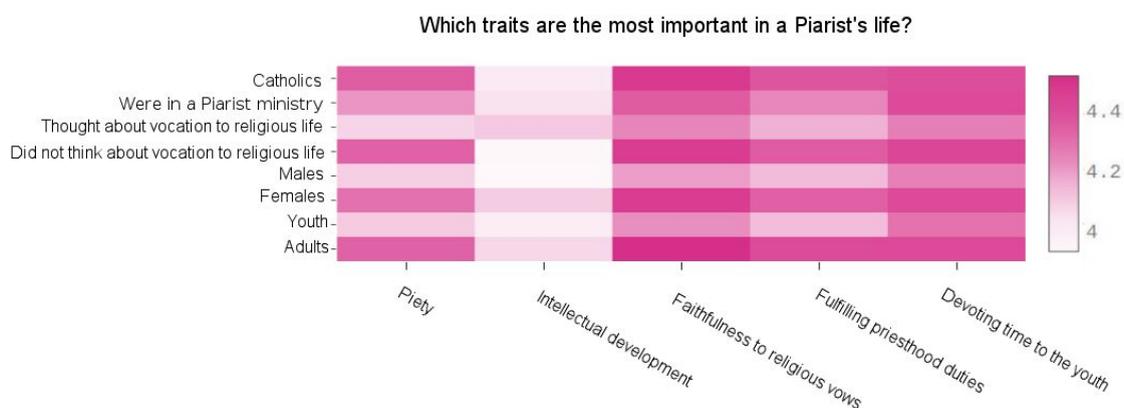
People who were discerning a vocation to religious life were posed with an open-ended question asking whether there's something valuable that had to be given up when picking a religious life. Answers were provided by 132 persons out of 211 who were discerning a vocation to religious life. About 75% of them said that there are things that they see as problematic when choosing such a life, like family matters (leaving one's family, no possibility to start a family, no possibility to enter marriage). Renunciation of pleasures and fighting doubts whether this path of life was a good choice were also viewed as great difficulties, although in a lesser degree as compared to former matters.

Respondents who did not think about entering a religious life (220 persons; 52%) were asked what would they fear in that path of life. 130 persons gave their opinions (60% of those who did not think about entering a religious life). The greatest fear turned out to be loneliness (39%) - lack of a possibility of sharing one's life with a significant other, no possibility of having children, limited social life. 29% fears that this path of life would be too demanding and difficult for them. 21% does not want to renunciate pleasures or abandon their passions. 11% fears having serious doubts that choosing this path of life was a mistake.

1.7.3. Traits of a Piarist

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of typical traits of a Piarist on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is a very important trait:

- Piety
- Intellectual development
- Faithfulness to religious vows
- Fulfilling priesthood duties
- Devoting time to the youth



Faithfulness to religious vows and devoting time to the youth were clearly the most important. Further on were fulfilling priesthood duties (highly correlated to faithfulness to religious vows) and piety. Intellectual development was the least important.

Devoting time to the youth was salient for people who were in Piarist ministries. Remaining traits were of the same importance level as for those who weren't in a Piarist ministry.

People who discerned a vocation to religious life and practicing Catholics gave higher scores to traits related to religion: piety, faithfulness to religious vows, fulfilling priesthood duties.

2. Challenges and key issues highlighted during the Provincial Synod

During the Provincial Synod developed a list of challenges and key issues that the Province of Poland is facing, based on conclusions reached at local synods and via analysis of surveys. These challenges can be divided into challenges seen by the youth, challenges seen by adults, and general issues.

A total of 135 challenges were listed. A process of prioritisation was conducted during the Provincial Synod, and a dozen or so challenges and issues seen as the most significant ones were selected for further discussions in five groups (3 youth groups and 2 adult groups). The groups were formed by representatives of local synods.

Results of group work on analysing challenges and issues that received the most votes during the prioritisation are presented below.

2.1. Challenges seen by the youth

Problems that young people face and weak points which they see in themselves:

1. **We don't know what we believe in.**
2. **We want to live by our own rules and not by God's.**
3. **We don't see God in our everyday lives.**
4. **Our faith is dependent on the quality of Church institutions.**
5. **We are not aware of what it is that brings us joy.**
6. **When considering entering the religious life, our fears/concerns are raised by the prospect of: lack of family.**

Re. 1. We don't know what we believe in

Lack of knowledge may result from poor education in faith or poor teaching, from a lack of a genuine experience of God, from a lack of questions asked, from difficulties in understanding. Young people have noticed shortcomings in the proper preparation of the catechism. They feel it is too formal. In their opinion, the catechism should be simple and should inspire further development in subsequent sessions.

Re. 2. We want to live by our own rules and not by God's

Young people have noticed that they are susceptible to influences from their surroundings, and less so to the essence of faith in the Lord. Sometimes, the Church seems distant from the lives of young people. Church's preaching seems to be artificial. Young people want to live with God, but not in all spheres of their lives. They do not focus on God, but rather progress through their lives alone, because they do not know that happiness comes from God. People search for something that gives pleasure at a given moment, and not for something long-lasting. They do not appreciate what they have or that true joy is to be found in community with the Church. The faith of the people must be mature in order not to concentrate on the flaws of the Church. Young people do not have solid foundations for their faith, and thus are easily put off (a poor testament to priests). People look to priests as a role model, thus the behaviour of priests becomes an indicator of faith. There is a shortage of discussion of good situations and the positive sides of the Church. The negative image presented in the media dissuades people from believing.

Re. 3. We don't see God in our everyday lives

Young people have noticed that the reason for the above may be their inability to see the workings of God, and their expectation of miracles. One solution may be stimulation of the desire to see the workings of God and the realisation that He exists. It is worthwhile to cultivate a sense of gratitude to God and to share this with others.

Re. 4. Our faith is dependent on the quality of Church institutions

Another reason may be poorly conducted catechesis in schools, the lack of a deep understanding of faith, and the absence of authority figures who may be imitated. A solution for these problems may be an increased awareness of the role of the laity in the Church, of the fact that the Church is created by the entire community of believers. The efforts of lay people to build communities and share testimony aids the clergy. Priests' own lives should be a testimony. Young people need an explanation of what is really going on in the Church and the faith. At the same time, young people have noted that they must search for answers and deepen their faith by themselves. They need to have the Holy Scriptures presented for them in a modern way, more accessible and more understandable.

Re.5. We are not aware of what it is that brings us joy

A further reason may be the large number of shallow pleasures available today and the need to meet the expectations of others. Pastoral care, dialogue, and the search for true joy through prayer and relations with God are important. Also important is the ability to pause and maintain this state.

Re.6. When considering entering the monastic life, our fears/concerns are raised by the prospect of: lack of family

Young have noticed that this concern may result from the difficulty of building relations with others in religious life, which can serve as a replacement for family relations. They may be terrified of a lack of contact with loved ones, the large distance from these family members, and the fact that brothers and sisters in religious life become a new family. A lack of knowledge on what religious life is like also arouses concerns. There are many stereotypes about religious life. Young people are not familiar with this way of life, and thus they fear it. It may be helpful to organise open days in the seminary, although young people may fear that participation in this type of event is synonymous with entering the monastery.

2.2. Challenges seen by adults

Problems adults face and weak points they see in themselves:

- 1. We hear young people, but we do not listen to them.**
- 2. We do not have instruments which would allow us to understand faith as experienced by young people.**
- 3. We are not honest in our sharing of faith.**
- 4. We are not diligent enough in our own spiritual development.**
- 5. We do not accompany young people in their experience of faith, of suffering, of doubt.**
- 6. As parents, we are not the leading authorities in matters of faith.**
- 7. We present faith strictly as a collection of rules which must be followed.**

Re.1. We hear young people, but we do not listen to them.

Adults are afraid of new technology, they stick to tradition and are not open, do not search for a common language with young people. This age group feels that it does not approach young people's problems seriously, that it does not constitute an authority for young people, that it chooses easy conversations rather than difficult ones, because peace and quiet are the most important.

Re.2. We do not have instruments which would allow us to understand faith as experienced by young people.

Adults do not know how to understand the faith of young people or how to gauge it. Adults feel that in relations with young people, there is a lack of mutual listening, a lack of trust. They follow well-worn paths rather than their intuition. The reason may be the failure to understand themselves before understanding others, and the inability to approach the same issues from different perspectives.

Re.3. We are not honest in our sharing of faith.

The reason for this may be a lack of diligence in the spiritual development of adults (parents/catechists), convenience, peer pressure, or superficiality. Adults are afraid to show their weaknesses and they display a lack of authenticity.

Re.4. We are not diligent enough in our own spiritual development.

Adults have noticed that they are mainly aware of their satisfaction from the current state of life, and that they rarely cross this boundary in order not to encounter difficulties, that they are spiritual "couch potatoes". The root of the problem may be disappointment, spiritual stagnation, in which faith becomes a routine. The lack of development of one's own faith can lead to its loss.

Re.5. We do not accompany young people in their experience of faith, of suffering, of doubt.

Faith has become a taboo subject. Young people are seen as a group and not as individuals. Among the young, there is a distaste for sharing faith. Young people are forced into faith while also being influenced by non-believing peers. Adults have difficulty in understanding young people.

Re.6. As parents, we are not the leading authorities in matters of faith.

Parents shift responsibility for education in faith to others. Spiritual guidance from parents is absent or is very minor.

Re.7. We present faith strictly as a collection of rules which must be followed.

Adults do not present faith as a personal relationship with God. Knowledge and faith are shared incorrectly.

2.3. General issues

General problems of communities:

- 1. Too few meetings regarding married life.**
- 2. Lack of dialogue on difficult topics**
- 3. Lack of dialogue on spiritual life**
- 4. There are no diversified youth groups with regard to age or marital status.**
- 5. There are too few offers for different types of excursions or retreats.**

Re.1. Too few meetings regarding married life.

- Separation of marriage from the Church
- Lack of a feeling of need for a calling for marriage
- The assumption that everyone has access to a good model for marriage
- The conviction of our own superiority and knowledge about marriage
- Shortage of dialogue with other marriages who have been married for some time
- Preparation for marriage in material terms, not spiritual ones
- Lack of dialogue, lack of skill in dialogue
- Partners getting to know each other inadequately
- Lack of awareness that a marriage must have a spiritual component, that marriage is a gift, but also a responsibility
- Lack of preparation for marriage by lay people
- Divorces, disappointments
- Failure to create a family with God
- Disruption of role hierarchies

Re.2. Lack of dialogue on difficult topics

- Lack of relationships
- Fear of humiliation and the reaction of other people
- Lack of vocabulary
- Lack of trust, of a feeling of security
- Fear of showing weakness
- Fear of being misunderstood
- Feeling of rejection and misunderstanding
- Being overwhelmed by problems
- Feeling that the topic is unwanted

Re.3. Lack of dialogue on spiritual life

- Spiritual topics have become uncomfortable topics
- No young people spoke with us, asked us questions
- Lack of initiative on the part of others
- Failure to address the topic
- Criticism / brushing off young people who come forward with the initiative to talk
- Failure to get started
- Lack of initiative

Re.5. There are too few offers for different types of excursions or retreats.

- Too few people interested
- No organiser or leader
- Lack of systematic approach
- Lack of a group in which it is possible to function well
- Lack of diversity in offers
- Too great diversity in offers

The oldest of the groups was tasked with formulating problems based on a list of challenges and holding a discussion.

- 1. The need for freedom of choice, and the freedom to make mistakes**
- 2. The issue of the maturity of parents and other adults**
- 3. The need to spend time together, to form relationships, to be together**
- 4. A challenge facing the Church: the clear and simple formulation of teaching.**
- 5. The lack of building a sense of responsibility, of encouraging initiative, of taking consequences for one's choices – there is a focus on intellectual development.**
- 6. Testimony of life!**
- 7. Negative image of the Church.**
- 8. Individual approach.**
- 9. Lack of awareness among young people that there are different possibilities for spiritual development.**
- 10. The situation in the contemporary world.**

- The need to develop pastoral care, catechism, and education appropriate to age.
- The creation of awareness of enormous responsibility, but also of the sermons, catechisms, homilies, and good preparation for completing these tasks.
- Showing young people existing opportunities and propositions of the Church, openness to new ones (pilgrimages, retreats, parish groups, conferences).
- The cause of young people's problems is often a lack of mental, emotional, and spiritual maturity, as well as a lack of relevant knowledge and means to educate and raise children and young people.
- This lack of maturity results in difficulty in creating and strengthening relations with young people, which we see as the basis for education.
- The need for the constant development of parents, teachers, and people in general. Guided development, directed towards taking up a specific role in society (being a mother, being a priest, etc). This development takes into account the personal commitment (desire) and real possibilities (well-conducted pre-marital courses, "schools for parents", courses, workshops)
- The maturity of an adult and knowledge of how to raise children and young people will result in a decrease or disappearance of certain problems in communication.



- The issue relating to the freedom of choice of a young person and the need for adult intervention. This should be more companionship and less taking decisions for them.
- Issues of society and worldview. Everything can be changed, we can always “get rid” of something, “forever” does not always mean forever.
- The need to build awareness that every believer creates the community of the Church (a change of thinking from “Church = priests” to “Church = us”).
- the great value of personal commitment in the life of the Church, both regarding a personal relationship with God and a relationship with other people or initiatives taken by the Church.