



Listening to the Voices of Youth: A Path to Discipleship and Ministry Success

FOR YOUTH MINISTERS, LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE ISN'T JUST HELPFUL; IT'S ESSENTIAL TO LEADING THEM IN THEIR JOURNEY TOWARD CHRIST. POPE FRANCIS FREQUENTLY EMPHASIZES THAT LISTENING IS KEY TO ACCOMPANYING YOUTH ON THEIR PATH TO DISCIPLESHIP. BUT WHAT DOES THIS REALLY LOOK LIKE IN OUR MINISTRIES?



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Listening goes beyond nodding or waiting to speak. It's a committed and genuine practice that requires patience, openness, and humility. We are called to give each young person our full attention, refrain from interrupting, ask questions to clarify, and even reflect back what we hear to ensure understanding. For me, learning how to do this took some effort. As someone naturally inclined to lead, I had to practice pausing, being open, and listening to understand, not to respond. This shift helped our youth to feel truly valued — a key step in showing them Christ's love.

Why is listening so essential? It builds confidence, self-awareness, and communi-

cation skills in young people, helping them feel their insights matter. In my 26 years of youth ministry, I've witnessed how transformative it is when youth feel heard. Recently, a group of high school students shared how much the *Welcome Retreat* (a Dynamic Catholic program) impacted their parents. Inspired, they wanted to lead the 8th grade confirmation retreat to make it equally meaningful. By listening and supporting their call to lead, I watched these young leaders grow stronger in faith and commitment.

Some might wonder, "Why should youth ministers focus on listening when we already receive guidance from our pastors?" Young people offer fresh perspectives that can

profoundly impact ministry. Listening to them allows us to shape programs that truly speak to their spiritual needs. When young people see that their voices matter, they begin to take ownership in the program, they feel a deeper connection to the Church, and they are more likely to continue their faith journey.

So, what do we do with what we hear? Act on it. Embracing their ideas and integrating their feedback creates a ministry that's welcoming and responsive to their growth as disciples. By listening with an open heart, we build a community that strengthens their faith and empowers them to live as followers of Christ, a true gift to the Church and the world. ✝

High School students discussing ways to engage and enhance the 8th grade confirmation retreat.



High school student giving his witness talk at the 8th grade confirmation retreat.

