



# Come, Follow Me: Priests and Ministry with Young People

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# The Church and Young People Today

- The Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.
- Challenges and struggles common to young people everywhere
  - Fears, problems with institutions they see as corrupt, problems with family and peers, worries about the future, decision making paralysis, addiction, isolation, finding meaning, where to give themselves
- Challenges for the young in the Church
  - Generally poor catechesis, lack of mystagogy and introduction into the sacred, hearing the Gospel through social media immersion, inadequate notions of Jesus, feeling out of place in the Church, misunderstanding of human love and sexuality in the divine plan, scientific reason versus faith, the scandals, the various “isms,” finding heroes among celebrities and athletes rather than saints.



# The Church and Young People Today

- Many clergy struggle to connect as they would like for various reasons.
- Others are wary because of the scandals to minister to young people effectively, because of what others might think or the danger of a false accusation.
- Some were never “trained” for youth work and the gap between generations seems to be growing. As a result, many delegate, either to volunteers or, in parishes that can afford it, professional youth ministers.
- Few engage with the spiritual fruitfulness they would like.





## John Paul II's and Young People

- Besides St. John Bosco, one of the greatest “youth ministers” in the history of the Church was St. John Paul II, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of whose election the Church celebrated yesterday (October 16) and whose feast day the Church will celebrate next Monday (October 22).
- He ministered to youth:
  - As a layman and seminarian through the Rhapsodic theater and the Living Rosary
  - As the University chaplain in Krakow
  - An the “uncle” of his *srodowisko*
  - Through the founding of World Youth Days
  - Author of *Dilecti Amici* and a letter to Priests on Ministry to the Young
  - Through his writings on human love



# John Paul II and Young People

- We have much we can learn from him
- His particular approach
  - He focused on perennial rather than was fleeting
  - He established a personal relationship with the young. He constantly used the second person singular (“tu”), something he would ordinarily only do in prayers to God.
  - He exercised genuine spiritual paternity, that was manly, challenging, loving, intimate.





## John Paul II's Spiritual Paternity

- Cardinal Christoph Schonborn's *Zenit* interview on Oct 16, 2018:
  - "I remember when [John Paul II] had died and his body was exposed in the Basilica in the Vatican in St. Peters, 4 million people passed in prayer one after another, and to see his body and pray. Four million. They had to wait up to 15 hours, on lines that seemed never to end. The whole Via della Conciliazione was full of those waiting, for this little moment, to see him for the last time. ... I took the occasion to ask young people why do you stay here for hours, some all night, to just have a glimpse, a short moment then to see for the last time John Paul."
  - "The answer," Cardinal Schönborn stated, "was absolutely unanimous, some with tears: 'We have lost a father.' ... That was the secret of John Paul and the Youth. He was a father and they felt that he really loved them. And because he really loved them, he was very demanding but not as a judge, but as a father who loves his children. I think that is the secret ....that he was a father...that's it."
- The urgent need for spiritual fatherhood today in response to the crisis, because the lack of it is what got us into the crisis.



## John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- John Paul II was a master in what I call “theological juvenology,” the study of young people from the point of view of God.
- Too often youth ministry starts with young people’s problems, with a particular focus on contemporary issues. This isn’t bad in itself, but it’s the same thing that juvenile officers, sociologists and psychologists do.
- John Paul II started with Christ and the young person made in God’s image — foundational truths that are the same from generation to generation — and then applied these truths in his direct relationships with young people
- John Paul II knew that every young person has his divine origin and vocation in God. He tried to help his younger brothers and sisters in the faith recognize this vocation and respond to it, in the midst of contemporary contexts.





## Five Beliefs Underlying John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

1. Youth is a time of searching for happiness
2. Maturity happens only through the mature use of freedom
3. True happiness and love will be found only in the free and unselfish gift of oneself
4. Young people often don't see and find Christ where they should
5. Young people are a great gift to the Church who want to give themselves in love





# Five Beliefs Underlying John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Youth is a time of searching for happiness
  - Young people by nature are searching and questioning. They're trying to determine meaning, their own personal projects, etc. Why are they here? Where are they going?
  - Youth is a time people need recognition, support, to be listened to and loved.
  - John Paul II often himself spoke to them by means of questions, identifying with their own questions. He took the perspective of a fellow searcher for the truth, rather than a definitive answer-giver. He leads them on a journey to the definitive answer-giver, Christ, and invites them to trust in Him.
  - He opened up a dialogue with them about the most important things. He loved their questions, listened to them, tried to respond and to guide them on this search. He was convinced that if they sought the truth, they would find it and that the truth has a name, Jesus.



# Five Beliefs Underlying John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Maturity happens only through the mature use of freedom
  - He wanted to raise the young to be fully-integrated, mature adults through a responsible use of the gift of human freedom.
  - He affirmed their freedom and challenged them to use it well. Every address had one action item or another
  - He informed them of the real issues at stake in the use of their freedom, indicating to them the path to which Christ calls them, but then forced them to choose.
  - He wasn't an overprotective spiritual father. He trusted them. They'd make mistakes, but that there was also a great capacity to choose the good.
  - He told them clearly what real freedom is: not the ability to do whatever we like, but the capacity to do what we ought to do.
  - He warns them about all the false prophets out there, enticing them with erroneous notions of human freedom and easy allurements.
  - He proposed Christ and his love to young people and invited them to choose Him. He doesn't "force" or "scare" them. But he also didn't water down the challenge.





## Five Beliefs Underlying John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- True happiness and love will be found only in the free and unselfish gift of oneself
- Young people search for love, but often search in all the wrong places. He wanted to point them to where they will truly find it, in Christ the Lord.
- He indicated to young people how to love, by pointing them to Christ, who first loves them and indicates by his actions and words what real love means. Jesus said during the Last Supper that “no one has any greater love than to lay down his life for his friends,” and then proved that love the next day on Calvary. True love, the greatest love, is giving of oneself to and for another.
- He challenged the young to give of themselves, to Christ, to others. This gift of oneself in love actuates a life of holiness. This gift of self, the Pope says, is seen in the priesthood, the sacrament of marriage, in consecrated life.
- The plan of Christ from the beginning is for them to become the image of God who is love. This is this mission, to which they're called, to which they're called to call others. This is the path to true happiness, this is the point of human life.



## Five Beliefs Underlying John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Young people often don't see and find Christ where they should
  - For too many young people, Christ is a dead, boring historical figure.
  - The Pope tried to bring him alive, to show that He Lives, to show that He Loves them tremendously. He asked bishops, priests, catechists, parents and everyone to do the same.
  - He specified various places where the Lord is alive that too many believers, young and old, don't see or take for granted: the Eucharist, prayer, Sacred Scripture, in the Church, in Confession, in others, in daily Crosses, in nature, etc.





## Five Beliefs Underlying John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Young people are a great gift to the Church who want to give themselves in love.
- The Pope was convinced that the Lord spoke truly when He praised the Father for “revealing to little ones the mysteries of the Kingdom.” The Pope dialogued with young people to discover in them and sometimes from them these mysteries.
- Many in the Church and in society don't trust the young, as if they're not capable of fulfilling serious spiritual responsibilities. Christ did.
- Part of Jesus' plan was to trust unlikely candidates with tremendous missions and then help them to fulfill those responsibilities. Prophets like Jeremiah. The Blessed Virgin. The apostles. The young throughout Church history.
- They bring the gift of their enthusiasm and energy.
- The example of young saints — the young virgin martyrs, Tarcisius, Aloysius Gonzaga, Maria Goretti, Bernadette, the *pastorinhos*, Nunzio Sulprizio — shows that the young can lead all of us in the faith.



# John Paul II's Juvenological Lexicon

- The Pope put these beliefs into practice through the vocabulary and expressions he repeatedly used. They communicate his essential messages crisply and clearly. The more we use them, can begin to change the whole way we interact with young people as well.
- We can break them down into several categories:
  - Responsibility and trust: “responsibility,” “task,” “Mission,” “Trust,” “Counting on you,” “Appointment.”
  - Dialogue: “You,” “We,” “Together,” “dialogue.”
  - Challenge: “Adventure,” “Challenge,” “Brave,” “Strong,” “Courage,” “Don’t be afraid”
  - Freedom: “Invite,” “Choose,” “Freedom.”
  - Friendship: “Friend,” “Accompany,” “Companion”
  - Integrity: “Consistent”





## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- We can condense what he said and did in his interactions with young people, based on these beliefs, to ten pastoral tips toward working with young people and encouraging them toward the fullness of Christian life.
- Insofar as we all have to become younger, in fact like little children, to enter into the kingdom of heaven, I hope that these ideas of our late Holy Father, will give us all a spiritual rejuvenation and added spur to holiness.



## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

1. Treat the young as friends.
2. Show them hope and confidence that they are capable of greatness and challenge them to that greatness.
3. Acknowledge their questions and their search for meaning and happiness. Help them to find answers by bringing them to Christ.
4. Assist them encounter Christ where they should.
5. Train them for love through training their freedom toward unselfish self-giving
6. Give them real responsibility and help them to discern, and faithfully respond to, the gift (vocation) and task (mission) Christ himself is offering them.





## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Treat the young as friends.
  - He called them “dear friends” and enjoyed their company.
  - He called their friendship a “great treasure.”
  - He made a commitment to spend time with them.
  - He wanted to accompany them in joy and sorrows
  - He loved them and sought to look at them with love as Christ looked at the Rich Young Man.
  - He made himself accessible and approachable.
  - He challenged them to the commitment of friendship in return.
  - He sought to model Christ's friendship with them and to help them respond to Christ not as slaves but as faithful friends, lovingly doing what he commands, and rejoicing in what he has revealed.



## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Show them hope and confidence that they are capable of greatness and challenge them to that greatness.
- He communicated to them that they were capable of sanctity and challenged them to the noble adventure of following Christ wholeheartedly.
- Many who work with the young water down the faith. He sought to help them receive God's help to meet God's high standard of holiness in ordinary life.
- He challenged those who were responsible for the care of the young similarly to challenge them and help them meet that challenge.





## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Show them hope and confidence that they are capable of greatness and challenge them to that greatness (*continued*).
- His most famous encounter happened in Holland in June 1985. Many were hostile. He took questions and responded with great candor:
  - “Dear friends, allow me to be very frank with you. ... Are you really sure that the idea you have of Christ fully corresponds to the reality of his person? The Gospel, in truth, presents us with a *very demanding* Christ who invites us to a radical conversion of heart, to detachment from earthly goods, to the pardon of offenses, to the love of enemies, to the patient endurance of abuses, and even to the sacrifice of one’s life for love of neighbor. In particular, concerning the sexual sphere, the firm position taken by him in defense of the indissolubility of marriage and the condemnation pronounced even regarding simple adultery of the heart are well known. And how can we fail to be struck by the precept to “gouge out one’s eye” or “cut off one’s hand” if these members are an occasion of ‘scandal.’ Having these precise Gospel references, is it realistic to imagine a *permissive Christ* in the realm of married life, in the question of abortion, of pre-marital, extra-marital or homosexual relations? ... In her teaching the Church never pronounces a judgment regarding concrete persons. But at the level of principles she must distinguish good from evil. Permissiveness doesn’t make man happy.” (6/3/85 Dutch Youth) ...





## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Show them hope and confidence that they are capable of greatness and challenge them to that greatness (*continued*).
- His most famous encounter happened in Holland in June 1985. Many were hostile. He took questions and responded with great candor (*continued*):
  - “Young friends, this then is my response: love Christ and accept the demands which the Church makes upon you in his name, because they are the demands which come from God, the Creator and Redeemer of man. Accept these demands in your lives and you will discover their value.”
  - “Beloved young friends, faith always involves a challenge. It has never been otherwise. Today there are difficulties for whoever wants to be Christian. But there were others yesterday. And tomorrow— one may venture this prophecy without ear of being proven wrong — tomorrow new generations of youth will have to face new difficulties. Being a Christian has never been, and never will be, a ‘tranquil’ choice.... But I ask you: doesn’t the decision for Christ find a particular reason for fascination from this very fact? What is arduous requires courage, and the characterisitic nobility of a human being is expressed in a unique way through courage. It must not be forgotten, furthermore, that in other areas of the world, young people pay a very high price to give witness of their consistency with the Gospel of Christ.” (6/3/85)





## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Acknowledge their questions and their search for meaning and happiness. Help them to find answers by bringing them to Christ.
- As we saw with the Dutch youth, he acknowledges the questions of the young and is not afraid to answer them. World Youth Days always featured this Q&A.
- He knows that, like with the Rich Young Man, many of their questions are urgent.
- Youth have questions about themselves, their personality, the meaning of existence, the reality of good and evil, the world of nature, Jesus and more.
- The young often phrase their questions in terms of criticism, and he acknowledges them.
- He responded as a guide rather than as a know-it-all.
- “He — Christ — is your answer” (Venezuela 2/18/85).



## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Assist them encounter Christ where they should.
  - Sacred Scripture — “Let us listen to the Word of God together”
  - The Sacraments (“signs and means of intimate communion with God”), especially the Eucharist and Confession.
  - Prayer — a living dialogue with Jesus.
  - The Church — Love the Church because Christ loves the Church and gave himself up to make her holy.
  - Others — “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers...”
  - Day-to-day struggles and Crosses
  - In Nature — A book written by our Creator that we’re called to “read”





## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Train them for love through training their freedom toward unselfish self-giving
  - Their life is without meaning if there's no love.
  - The young often seek love in the wrong places
  - He calls them toward Christ-like sacrifice, reminding them that they're made for it. "Since you are in the image and likeness of god, your life may not exist only for yourselves, but must be a gift, a present for others" (Venezuela 1985).
  - Loving others as Christ has loved us first.
  - The nuptial meaning of the person
    - Marriage
    - Priesthood, Religious and Consecrated Life



## Six Lessons from John Paul II's Theological Juvenology

- Give them real responsibility and help them to discern, and faithfully respond to, the gift (vocation) and task (mission) Christ himself is offering them.
- Young people are not just part of the future of the Church but an essential part of the Church now.
- “It’s not enough just to belong to the Church”
- He gave them a particular mission to their peers.
- He wants to help them invest the talent of their life
- “Take the initiative and don’t wait for everything to come from the older people and from those in office” (9/16/85 Morocco)
- “The future can be yours if you live the present with serious commitment. You will be tomorrow what you have been able to be today, since the future will be only the fruit of your being able to give meaning to the present. Youth conditions the irreversible choices of adulthood.” (3/13/85 Audience)





# Final Words

- John Paul II summarized his strategy as endless patience, loving closeness, and helping the young to experience they're lovable by God and by others.
- He had a particular appeal to priests in his 1985 Holy Thursday letter.
  - In the Gospel passage of Christ's conversation with the Rich Young Man there is an expression that we must assimilate in a particular way. The Evangelist says that Jesus "fixing his eyes on him, loved him" (Mk 10:21). ... If we were to question those who, among the generations of priests, ... have borne more lasting fruit in their work with young people, we would be convinced that the [most effective] have been those who look with the love of Christ. We must identify with this love in our priestly souls. It is simply the love of 'neighbor,' not something exclusive. Love for youth possesses its evangelical character only when it springs from love for each and everyone. Such love is truly disinterested. It gives young people confidence. They have an enormous need for it in the phase of life they are going through. Each priest should be specially prepared for such a love freely given. It can be said that the entire asceticism of priestly life, daily work, prayer, union with Christ, and entrustment to his Mother find their daily verification precisely in this love. Young people are particularly sensitive to this and sometimes very critical when it's not present. Experience confirms that [it demands] qualities of character and heart: goodness, dedication and firmness. Each of us should insistently ask the Lord Jesus that our contact with young people will be essentially a participation in that gaze with which Jesus 'fixed' his eyes on his young interlocutor in the Gospel, and a participation of that love with which he 'loved' him. We must also pray insistently, so that this disinterested priestly love may correspond in a concrete way to the expectations of all youth, both male and female, of boys and girls. With regard to each and every one we must learn from Christ that love, with which he himself 'loved.'"



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Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.  
 Believe what you read.  
 Teach what you believe.  
 Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,  
 Fr. Roger J. Landry

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