

Woodstock Conversations ...

Young Adult Catholics: Believing, Belonging, and Serving



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Introduction

On February 6, 2007, the Woodstock Theological Center sponsored a two-part forum titled, “Young Adult Catholics: Believing, Belonging, and Serving.” These young men and women from the so-called “millennial generation” have recently attracted growing interest among social researchers – and no small degree of concern among those with pastoral responsibilities in the Catholic Church and other religious communities.

A number of worries were aired at the forum, having to do generally with the loosening ties of young adult Catholics to the institutional Church. Among other examples, Purdue University sociologist James A. Davidson pointed to the relatively low likelihood of young adult Catholics affirming statements like “I can’t imagine being anything but Catholic,” or agreeing with the proposition that the teaching authority of the Church is important.

At the same time, the concerns ultimately centered less on young adult Catholics themselves than on whether the Church will offer credible answers to questions and doubts raised by these Catholics born after 1979. Father Ray Kemp, a Woodstock senior fellow who spearheaded the forum, believes that the attitudes of young adults pose a fresh challenge to Catholic leadership. He said in an interview some weeks after the forum, “I hear them asking the Church to make herself clear on the basics. What do you mean when you say Jesus Christ is the son of God? What do you mean when you say the Eucharist is the body of Christ? How is it the body of Christ? How are we the body of Christ?”

At the forum, Davidson and fellow sociologist Dean Hoge of The Catholic University of America presented research from their new book, *American Catholics Today* (Rowman & Littlefield), which they coauthored with social scientists William V. D’Antonio and Mary L. Gautier. Responding to empirical research were two speakers who offered pastoral and educational perspectives – campus minister Catherine Heinhold of

Georgetown University and Carroll Ann Kemp, a religion teacher who helps coordinate community service and retreat programs at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C. (and is the sister of Father Kemp).

The research and pastoral perspectives – highlighted during the second part of the forum – followed a separate discussion held among students and recent alumni of Georgetown University. Excerpts from both parts of the forum are presented here in this edited account of the conversations held that day in two separate locations on the Georgetown campus.

The “millennials” were not the only generation examined during the forum. Research conducted for *American Catholics Today* focused as well on pre-Vatican II Catholics, identified as those born up to 1940; “Vatican II Catholics,” who correspond roughly with the baby-boom generation and were born between 1941 and 1961; and “post-Vatican II Catholics,” whom the authors placed in years of birth between 1961 and 1978.

At the time of the last opinion survey taken for *American Catholics Today* in 2005, members of the millennial generation made up nine percent of the American Catholic population, compared with the 17-percent share held by pre-Vatican II Catholics, the 35 percent belonging to the Vatican II generation, and the 40 percent of Catholics who come from the post-Vatican II ranks.

In the following pages, the empirical research appears in many respects to confirm the experiences of young adult Catholics as well as the observations made by people who teach and minister to them. One general observation borne out by the findings is that young adult Catholics do have a lively sense of God’s presence in their lives, as Davidson and Hoge learned in part from focus groups designed as part of the research. “They feel that God is all around them, that God is caring for them and looking out for them,” Davidson said during the Q&A, though he added that their spiritual practices such as prayer tend to be infrequent and informal. As Aileen Tejeda of New York (class of ‘07), remarked during the forum’s first part, “I’m not really into formal prayer.” Then she added – “And I talk to God a lot. I talk to him like he was right there.”

The forum yielded nothing like a ten-point plan for engaging young adult Catholics more deeply in the life of the Church. The presenters agreed that the Church has to start the conversation by letting young adult Catholics

speaking for themselves, and by listening to what these Catholics have to say. As Davidson, a Vatican II Catholic, put it during the discussion period, "If they know we love them, they can respond to the Church. If they think we [look at them as] a problem or they think we're going to look down on them and not trust them, they're not going to have any interest in us, and their belief will grow weaker as a result."

1.

Understanding Young Adult Catholics

During a brief exchange among panelists immediately following the formal presentations, James Davidson related an anecdote about a talk he gave a couple of years ago in Detroit, where he explained how sociologists measure religious commitment by such indicators as church attendance. At that point a young man stood up and asked, “Why would you ever use Mass attendance as a measure of religious commitment?” Davidson, feigning a heart palpitation with a slap on his chest, related that older members of the Detroit audience gasped when they heard this. But as Davidson understood him, the young man was really saying his way of practicing the Catholic faith was different from that of earlier generations, particularly pre-Vatican II Catholics. “And we have to understand that difference,” the sociologist said, noting that many young Catholics place higher importance on service to the poor and social justice than they do on the conventional markers of religious identity. Davidson’s understanding of these matters is hardly anecdotal, and here, he presents some findings based on the empirical research that went into American Catholics Today. That research included random national surveys of young adult Catholics 18 years of age and older (studies with margins of error of a little more than three percentage points, plus or minus).

To begin the discussion, I want to identify four different generations of people in the Church.

There’s the oldest generation, which we call the pre-Vatican II generation. It consists of people who were born in 1940 or before. When we did our latest survey in 2005, these people were about 65 or older. That group represented about 17 percent of the total U.S. Catholic population that is 18 years of age and above.

Then there's a Vatican II generation which more or less corresponds with what we would call the baby boomers. We have used the dates of 1941-1960 as the beginning and the end of the Vatican II generation. When we did our research in 2005, those people were roughly between 45 and about 64 or 65. That group represents about one-third of the total U.S. Catholic population.

Then there's the post-Vatican II generation. That group was born 1961 up to (most people would say) around 1982 or so. In our research, we used the cut-off date of 1978 – so roughly, people born between '61 and '78. They were between 27 and 44 years old at the time, and about 40 percent of the U.S. Catholic population.

Then the last group has been called the millennials – it's the youngest generation of all. They were born from 1979 on. But because we survey only people who are 18 years of age and above, we'll focus on the millennials who were born between '79 and roughly 1987. That means the people surveyed were at the time between 19 and 26 years of age. How many of you are in that group? Oh, 10 percent [judging by a show of hands]. That's about what we would expect on a national sample – about nine or 10 percent of the American Catholic population. So that gives us some parameters to work with. About half of all Catholics and maybe slightly less than half of this room belong to either the post-Vatican II or the millennial generation.

I want to make three points about young people. First of all, they are similar to other generations in many important respects, in some respects that we tend to forget or not think about. Secondly, they're different in some ways. And third, there are some important variations among them. So, we can look at the differences between generations, but we can also look at the differences within generations.

Let me start, first of all, with some comments about similarities. What we're finding is that a majority of Catholics of all the generations agree that some elements of the faith are more central than other elements are. People in all the generations attach more importance to things like Incarnation, Resurrection, Real Presence, sacraments, concern for the poor, than they do to sexual reproductive issues or rules having to do with who is and who's not eligible for the priesthood. So in some sense, there's a hierarchy of truth in the minds of these folks and that is true across generations. Also,

a majority of people in all the generations agree with Church teachings that they consider to be most central. For example, all of our studies are showing that most Catholics, including young adults, still believe in the Real Presence [of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist]. They may not be able to explain it very well. Some theologians may be dismayed by the lack of sophistication and explanation. But we find that young people affirm and take as a given the idea that the bread and the wine actually become the body and the blood somehow. We think there's some good news in there, and that we need to acknowledge that.

Also a majority of Catholics in all the generations believe that the laity should be involved in parish life and diocesan decisions, especially related to the way in which money is spent and to parish closings and other issues that hit home at the parish level. The majority also believe the sexual abuse scandal was an outrage. They consider that to be the most serious problem facing the Church today. Those similarities are sort of the common ground. Those are the things that Catholics stand on. Those are the social glue, if you will, or the theological glue that holds us all together.

Now, my second point is that today's young adults are different from the other generations in some other respects. The theory of generations basically says that everybody's religious beliefs and practices are shaped by the conditions in the world and in the Church during people's formative years. Now "formative years" is a fuzzy term, but we tend to think in terms of an age period 11 and 21, or 12 and 22, somewhere in there, where young people are coming out from the influence of parents, becoming independent, becoming young adults, making decisions on their own. What happens in that period shapes their thinking forever. It's not that they don't change at all later on, but the parameters are set by some of the occurrences during that period. For example, the pre-Vatican II generation and its members who are here tonight grew up in the depression of the 1930s. Their formative years include World War II. And they grew up in the pre-Vatican II Church. That's the place in which they learned their faith.

The boomer generation or the Vatican II group grew up in the cultural revolution of the 1960s, which set them apart from the previous generation. And they also grew up in the Church at a time when it was making this transition from the old Church to the new. So in their formative years, they experienced two different shifts or cultural revolutions, one in society and one in the Church.

The post-Vatican II and millennial generations have grown up in the midst of great skepticism about institutions in general, whether they be marriage or politics, economy or the Church. And so they have some skepticism about the post-Vatican II Church as well.

So we shouldn't be surprised to find that members of these different generations think differently and act differently with regard to some issues. Millennials, for example, are the least likely to identify with the faith, the Catholic faith, and they're the least attached to the Church. Now we could go into the details of exactly how you measure that, but for example, if you're talking about Catholic identity or identifying with the faith, we could use items like: "I can't imagine being anything but Catholic" or "Being Catholic is an important part of who I am." Those sorts of affirmations have to do with the faith. Commitment to the institutional Church – that has to do with Mass attendance or the importance of the Church, or the likelihood that one would ever leave the Church for some other denomination or religious tradition. The youngest generation also is the least likely to agree with the Church on issues such as the authority of the Magisterium, along with sexual and reproductive issues including pre-marital sex, homosexual behavior, and celibacy among priests. They view those issues as less important and that's where their disagreement tends to hold.

Young adults are more likely than the other generations to say that lay people should be involved in the selection of parish priests and in decisions of whether or not to ordain women. They are the least likely to consider the priest shortage a serious problem. It's harder for pre-Vatican II Catholics to imagine a Church without an abundance of priests because that's been their experience. It's much easier for young people to imagine a Church like that because that's what they've come to expect.

The biggest differences basically are between the pre-Vatican II generation and the other generations that come later. That seems to have been the big divide. There are smaller differences between the Vatican II group and the post-Vatican II generation. And I think one of the reasons for that is that the Vatican II generation, which has got one foot in the old Church and one foot in the new Church, is making up its mind and deciding that it prefers this post-Vatican II Church more than the pre-Vatican II Church and is opting in that direction, which closes the gap. The millennials look to us as if they are extensions of the trends that we see in the previous generations. So when

the trend is towards lower scores [based on opinion surveys], as it is in terms of identity or commitment to the Church, the millennials score lowest of all. When the trend is towards higher scores, for example in issues related to decision-making in the Church, the millennials are scoring the highest of all. In other words, we don't see any signs of great reversals taking place among the young adults. They look like they are extensions of ongoing trends which they have perhaps learned from their parents.

Finally, I want to say a word about variations among young adults. There are variations in every generation. And that's true for young people as well. And here's one way to think about that. It's not the only way, but it's one way. I think of a continuum ranging from what [the Catholic writer and psychologist] Eugene Kennedy called Culture One Catholicism to Culture Two Catholicism. At the Culture One end, there's an emphasis on Catholic identity, attachment to the Church, the teaching authority, the Magisterium, compliance with Church teaching. At the Culture Two end, there's still an emphasis on identity, but the emphasis is more on the individual's responsibility for his or her own faith; the integrity of the person's own conscience; and the person's responsibility to make up his or her own mind in terms of what's right and what's wrong.

The way I read the surveys (not only the ones we have done, but earlier research as well) is that in the pre-Vatican II Church in the 1930s and the '40s, probably 80 percent of Catholics were Culture One. And there were maybe 20 percent who were Culture Twos at the time. When you look at the surveys we have of today's young adults, it looks like only about 20 percent of them are Culture Ones and about 80 percent of them are Culture Twos, so there's a shift of orientation that's taken place over the years.

In her book *The New Faithful*, Colleen Carroll suggests that the number of Culture One young adults is growing. We [the coauthors of *American Catholics Today*] would disagree with that. We can't find any such trend in at least the national data that we've been working with. Our view is that Culture One young adults are not growing, but they're more visible than Culture Twos because they're more organized. They're more likely to volunteer for parish activities; they're more likely to participate in diocesan programs; and they're more likely to choose religious life. So as a result, they're likely to have far more influence in the Church than their relatively small numbers would suggest in the years ahead.

2.

Different Wavelengths: The Young Clergy and the Young Laity

Dean Hoge is a coauthor of American Catholics Today, which reports, among many other findings, that millennial Catholics diverge markedly from Church positions on sexual and gender issues including homosexuality as well as whether to ordain women. On that latter point, 87 percent of them favored an end to the male-only priesthood, compared with 61 percent of Vatican II Catholics, who are presumably their parents' generation for the most part. In his remarks at the forum, selected here, Hoge contrasted these and other views of young adult Catholics with those of the younger Catholic clergy, which is considered notably more traditional than priests who came of age around the time of Vatican II. He pointed to opinion data indicating that the millennial Catholics are moving in ideological directions nearly opposite to those of younger clergy, a trend that is likely to present further pastoral and institutional dilemmas in the future.

I want to speak about two topics. The first is about generations of priests and the other, about generations of laity.

There's been research on American priests as well as the laity. And there have been two shifts in the self-understanding of priests since Vatican II. This is important. The first shift occurred about the time of Vatican II and it was already well underway by 1970. We call it a shift from the cultic model, the earlier model of the priest, to what was called the servant-leader model. Let me explain.

The cultic model of the priest is a more traditional one which emphasizes that the priest is a man set apart. According to this model, he should emphasize his separate status; his main job is sacraments and preaching and teaching; it is not a high priority to work with the laity as equals or to

collaborate; and he should, if possible, have special clothes so he's always visible that he is different.

The servant-leader model was somewhat different. They emphasized continuity with the laity and working collaboratively with the laity. And they are the priests who didn't enjoy wearing the clerics [or priestly garb]. They wanted to emphasize that they were spiritual leaders of the flock. This was quite a shift at that time. It was very visible in the data. And the people who bought into the servant-leader model after Vatican II hoped this would be a permanent shift, but it was not. It has shifted back again. So now, especially among younger diocesan priests, some version of the cultic model is predominant in the seminaries and also among the young diocesan priests. Among religious priests, it's not so clear, not nearly as extreme.

Why do I bring this up? Because we have just heard that the trends among the laity are towards greater individualism, greater feeling that authority lies with the laity as well as with the hierarchy, and a greater wish for greater involvement in the Church at all levels. That's the trend. But among the priests, the trend is different.

My point is a very simple. The young people are moving in one direction; the priesthood, at least the diocesan priesthood, in another. We have to keep communications open to avoid tensions.

My second main topic is about Catholic identity of young adults. This is a topic being constantly discussed. It's often said that young adults do not have as strong a Catholic identity as older people. And generally speaking that is true. The older people ask: Will tomorrow's Catholics still support our beloved institutions? Universities worry about this. Bishops worry about this. Everybody who's responsible worries about this.

So the first thing to do is to get an idea of whether Catholic identity actually is weaker in young adults. And by all measures, it is. How has this occurred? The first thing I want you to think about is how the life of young adults is different today than it was, let's say, 50 years ago. Catholics have higher levels of education now than ever. They have been moving to the suburbs; they no longer live in Catholic enclaves; they're marrying non-Catholics at a very high rate, at least 45 percent, maybe 50 percent; and they have acquired new theological self-understanding after Vatican II.

They're no longer so distinct. And the cultural supports for Catholic identity, which were in place 50 years ago, are now gone. So it's only reasonable to realize that Catholic identity would not be as firm today as it was before. The boundary walls which surrounded the Catholic community earlier are no longer there. Young Catholics resemble young non-Catholics in most attitudes. They're not that different.

So now the question is: Why be a Catholic? What's distinctive? What is it about us? Before getting to this question, I first want to tell you that [the lesser Catholic identity is] not because the young people are less religious, or somehow bad or somehow lacking. I don't even think you should say: Well, the Church has failed. The society has shifted so greatly that there's no way the old mentality can continue into the new. Today's young adults are the most educated, the best traveled, the most individualistic, the most culturally conscious, and the most affluent in American history. I should say they're also more demanding of what they want from the Church. We haven't seen anything like this generation until now. Not only the Catholic Church but every institution needs to adjust to this. And I think that's our agenda.

Now there's a lot to rejoice about. This is not a sad story. These are the most intelligent, most broadly minded young Catholics we've ever seen. And this university [Georgetown] is full of them. We should rejoice and we should bless them.

But there are problems. Let me mention two big problems. One is in matter of sexual morals and related moral teachings of the Church. These are widely – what shall I say – dismissed. At least, they're not seen as compelling by this generation. There's a whole area, a whole range of areas dealing with gender, reproduction, homosexuality, marriage, and so on. This is a genuine problem area.

The second is a feeling about obligations. Older Catholics have a feeling of obligation. There are the days of obligation; going to Mass is an obligation. Young people don't feel that way. And I don't think anybody of my age should say to the young people: "Oh you have an obligation to do..." They don't want to hear that. They don't understand that at all. They say, "Why am I obligated?"

I've done some research on Catholic identity to find out what is essential to being a Catholic in the minds of young adults. This is not my view. It's their view. We've done several surveys. We've asked them: What is the most essential and central part about being Catholic. And they had a whole list of things, starting with the sacraments [number 1]; charity towards the poor [ranked as second]; devotion to Mary, Mother of God [third]; and creedal beliefs [fourth]. Which things are not central? Teachings about the death penalty, teachings about abortion, personal confession, and the rule that only celibate men can be priests [ranked in descending order from one through four]. They're not considered central. And you should not expect young people to hold to those in the same way.

We had another twist. We asked the young people: Who are the two most inspiring Catholics in all of Church history from the Bible until today? Who are people who make you feel proud and who are inspiring to you? There was a tie for first place: Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II. Third place: St. Francis. I mention this because if we're talking about the future of Catholic identity, these are the heroes of the faith in their eyes, and I think we have to pay attention to that.

I want to make one other point. That is, the boundaries of the faith are weak right now. This is a problem area. For example, in our nationwide survey in 2003, we asked Catholics of each generation whether they agreed with statements such as: "If you believe in God, it doesn't really matter which religion you belong to." Overwhelming numbers of each generation, including 91 percent of young adult Catholics, agreed with that particular statement.

What are the boundaries of faith? Well, the majority of Catholics think we should honor and tolerate and have good will with many faiths, and not say: we know the will of God and you people don't. So therefore, what does it mean to be Catholic? I don't have time to get into this, but this is a topic we have to research and study in the future.

In short, I hope the old people in the room don't lecture the young people as to where they're lacking. They're not lacking anything. They live in a different world than you and I do. And they're just as smart and just as committed to making their lives worthwhile as we were. But the situation is different today and we cannot expect to bring them back to what we consider the preferred way of being Catholic in yesteryear. That's my main

point tonight. And secondly, please open up communications, two-way communications. Make sure we hear the young people. I'd say, let's start with the college students. And let them pick the topics. Let them speak and not just be lectured to. I think something should be done and we could start right here.

3.

Pastoral Perspectives

In their responses to the research presented by Davidson and Hoge, Catherine Heinhold of Georgetown's campus ministry and Sister Carroll Ann Kemp of Gonzaga College High School touched on ways in which some young adult Catholics are shaping their Catholic identity around questions of poverty and injustice. Heinhold spoke of students who say they practice their faith by serving the poor, and Sister Kemp (whose brother is Father Ray Kemp) spoke of how Catholic students are reconnecting to the faith through service activities. She added that while on these service missions, the students spend about an hour each day gathered in a circle, reflecting on questions such as, "Where do we see the presence of God? Who did you meet today who really called to you?" Picking up on his sister's comments, Father Kemp – highlighting Woodstock's mission of encouraging theological reflection – noted that not all service programs pay as much attention to the importance of such reflection. "I think the priority that we give to reflecting on what's going on, where God is, what the reality is, what's the social critique as well as the theological critique of what's happening – to me I think that ought to assume more and more importance," he commented at the forum, following these remarks.

Catherine Heinhold: I'd like to relate some experiences that I think illustrate the types of students we have on campus and their approach to the Church. I coordinate the Retreat Program here at Georgetown. And our Agape retreat, as we call it, is one of the more popular of these – most of the time. When it competes with basketball games and parents' weekends, then it's not so popular. But that retreat is led by a team of six students. And several years ago, I was meeting with the team – students who have been on the retreat before, some of them active in campus ministry, some of them not so active in campus ministry. Somehow we got off topic, and one of the students said: "I don't know why I should have to get married, especially in the Church. Why do I need a piece of paper from the Church just to have sex?" And that's how she viewed marriage in the Church, as

getting a piece of paper that said she could have sex. So I just said to myself: OK, great – teachable moment! So we opened it up to the group, and the other team leaders either seemed to agree or they didn't have much to say to expand on that. I just started to talk with them about marriage and about the communal nature of our faith and our tradition and the way that God is in our lives – that it's not so much an individualistic thing. I talked about the married couple getting married not just for their own benefit and their own mutual love, but as being part of a larger society, and about how the ceremony itself being public was a communal event with the couple asking for the support of the community, publicly asking for God's blessing, and committing themselves to contribute to the community. So I really just kept stressing that communal nature. And one other student, not the one who had asked the question, said: "Wow! That sounds ancient!" And I said: "Well, it is!" But to me that conversation just really typified [the sensibilities of many students].

These were students who had some level of activity in the Church. They were showing up most Sundays for Mass, but really feeling kind of distant from some of what they saw as the rules and regulations of Church, having been influenced more by society's stress on individualism, rather the Church's stress on community and the life of Christ in the community. I hear again and again from the team leaders – and I get to know them better than other students – very often that Mass just doesn't seem meaningful for them. They feel disconnected. So that's one experience I've had.

This past Sunday we had a brunch for students, as part of an effort involving Catholic campus ministers and our Center for Social Justice, to make some stronger connections between Catholic social teaching and the service that so many of our students are already doing on this campus. One student who spoke up at the brunch – and I have her permission to tell you about this – is really a committed, involved student, very active in [direct] service as well as social justice. She's been a retreat leader. She's spoken to me about a felt presence of God in her life. She's articulate. She prays. She's planning to volunteer her post-graduate [year]. Today she was talking to me about her faith and about how she sees most people practicing their faith. And she said: "For me and for a lot of my friends, practicing my faith is serving the poor." That's what it looks like to her, and it's more important to do that than to go to Mass. It's more important to stress serving the poor than to worry too much about the moral teachings.

She says: “I live my faith by serving others.” At the brunch, she spoke of the tension she feels being energized by her faith, motivated to serve others and work for justice, but really finding herself at odds at times with the official Church teaching, particularly on moral issues, sexual issues, having friends who are gay. So she was angry and conflicted and asking: “How do I do this? How do I reconcile this?” That’s a question that I find quite frequently and I’m surprised at how often when I hear it, it’s as if the students are afraid to vocalize it. They’re afraid to say it out loud because maybe no one agrees with them. Or maybe they’ll be put down or told what they should believe.

The third issue that I wanted to touch on is something that Dean brought up a little bit – the generational divide. We have a number of students here – they are the minority but they are a very active minority – that has what some people might term a more traditional piety or traditional spirituality. They love going to adoration. They have a monthly Mass in Latin. They say the rosary. They really feel moved by some of the more traditional aspects of the Church that have kind of fallen away since the Council. They’re the Culture One young adults as Jim was describing. On the other hand, our staff is made up of people who are mostly of the boomer generation and a few people, like me, who are post-Vatican II Catholics. And there’s a lack of understanding between the two generations. The younger ones are dismayed that the older ones are so bothered by their traditional piety. They feel sometimes like they don’t have a home here. They might be ridiculed for the things they’re interested in. And the older folks, the folks on staff, are worried because they’re afraid the younger ones are trying to turn back the clock, and they don’t understand why the younger ones are so attached to some of these devotions that some of the people who actually lived through Vatican II feel was a good thing to give up. And so, I agree with Dean – these folks are a minority but they should get attention. They have real needs and real hungers. We need to think about some communication on both ends. [There’s a need] for the younger generation to make an effort to understand that their elders have been through a different experience and have very good reasons for being concerned and for wondering about some of the things that they’re doing. And [there’s a need] for the older generation to look at the real experience of our young people who were brought up in a very different Church and have some very real desires to grow in their faith and their spirituality.

One thing I have definitely noticed here is that our young adults are very diverse in their practice and in their belief. They respond well to outreach. They really enjoy discussing the issues. They'd talk all night with each other about Church things, and God things and the meaning-of-life things. They get really excited if things are presented well to them – and they're really, really hungry for God, whether they can articulate it that way or not. For me, it's a privilege to welcome them.

Sister Carroll Ann Kemp: Gonzaga High School has a tremendously sound program in academic and theological training, and a tremendous program in Christian service and in retreats, thanks to the administration and leadership of the school for a number of years. That would be financial support, encouragement for the students to go out there and take advantage of these programs where they are face to face with migrant workers in Florida, living with families in Guatemala, living with families in the Dominican Republic, doing the work of building roads and digging latrines, and all that kind of glorious work of God's reign. They're doing it. And how that enriches the school experience is beyond measure. The retreat program also is very rich, especially the long retreats for the juniors and seniors called Kairos. It's a four-day, three-night program. It's very heavy duty, and like the Christian service program, it's not obligatory. Everybody wants to do both the retreat and the service. And in keeping with the whole methodology of the school, the faith and service are just caught. And it makes the school community really vibrant.

Now obviously we have a good number of Christians who are not Roman Catholics in the school. Everybody participates and we all participate, at one level or other, in faith sharing. The Christian Service Program includes a faith-sharing theological reflection hour every day that we're away either in Guatemala or Dominican Republic or the Red Cloud Indian Reservation in South Dakota, or in Emmitsburg, Maryland, working with people you cannot believe exist about 500 feet away from Rt. 15 in houses that have been substantiated with pizza boxes and real poverty that I couldn't believe exist in the mountains behind Mt. St. Mary's University. We also go to Camden, New Jersey, and the Bronx, New York, for a week of work in each place. Plus we're lucky enough to have the shelter and the soup kitchen right next door. So it's really an ideal place to be working with young men.

We're in the second year right now doing the Campus Kitchen Program, a fabulous program in which many universities are working to bring food from business agencies or law firms, from hotels and restaurants – bring that food to a central place and redistribute it to be presented beautifully, tastefully, heated [for] people in the neighboring area who are really poor and would not get a hot meal otherwise. I believe Gonzaga is the first high school to have taken on this Campus Kitchen project and we work with it through D.C. Central Kitchen. The students re-prepare the food and present it in individual serving boxes, and then they actually carry it to at least 65 homes of people who live right in the neighborhood of Gonzaga College High School, which is just two blocks from the U.S. Capitol building, And so, these programs go all year long and then we have the longer ones for service in the summer.

I think one of the reasons these programs keep working is that when we're doing the service work, we spend a good 45 minutes to an hour every day, really gathering the students, doing a circle, talking the talk about Jesus, Gospel, God. Where do we see the presence of God? Who did you meet today that really called to you? What do you want to remember? Give me a word. Give me a face. Give me an expression. What's going on inside of you as we're picking crops with the migrants, building a new school in the Dominican Republic, and whatever we're doing? So I think that theological reflection is basic. Everyone participates, Catholics along with other students. And our real compelling point then in a retreat setting is the tremendous experience of a very deep sharing, getting to know students at a much deeper level – the students getting to know students experiencing the Body of Christ in a way that is so palpable. It's really a privilege to be part of it as a teacher.

I wanted to say a few words about our teachers. We hire our own graduates. Gonzaga is one of the most tight-knit communities you'll ever see. I don't know if that's true of all Jesuit institutions, but when our students come back after college and with graduate degrees, a lot of them get hired as teachers. And that's a real plus for the school, of course. And in speaking to them in preparation for tonight, I heard three themes that I'd like to just put out here.

One theme is actually a kind of challenge from one of our young teachers, about the welcoming possibilities of the Roman Catholic Church. And sometimes the Church feels non-welcoming to people. This student – I

taught him when he was a freshman – went through 16 years of Catholic education. At Gonzaga, he was a real leader in service and in the retreat program, and a major football player – he did the whole thing. He comes back, gives a whole year in an alumni program of service to our school, and now he's teaching full-time at our school. He's from a very staunch Catholic family. So I'm saying to him, "What are you finding challenging?" And he said, "I hate to tell you this, Sister. But the most challenging part is – I just got engaged to be married to a woman who is Baptist but worships at the Episcopal Church. So one Sunday I go to her church with her; the next Sunday she goes to my Catholic church with me. I'm so sad. I'm really saddened by the fact that I'm invited to receive communion at her service and she's told she can't receive communion at mine." That's one story. I said: "What are you going to do about your kids?" He said: "I don't know."

Another young man graduated from school, went through college, and then served as a Jesuit volunteer in Nicaragua for two years, staying on for two more years when his initial commitment had expired. He was there living in community with other Jesuit volunteers, and working. Just two days ago, he was reflecting with me, and he reflected that he didn't go to church for a while. Then he started saying, "But the people, the poor are going to church." And he has really dedicated himself to the work of justice. He's one of our special leaders in all of our service programs. He's going back to the Dominican Republic this year for the fourth time where our students actually live with the families there. They do a lot of work. He is not himself sure if he'll continue in the Roman Catholic Church because, again, his idea of faith – as a number of people have said already today – is doing the work. It's doing the work of Christ in trying to bring justice to all people. Sometimes he goes to church and sometimes he doesn't. But he said: "You know what? I think I'm going to give church another try. Maybe I could find some word in a homily or Scripture that would give me some energy to keep doing this work with the poor."

I'll say just one more thing, about one of our few African American teachers in religion – also a graduate of Gonzaga. His major problem and challenge with the Church is that he feels the Church offers nothing to his age group, people between 18 and 35. If you're not in school or have young children to bring for Communion preparation or Baptism preparation, the Church is not really there for you. And this is a very dedicated black Catholic who graduated from Gonzaga, and as our headmaster said, "He is really a Catholic" and really respectful of the sacraments and a fantastic teacher.

But he's in the gap between 18 and 35. He has no kids. And if you're in that age group, the Church is not even hearing what you need.

4.

Listening to the “Millennials”

In the research as well as pastoral views presented at the forum, there were echoes of what young adult Catholics said during the earlier part of the forum held in another building with a different though overlapping audience. About 150 people turned out for that earlier part, titled “Stories of Faith” (roughly the same number that attended the second part titled “How Young Adult Catholics Live Their Faith”). Young Catholics spoke, for example, of how they see helping the poor as more central than any other aspect of the faith. In their reflections, they seemed to be drilling below the doctrines and religious obligations, in search of the essence or mission of Catholicism. And, some young-adult panelists appeared to be walking a thin line between faith and doubt, or perhaps they were simply exploring the terrain of truth unbounded by sheer certainty. Father Kemp, who knows many of the young people who turned out for the discussion and teaches a theology course at Georgetown on the Church and the poor, got the conversation going with three questions put to them: “What does being Catholic mean to you? What’s challenging and frustrating about being Catholic? What kind of Catholic Church do you want to build?” Here are samplings of four voices heard, in response.

Rob O’ Rourke (class of ’07): I think a lot of people would say: This is the Catholic way to respond to a certain issue. And I guess my experience has been that it’s hard to come up with what that means. And being a theology major has certainly made me understand a lot of things about Catholicism in a different way. I think back to my biblical literature courses which just sort of totally shaped my listening [to the readings] every Sunday. And I came to understand [those readings] in a totally different way. I’ve actually been asked more than once whether being a theology major meant I would become an atheist. And for me, it’s been a very different experience. For me, my studies have only affirmed what I believe and made me understand more clearly what I believe. So that’s the kind of a tension that I’ve dealt with.

But above all, I think for me, being Catholic is about service. It's about responding to Jesus' call to discipleship. It's about loving one another. It's about being Christ for people in this world. That's what I've come to understand.

I'd love to see a church that encouraged us to think critically about the issues before us and then formulate our own opinions because I think it would be great to have a church let each person be Catholic in the way that was right for them to be Catholic.

Pati Notario (class of '06, now at Georgetown Medical School): My relationship with the Church is on again and off again. But I think it's been more *on* since I've been at Georgetown. The people I go to Mass with here – they're a support system.

I'm thinking back to high school. I was 16 and I went to my pastor and I said I have to be a Eucharist Minister. And he said: Well, you're supposed to be 18. But I said please, please let me do this. And he agreed and I was a fervent Eucharist Minister and I wanted to be captain and I wanted to establish my way of participating in the Eucharist. And I really believed it was the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ. Then senior year of high school came and I started having doubts. I stopped being a Eucharist Minister because I couldn't say, "This is the Body of Christ," without really believing it. I'm still having trouble convincing myself after receiving the Eucharist that that's what's going on. And I've prayed not to have that lack of faith. But I don't really feel as strong about it as I used to.

I think the Eucharist is really a hard doctrine to understand. I don't feel I've been educated enough in why we believe what we're supposed to believe. How is it that this is God? And, you know, it's bread at the same time but it's God at the same time. It's a difficult concept but we're supposed to accept it. It's a very difficult concept and I don't think it's explained enough. I think the explanation is to just have faith. But I think that that's a problem especially in an intellectual community such as Georgetown where belief is important, but we also have an academic answer to it. And I think for me one of the most special moments, being a Catholic, is seeing the way that people receive Communion – I guess just physically feeling I am a part of this, and I am. These people who come up actually don't think that this is just a piece of bread; they're expecting something more. And I think that

that is one belief that has brought me to see the Eucharist in a different light now. I find a lot of solace in just going to the chapel and being near the Eucharist, something that before I would never think to do, because I would think, “Why? This is just a piece of bread.” So I think for me it’s become central but it has been very difficult for me and it’s something that I don’t think has been explained very well to ordinary Christians.

In conversations I’ve had with my family and with my friends, I’ve realized that there are two main areas that really make me a Catholic. Those are family and values. I know it’s easy to focus on the problems you have [with the faith] rather than on the positives of what you have. So rather than say: “Oh, I find it hard to believe that there’s a man who came down, sent, and [was] supposedly divine, supposedly half man, and maybe he was crucified and then he rose from the dead. Yeah, right.” And rather than say: “Okay I can say with 110-percent certainty that that definitely happened and that’s my faith.” It’s more the values behind that. Even if you strip that story away, there’s still forgiveness. There’s humility. There’s love. And of course, there’s that faith. And I think that’s what being Catholic means to me. Also, the whole community aspect – there’s a family, a group of people who are trying to uphold these values and are working towards it, and are trying to find their way. And not everyone’s perfect. That’s really what being Catholic means to me.

Jeffrey Brown (class of ’06, now an associate in a law firm): I grew up outside of Philadelphia, in Yardley, Pennsylvania. You name it, I did it at St. Ignatius Parish – CYO basketball, parish picnics, cross-country track. I was pretty involved as a kid and as a young adult. But I think I was what you would call a cradle Catholic. I never really had a choice. I just did it because that’s what Mom and Dad expected of me. But I always felt a connection to St. Ignatius even when I was here at Georgetown.

A little over a year ago, a scandal blew up in Philadelphia and hit real close to home. I had an email from my mom and it said: “Read this article, ‘Scandalous Priest’ -- you’re going to recognize somebody.” And it was a priest who was the lifeblood of St. Ignatius for a part of the time when I was there. He was the priest that every altar boy wanted to serve under. You wanted to impress him because everybody’s parents loved him. And obviously it [allegations of sexual abuse leveled against him] hit home pretty hard. If that weren’t [enough of] a burden for this little faith community in Yardley, we found out later that two other priests at St.

Ignatius, who consecutively held positions in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, [allegedly] were directly involved in covering up the scandal in the Philadelphia area. When the [broader] abuse scandal hit, Father Kemp and I discussed this a few times – that it's either going to draw people away from the Church or draw them in. I found that I wanted to be drawn back in. I didn't really have anybody to go to at the time to talk about my feelings about the Church, my doubts, my hostilities on this, my criticisms. But Father Kemp and I went to lunch one day. I just needed someone to talk to about it all. And I don't think we came up with any real novel answers about what I was grappling with – you know, my frustrations with the Church, with my faith life. But I think the one thing I did realize was that it felt good to talk about it. And I think that's the reason I started to be drawn in the Church in some ways. Shortly after our conversation, I joined up for Agape [the retreat program at Georgetown]. A few of my fellow retreatants are here right now. And it was just another great experience for me to be able to find some people my age, my religion, who were having the same kind of issues and qualms with their faith life as I was. I still wouldn't say I'm all the way back, [yet] I still feel that call to the Church. It's something I want to be a part of. But I'm still grappling with some of the issues. That's the Catholic Church for me right now.

And I'll just add that the Church has been around for 2000 years in spite of all its mistakes. So it's not going anywhere. It's going to be here. But I think it needs to be a little more progressive if it's going to keep some individuals like us in the Church and committed to the Church. That would be just my take.

Carrie Gladstone (class of '07): I don't necessarily agree 100 percent with all the doctrines the Church teaches. I agree 100 percent with what Pati [Notario] was saying about the underlying values that you can get from the Gospel or from going to Mass and just making you think and reflect. But it's difficult because I think a lot of times people focus on those doctrines, like Mary was a virgin. What does the word "virgin" mean – there are so many different translations. And you get stuck on that and you just disregard everything else. I mean it's hard to belong to a Church where I feel like such a strong and independent woman and yet women can't be priests. I don't want to be a priest necessarily; I don't feel called to that vocation. But it's frustrating to belong to something where I feel like my gender is not recognized as being completely equal. And I know there are a lot of reasons for that in history and all that. But it's difficult for me as a

woman to agree with that and to support that. I don't like belonging to a place that is criticized to be not modern. It doesn't deal with the real problems. Like, as far as sexual morality – that's a topic people don't really like talking about, but it's something that's very real and present. I mean, a Church that doesn't deal with issues of homosexuality and condemns it [and] is so certain [about] teaching abstinence only – let's look at these problems and not just with a narrow-minded approach.

—*Edited by William Bole*