

KSC 2018 FORMATION PROGRAMME TOPIC CHOSEN – YOUTH

Session Six: **Theme:** **Secularism**

In addressing the opening of the Pre-Synodal Meeting for Youth the Holy Father spoke of the Scriptural examples of God speaking through young people: Samuel, David and Daniel, for example. He went on to tell those present that the Church needs them: “You have been invited as representatives of the young people of the world because your contribution is indispensable.” This is because the upcoming Synod is also, in the Pope’s words: “An appeal to the Church to rediscover a renewed youthful dynamism.”

Step 1: **Opening prayer:** from the Order’s Prayers

Step 2: **READING ON THE THEME**

In Session Two we considered some of the writings of Fr. Elbert from his book *‘Youth: the hope of the Harvest’*. By way of introducing some context into considering Secularism I thought it might be useful to look at his work again. “It is our responsibility through our own dedication to values to hand on to our youth the necessary tools and blueprint for the way of life that is properly ours as humans. If we fail here, in the very ‘basics’ of life, then we cannot expect success in them on the part of our youth.” It is perhaps timely for us to remember that we are all influenced by the ‘significant others’ in our lives.

What are we talking about here? The internet offers the following description: ‘One manifestation of **secularism** is asserting the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, or, in a state declared to be neutral on matters of belief, from the imposition by government of religion or religious practices upon its people.’ This has been very much a part of the last two hundred years of Australia’s history. There is no doubt that adoption of this as a value can create a vacuum into which all manner of alternatives to religious teachings can, and have, found a home and influence. It should come as no surprise to us that, in many sectors of our society and at different levels, those whom I call ‘social engineers’ are very active and admittedly very effective in prosecuting the alternative values they project. I am sure we are all alert to ‘the signs of the times’ and have struggled with this perceived contradiction with our faith-inspired values. I am also sure that we can appreciate that many – including those motivated by religious values – have succumbed to alternative (and I would argue deficient) codes causing great harm, bewilderment and even anger.

Pope Francis said he had personally read some of the emails regarding the questionnaire posted on-line by the Synod Secretariat (already referred to beforehand) and had been struck by the responses by many of the young people. “One girl observed that young people lack points of reference and that no one encourages them to activate the resources they have.” That unnamed respondent concluded with an appeal: “Help our youthful world that is increasingly falling apart”. The Pope described this girl’s cry as sincere and requiring attention. “The Church must learn new ways of presence and closeness” he said.

“I think it is important that there be Christians who testify to their faith, and who are willing to accompany and guide young people. These guides should be available for example at school or in a youth movement and ready to give meaning to the lives of young people.” (Annelien Boone delegate from Belgium). Boone went on to paint a picture of the religious status of youth in Europe quoting from a study in more than 35 countries: nearly 50% distrusts religious institutions and that up to 94% believe that religious beliefs are not necessary to obtain happiness. In Belgium only 2% of population under 34 takes part in a religious service more than a few times a year. I am sure we can identify that we have a similar situation here in Australia. In fact a recent census in the Australian Defence Force has identified that about 40% of personnel state that religion is ‘not applicable’ even though there was also available to them a separate category of ‘none’.

This is certainly not the time – even though the temptation might be there – to throw up our arms in horror. It is a challenge indeed but one that will and must be met with conviction and definitive determination to pass on what we have been truly blessed to receive and to find the ‘new ways of presence and closeness’ that the

Pope speaks about. In order to do this we must review our own personal dedication. There are many examples recently in our society generally where we have had the opportunity to plant our banner in the marketplace and we must continue anew in our efforts and collaborate even more closely.

Step 3: *Allow a few moments reflective silence.*

Step 4: **SCRIPTURE READING** From Gospel according to John. Chapter 14, verses 25-26.

“I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.”

Step 5: **REFLECTION** (5 Mins)

Step 6: **SHARING** (10 Mins)

In our society are there limits to what we can/should do to ensure that religious teachings and discipline are upheld?

What new ‘ways of presence and closeness’ regarding the transmission of the faith that can be developed?

How can we reach our young people with attractive ways (to them) of handing on our religious values?

Step 7: **CONCLUSION** We pray together;

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with the fire of Your Love.

Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

**Come Holy Spirit and inspire us so that every thought and deed may be inspired by You,
and by Your grace brought to a happy conclusion.**

Amen

Our Lady of the Southern Cross, Help of Christians, pray for us.

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, friend of the young, pray for us.

Step 8: *The meeting proceeds*

Step 9: **CLOSING PRAYERS – FROM THE ORDER’S PRAYERS**