

# Conversation # 3

## Witnessing Faith

### Leader Outline



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*These resources are provided as part of the Accompaniment Project from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and the Center for Ministry Development.*

This conversation introduces vision and skill for witnessing faith to youth and families. This will include preparation for including faith witness within accompanying relationships as well as practical ways to integrate faith witness within youth ministry, adolescent catechesis, and sacramental preparation. This process should take 75 to 90 minutes and is intended to be used with planning teams, ministry teams who work with youth and families, other leadership teams in the parish, parents, catechists, ministry leaders, and groups of interested parish members.

#### **Prepare in Advance:**

- Select and prepare readers for opening prayer and closing prayer.
  - Opening prayer – Acts 1:8
  - Closing prayer – John 15:11
- Prepare a prayer table with a cloth, candle, cross and bible.
- Prepare for your presentation and for your personal sharing:
  - You will provide a personal sharing about someone who was a witness to you.
  - You will provide a personal witness and connect it to the pattern of witnessing faith on page 5 of the handouts.
  - You will share with the group your personal sense of tasks that come easily and areas to grow as a witness from page 8 of the handouts.

#### **Introduction (5 minutes)**

(slide 1) Welcome participants and introduce yourself and the workshop / conversation. Share the purpose for our gathering:

One of the most important ways that we share faith and help others grow in faith is by providing an authentic Witnessing of a living faith. Many of us feel awkward and lack confidence in witnessing faith. We may even have pictures in our minds of people talking about their faith in a way that seemed boastful or disrespectful of those with whom they were speaking. Our gathering today

will introduce a vision for witnessing faith rooted in our Catholic faith. We can provide a witness in our relationships, with youth who we accompany, and within our ministries.

(slide 2) Introduce the Joy of Adolescent Catechesis document and share this quotation.

The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis is a document of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, the National Conference of Catechetical Leaders, and the National Catholic Education Association, working under the guidance of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This document provides direction for us as witnesses and guides us to remember our Joy!

In this passage, we are reminded of the need for witnesses to make the information about our faith come alive.

(slide 3) Continue by sharing this quotation from the document that emphasizes that witnesses apprentice young people in faith.

## Prayer (10 minutes)

(slide 4) Invite participants to take a moment of quiet, then begin with the sign of the cross. Continue with the gathering prayer:

Generous, loving God,

We thank you for your call to serve and be witnesses to youth.

“Let us pray that we will always recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, guiding us in wisdom and courage as, together, we strive to hand on the faith to the next generation of Catholic teenagers in the United States.” (page 3)

We ask this in Jesus’ name.

**All: Amen**

*Invite the person you identified to share the reading:*

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

(slide 5) Share a reflection:

What does it mean to be a witness? This is how Saint John Paul II describes witnesses:

“When we meet Christ and accept His Gospel, life changes and we are driven to communicate our experiences to others. ...the Church needs genuine

witnesses: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others.”

Pope John Paul II, World Youth Day – Toronto, 2002

(slide 6)

A witness is someone whose life has been changed through an encounter with Christ who is able to share that experience.

Personal Sharing: Share an example story of someone who was a witness for you?

Who is someone that has been a witness to you? How did they witness Christ to you? Share with one or two people about the person who was your witness.

Allow for 4 to 5 minutes for sharing. Provide a one-minute warning before gathering the group.

After gathering the group back together, ask participants what they noticed about witnesses from sharing their story and listening to their partner’s stories.

(slide 7)

Lead the Petitions:

Please join me in our prayers of petition. Our response is: Strengthen Us, Loving God.

**All: Strengthen Us, Loving God**

Loving God, we thank you for this cloud of witnesses. We thank you for their love, their vulnerability and their sincere faith. Fill them today with your spirit of peace.

**All: Strengthen Us, Loving God.**

For what else shall we pray?

After allowing participants to share prayers aloud, provide this transition:

Let us bring our many prayers into one.

(slide 8)

We thank you, O God, for sending your witnesses into our lives and turning our lives around.

**All: May we always turn to you.**

(slide 9)

We thank you, O God, for calling each of us to live in holiness and love. May we continue to embrace this calling with faith.

**All: May we live in your love.**

(slide 10) We believe your Spirit fills us

And empowers us to respond to your presence and witness to your Gospel.

**All: May your Spirit kindle in us the fire of your love**

(slide 11) We have been touched and healed by Christ.

Who lives with us now and forever.

**All: Fill us with grace, O God, strengthen us as witnesses,**

**And lead each of us to a holy life.**

**Amen**

## Part 1: Be Witnesses (20 minutes)

(slide 12) Introduce this session:

It takes a witness to share the joy of Christ's message. Let's begin by looking at some of the key messages about witnesses found with the document.

### Witness Activity

Point out page 2 in the handouts. Assign one of these 10 quotations to each group of two or three people. Choose the number of quotations you will use based upon the size of your group. (You do not have to cover all 10.) If you have more than 30 people, you can assign the same quotation to multiple groups.

Groups are to read over the quotation and discuss what this means for us as faith witnesses. What is an experience of adolescent catechesis that connects to this quotation? What is the challenge of living this out?

Groups should be prepared to share a few key ideas with the large group.

1. For two thousand years, the Church has flourished from generation to generation because of people like you who are willing to take the time to share with others the faith and love you have for Jesus Christ. Page 1

2. We may never see the results of ministry with young people, because often we are seed planters but not harvesters, joining a chorus of others who have planted or will plant the seeds of faith and love in the lives of our young people. Page 2

3. We are privileged to share the love of Christ with others, and to share with them the reason for our faith and our hope in Christ's promises of abundant life. Page 3

4. The Church has no shortage of words; what she needs are more witnesses. Page 3

5. ...our mission is not just to inform for to form and transform. Jesus is not a subject to study but a person to encounter. Page 2

6. Jesus is not a subject to study but a person to encounter. Page 2

7. This ministry (of catechizing adolescents) gives us the opportunity to invite young people to have a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church. Page 1

8. We make a profound difference in the lives of teenagers by sharing with them, in words and deeds, the beauty of the Catholic faith. Page 2

9. Grace empowers us to be witnesses of faith, and the grace of the Holy Spirit works in the lives of young people to invite them to conversion. Page 2

10. Our young people not only desperately need to see and hear what it means to be Catholic: they need to be apprenticed into the faith. Page 2

(slide 13) Provide comments about these quotations and this guidance for witnesses. Connect your ideas to the reports of the groups. Provide this summary:

#### Witnesses

- Are centered in Christ and rely upon the Holy Spirit.
- Collaborate with others to plant seeds of faith.
- Share Christ's loves.
- Share a reason for faith and hope.
- Lead youth to encounter Christ.
- Invite youth into intimate relationship with Christ.
- Share a living faith.
- Invite youth into conversion.
- Mentor youth in the faith.

## Part 2: Prepare to Witness (30 minutes)

(slide 14) Continue your presentation about witnessing. Share this quotation by Rick Warren and provide an explanation of the role of a witness. This addresses the fear that many have that they are not knowledgeable enough or articulate enough to witness to their faith.

(slide 15) Continue your explanation of the role of a witness:

**Share the story of God in your life.** Witnessing is about telling the story not about convincing or teaching. We have experienced God's presence,

God's mercy, and God's assistance in little ways and in big ways. We witness to everyday faith by sharing glimpses of these experiences.

**Your life is your witness.** The primary way you witness to your faith is the way you live your life. Youth have heard a lot about faith; they yearn to see faithful living in action. What does it look like to be a person of faith, hope, conviction, and joy? How do we show that we trust God and that we see purpose in our lives that is part of God's plan?

**Be true to your values.** Little things (and big things) matter. Youth may not always be listening, but they are always watching. Our witness is our authenticity: we strive to be faithful in the way we treat others, the way we treat students, the way we handle challenges and successes, and the way we rely on God. Youth notice kindness and integrity.

**Sometimes our witness is subtle and sometimes we are called to be bold.** We can witness in subtle ways by connecting our faith in God in conversations, in the environment in our home, or referring to prayer. There are occasions when the context of the conversation and the relationship may invite a bolder response such as sharing a story of how we experienced God in a personal challenge, or by offering to pray with or for a young person.

(slide 16) Explain this slide:

A witness sharing is not a formula. It is a sincere sharing from the heart of an experience of coming to know God better and integrating that glimpse of the holy into our lives. There is often a familiar pattern to the way a witness shares their experience.

Share and explain this pattern for a faith witness which is also found on page 5 of the handouts.

(slide 17) Review the questions on this slide which are on page 5 of the handouts.

These questions could help you recall your experience of God and prepare to share this experience.

(slide 18) Continue reviewing these preparation ideas.

Our God meets us in our life experiences. How and when did you experience God's presence? What surprised you?

(slide 19) Point out the resources for witnesses on page 4 in the handouts.

Share this reflection from Diana Macalintal.

(slide 20) Share this witness story of a young person.

When Victoria was in high school, her theology and history teacher was Mrs. Gerson. Victoria had a grudge against her; she felt that Mrs. Gerson treated her in a demeaning way, dismissing her as a student. She had an encounter that really changed her perspective while she was distributing communion at her parish.

As I picked up the host and raised it up reverently before the communicant, I found myself looking eye-to-eye with Mrs. Gerson. I could not believe what was happening. In a moment that seemed to last forever, I felt all the pain, the fury, the hurt, and the hate resurge in my body. Then just as quickly as those feelings had come, they dissipated and sudden peace filled my body when I said the words, "The Body of Christ."

I placed the host—the living God—into her outstretched hands. She said "Amen," made the Sign of the Cross, and then turned down the aisle. I was stunned and did not know what to think. In an instant, we were no longer student and teacher (with a grudge between us) but rather two believers who had come to eat at the table of Christ. When I looked at her, I still felt the resentment that lingered in my heart, but looking up at the host, I saw Mrs. Gerson for who she really was. In the Body of Christ, I was able to see that Mrs. Gerson was like me: a sinner trying to orient her life toward Christ. As with me, Christ shows his love to her in spite of her sins. And it is Christ's unconditional love given to us in the Eucharist that joins her to me and makes us one in him.

Leonard J. Delorenzo, *Witness – Learning to Tell the Stories of Grace that Illumine Our Lives*, Ave Maria Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2016, pages 90 and 91.

After sharing the story, connect Victoria's story to the pattern for witnesses.

- (slide 21) Share a personal witness that you can connect to the pattern.
- (slide 22) Connect the elements of your witness with this pattern.
- (slide 23) Invite participants to recall an experience of God's presence and use the resources to reflect on that experience and prepare to share with others. After several minutes, ask participants to gather with the one or two others that they had shared with earlier. Allow several minutes for sharing.

After the sharing in pairs or groups of three, collect questions and comments from participants about using these resources:

What did you notice about the process of witnessing faith?

How did you feel about the resources that helped you prepare?

- (slide 24) Present these ideas for integrating witness within our accompanying relationships and in our ministry and formation of youth. Provide an explanation for including youth and adult witnesses within our retreats, ministries, and catechesis experiences. I recommend that witnesses

prepare and write out their witness story. This gives the opportunity for feedback and guidance, to keep the story focused on how we see God's action. This also allows for prayerful proclamation of the witness story.

(slide 25) Present some ideas about families as witnesses of faith.

We can empower families and coach family members to be witnesses.

We should consider all the relationships and provide support for family members.

We can also provide and encourage experiences that promote opportunities for encounter and witness such as service and shared ministries.

(slide 26) Describe a vision for the parish witnessing faith to young members.

In his document, *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis describes that process for parish communities to become witnesses. It begins with drawing close to young people and listening.

(slide 27) Continue by saying:

We make room for young voices and we listen with empathy. This creates the setting where the witness to faith can be shared – heart to heart.

(slide 28) Show participants the self-assessment for witnesses in their handouts on page 8. Share with the group your own sense of tasks that come easily and areas you would like to grow in as a witness.

Invite participants to take the self-assessment (5 minutes) and share in groups of three. After the group sharing, collect some key ideas about strengths and areas to grow. Note: this could assist you in planning for continued support and additional training.

Provide concluding comments about being a faith witness for our young people, including ways that the parish can continue to provide support.

Thank the participants and share the gifts and strengths you saw in them today.

## Conclusion and Prayer (10 minutes)

(slide 29) Invite the community to join in the closing prayer.

(slide 30) Generous God, open our eyes to see you and our hearts to receive the encounters that you send to us. We seek to live in Joy.

**Response:** Send us as witnesses of your Joy!



(slide 31) John 15:11

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

(slide 32) Loving God help us to guard and treasure the joy that you send us so that we may be ministers of your love and witnesses to your power in our lives. We say "yes" to the Joy of the Gospel!

**Response:** Send us as witnesses of your Joy!

(slide 33) Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit.

We make this prayer as witnesses of the Joy of Christ.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy spirit

**All:** Amen