

## ENGAGING OUR YOUNG ADULTS: “OUR PARISH WILL PERISH WITHOUT US”

Thanks to an invitation from a Cathedral lector who was also one of the players, I attended an original musical produced by local Catholic young adults. Truthfully, I look forward to quiet weekend evenings, reading and preparing for Sunday Mass. I am much less inclined to go out. Nevertheless, I am glad I accepted her invitation. Entitled “**Catholic Young Adults: The Musical,**” it was held at the Helene Houle Auditorium at Saint Agnes School. What I did not expect was a **sold out theater for six nights!** It is the story of a fictional parish named Saint Stephen and the young adults who see the parish as the center of their lives, but hear rumors about its possible closing. Not content to sit back idly, they band together lest the “parish will perish without us.”

The cast of characters truly made me **chuckle**, because in my rather limited experience with young adults, they hit all the right notes! For example, the cast features a skeptic, a perpetual discerner, a zealously orthodox guardian of the faith, as well as a gentleman who is clearly too old to be hanging out with the young adults! There are romances, visits to convents, strained relationships, trips to the seminary, all of which are part and parcel of our young adults struggles to live the faith in a secularized world. Why is such a musical relevant? Simply put, it gave me a beautiful insight into the **multifaceted life** of our young adults, who have grown up in a radically different world than did I. Sure, I would’ve preferred the priest to be a little less curmudgeonly, but that’s just me! Perhaps that character hit home a little too closely!

Besides the **catchy musical numbers** and quirky dialogue, this musical was so engaging because its central theme speaks profoundly to our young adult experience in the church. Those of us over 50 fail to appreciate an experience in which living one’s faith is not only **countercultural**—it’s **socially risky**. Societal **approval** for an active faith life amongst those in their 20’s has largely vanished. Their choice for the faith must be an intentional one. It is no longer taken for granted in 2019. Not only are young adults searching for their own identity, they are seeking others who share in that Catholic identity.

As intermission wrapped up, I jokingly mentioned to the couple with whom I sat that since I rarely ever shut off my phone, perhaps I should check just in case any **emergency calls** came in. We priests feel tethered to our smart phones—mine connected to the emergency line! Sure enough, just seconds before a new scene began, I noticed that multiple emergency calls had come in. I made a quick exit and ended up going to the hospital to anoint someone who was gravely ill. While I am disappointed that I missed the remainder of the play, I guessed correctly at the outcome in part. The young woman who visited a convent solely as a favor to another, actually ended up entering!

The production company is named “**Missed the Boat Theater**” and this was their premier production. The musical was written by one of our talented young priests, **Father Kyle Kowalczyk**, parochial administrator at the parishes in Delano. He wrote the script in the lyrics, and was assisted musically by Brother John—Marmion Villa, former local who joined a religious community in Arkansas. The playbill hinted that if all goes well, they will do more. **Bravo!** They ought to market it throughout the country, so universal are its themes. Nor does the play shy away from difficult topics, such as the married couple experiencing infertility, who seek to do the right thing, while struggling with such seemingly difficult roadblocks on the way to parenthood. It is a poignant reminder that life is a gift, not a right.

Young adults are vitally important to the church, both today and looking to the future. This is a cohort we must engage. They are becoming or soon will become parents and as we have seen sadly in some European nations, the faith is dying. Despite our many challenges in this country, I think it is indisputable that our churches are still quite vibrant in comparison to many nations in Western Europe. Still, there are dark clouds on the horizon. We must attract and retain our young adults if we hope to have a future. This generation will speak volumes about the vibrancy or lack thereof in the church after 2020. The real challenge comes in **reaching out** to young adults, while at the same time holding fast to the perennial truths of the faith. The predominant youth culture accepts same-sex marriage and cohabitation, aspects of the moral life inimical to the Catholic faith. Many are indifferent to sacramental marriage in the Church. I pray that they will continue to see **Jesus Christ** and the Church as the **center** of their lives.

- Late night stroll? I was not prepared for a **10:30 p.m. ascent** to the **top of the dome**, but this time I was accompanied by firefighters. Apparently, a neighbor called, fearful that the dome might be catching fire. As we discovered (and surmised) the culprit was a flickering accent lamp at the tip top of the dome interacting with the falling snow. To be safe, the firefighters investigated. They told me I could remain below, but frankly, I knew it's a maze up there– I myself have gotten lost! Well, at least **they** enjoyed themselves!
- *O Felix culpa*– O Happy Fault. As it turns out, while climbing, the firefighters provided valuable insight into how we could quite possibly arrange for a **water pipe** to carry water up to the dome, something we will surely explore. Please consider contributing to our **Safety and Security** special collection that continues through Advent. The goal includes both security cameras and fire prevention measures for the dome.
- Confused about Mass today? When the Solemnity of the **Immaculate Conception** falls on a Sunday, the Second Sunday of Advent takes liturgical precedence. However, the feast is **transferred** to Monday, December 9, though **without the obligation** to attend normally associated with the Solemnity. Still, I invite you to celebrate with us, as it is the Patronal Feast of the United States of America. The U.S. bishops **commended the nation** to the patronage of Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception in 1846. Pope Pius IX approved their decision Feb. 7, 1847, six years **before** the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed.
- Next week we take up our annual Christmas Flowers/decorations collection. We hope to add **two new Christmas trees** to the back of the sanctuary this year, providing a beautiful backdrop for our flowers. You may donate in memory of or in honor of a loved one. Take an envelope home today and bring it back next week. Thank you for your assistance.
- I was stunned to hear of the sudden death of **Bishop Paul Sirba** of Duluth last Sunday morning from a heart attack. Originally a priest of this Archdiocese, he served faithfully for ten years in Duluth, a true shepherd of souls with the heart of Jesus. I count him a dear friend, and will write more in a future column. *Requiescat in pace.*

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel  
Rector