



Step into most Catholic Churches these days and you will quickly notice that the number of “gray hairs” is greater than the number of young adults, young families, and teens. Is the Catholic Church dying? It might appear that way, but in several areas of the world, the Catholic Church is on fire. What can we learn from those who have been successful in their evangelism efforts with the Millennials and Generation Z?

8 Tips For Introducing Millennials and Gen Z To The Beauty Of Catholicism

1.) PRAYER – This is always, always our starting point in anything that we wish to accomplish. We all know that our own efforts will prove fruitless. We must invoke the power of the Holy Spirit, the principal agent of evangelization. We also need to ask for the intercession of the Saints and Angels as we work to lead the next generation into the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Pray daily, incorporating fasting as a form of prayer, for the specific people in your life that need Christ. Pray for the generations that desperately need Jesus. This will soften our hearts and open us to be ready to hear the call to outreach to the lost. Whenever you enter a room, pray “Who here needs Jesus?” and begin to look around. The Holy Spirit will make it abundantly clear.

2.) See Jesus in Others – Have you ever heard the saying that you only love Jesus as much as you love the person you find most unloveable? To effectively evangelize anyone, we must first ask God to give us eyes that look beyond the exterior and begin to see Jesus in every person. In spite of all the differences, we treat everyone just as Jesus did. We can’t expect people to be holy before they even know the love of God. No matter what a person’s sin is, we respond with the same love, mercy, and compassion that Jesus showed everyone He encountered. We must be willing to defend the prostitute, just as Jesus did.

We must be willing to touch the untouchable, just as Jesus touched the lepers. We must be willing to eat with “tax collectors” and welcome the little children, just as Jesus did. Who are the prostitutes, lepers, and tax collectors in your life? Where can we find them? What do we know about them? How can we get to know them?

“As evangelizers, we need to know the predicament of our time—what people are facing—so that we can adjust not the gospel but our presentation of it to the needs of the day. Otherwise, the Church and the world will be like two ships passing in the night.”
-Jeff Cavins

Let's take a minute to get to know the Millennial and Gen Z'ers.

The world these generations know is vastly different from what most Baby Boomers (those ages 53-74) and even Gen X'ers (those ages 37-52) grew up in. Think about all the “norms” that have changed even in the past 20 years.

Currently, the Millennials are one-quarter of the nation's population. In general, millennials can be described as technology driven, optimistic, creative and adventurous. They value authentic, meaningful relationships. They enjoy feeling special and valued. Millennials have a strong desire to be a part of something that is impactful and that will truly make a difference. They desperately want to make a significant contribution to whatever they do. They challenge rules, constantly wanting to know the “why” behind what it is they are doing rather than just accepting that “things are always done this way.” If you want their respect, you'll have to earn it by investing in them. They are shopping around for moral values and they are looking for mentors to guide them. Millennials also thrive on feedback and affirmation.

The Gen Zers are also known as the Selfie Generation. This generation is known to be individualistic (everything is personalized to them from music to clothing to food choices) and they have lost a sense of real-life community because they are constantly in front of a screen. This might help explain why they often feel more alone and more overwhelmed than any previous generation. They are entrepreneurs, desiring to start something new, and, like Millennials, they are do-gooders that desire to make a difference in the world.

This generation is extremely diverse. Gen Z is adept at researching. They prefer to self-educate and find information on their own. They do not know what a “traditional” family make up looks like and, although underage drinking and drug use are down, the moral lines are blurry for them. They cannot remember a world without the internet. Whereas Millennials use three screens on average, Gen Z’ers use five: a smartphone, TV, laptop, desktop, and iPod/iPad. Hint: If you want to know where to find them, it’s probably in front of a screen!

We have two generations who are eager to learn and truly desire to make a difference, but the world (internet) is feeding them a false idea of how to do that. The results have been more loneliness, anxiety, and depression than ever before.

“In every age, the sense of the emptiness of life without God is a sign of hope. This sense sounds like a symptom of some greater problem, but in fact, it is a sign of hope. Those who experience this emptiness, especially the young, are those who become really energized by an experience of Jesus. They are the ones today becoming apostles.” – Archbishop Kurtz at the Convention for Catholic Leaders

Let us be encouraged by these things. These younger generations are looking for hope, joy, and meaning, and we Catholics have that to offer. Through each of the next points, I will tie in how we can use some these “characteristics” to our advantage in evangelizing.

3.) Be Willing to Ask and Even More Willing to Listen – Armed with some knowledge on the way these generations have been raised, we can begin to think of questions to engage with them to use as our starting place to building an authentic relationship.

Jesus shows us how to do this when He meets the Samaritan woman at the well and asks, “Will you give me a drink?” He opens the door to a conversation because He is aware that she needs to be ministered to, that she’s searching. When we see a person in need or hurting or outcast, we must be willing to ask the questions and begin a conversation. It’s not easy. It will probably make you uncomfortable, but they aren’t going to come to us, we must go to them.

Think about people you see at the grocery store or in the doctor's office or even at family parties. Look for the ones that need conversation and begin with a simple, non-threatening question, such as: What are you passionate about? What are you good at? Can you help me____?

Be ready to LISTEN. Really listen. Not the kind of listening in which you're preparing what to say next or thinking of what the Catechism says or getting ready to quote a Saint. Listen to what the person is saying, as well as what they are not saying. Dig deeper with another question, and listen again to the response. At the beginning of your relationship, spend more time listening than talking.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to take your conversation to a deeper level is to ask someone to share his or her story. Everyone has a story. This allows you to get to know the person better. As you listen to the person's story you can learn about how they grew up, what is important to them, and the events in their life that impacted them the most.

“To create a culture of encounter and witness, we must live explicit lives of discipleship. We are called not only to believe in the Gospel but to allow it to take deep root in us in a way that leaves us incapable of silence: we cannot help but to announce the Gospel in word and in deed. This missionary outreach is at the heart of discipleship.” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization* p. 14)

4.) Walk With Them – Every one of us should have someone that we are walking with. These generations are looking for mentors, people to lead, and guide them. Many do not have parents that have modeled Christian virtue or values.

It's going to take significant effort, investment, and time to build trust and form meaningful relationships. Yes, we are all busy and short on time, but look for ways to connect them to your life.

What do you regularly do that you could involve someone in? Though it can be, mentoring does not always have to be meeting at a coffee shop and discussing the Bible. In fact, it can be more powerful to invite someone into your life and to do things with you – yard work, ask them to give you a ride somewhere, ask them to babysit your kids, etc...do life together. Jesus modeled this type of mentoring with the disciples.

When they spend time with you, they will begin to see how you live life differently from their peers. You can model joy, prayer, repentance, and peace in all you do.

As they begin to desire what you have, which is a life in Christ and a baptism in the Holy Spirit, your next step is extending a personal invitation to your small group, a retreat, or an event, but that will take time. Pray that the Holy Spirit will signal to you when the time for this step has come.

The most powerful witness for me as a young college student was the joy present in my husband's family. This took place before I was even dating Jared. When we were just friends, he would take me to hang out at his family's house and I knew there was something different in that home. I was an ardent observer of how his parents interacted and how they talked to one another. I slowly realized that this joy was from not only a relationship with Jesus Christ, but also a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Their witness is what led me to desire to have a relationship with Jesus more than any talk I heard or book I read. An authentic expression of joy!

5.) Be Creative – Remember, though the generations change, the life-transforming power of the Gospel message never changes. The message of God's love and what Jesus has done for us will always be relevant. We never need to change the message, but we must continuously evaluate how we deliver the Gospel message.

In Luke 5:27-39, we hear the story of the friends who lowered the man on the mat down through the roof to Jesus so that his sins may be forgiven and that he might be healed. This event is rich with wisdom for us today. We must have that same type of creative vision and dedication to bring our friends and loved ones to Christ. If it's not going to

work out to take someone through the front door, we have to be willing to put the work into finding a way to get them to Jesus. It might be unconventional, it might be impractical, it might take hours of work and great strength, but it's worth it.

6.) Help Them Discover All That Is True, Good, and Beautiful About The Catholic Faith.

“It is ordinarily through a series of relationships that a young person finds himself or herself in church—attending some kind of celebration—and he or she discovers there an already present community of young people. And it's attractive, because unlike other communities in their life—such as their work community—this community places no burdensome demands on them.” – Bishop Massa of New York City

– Work to build community. Because many have spent so much of their lives online, they've often failed to form a sense of real community, and they are craving to belong and be a part of something. Work to create an environment where all feel loved and accepted. Remember, you can affirm and accept a person as created in God's image without endorsing his or her lifestyle.

“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.” – Pope Francis.

– Provide faith experiences that allow for a personal encounter with Jesus. This is a generation that craves experience as evidenced by their desire to travel and the term FOMO, fear of missing out. They want to DO. They want to LIVE. They want to feel. This is good news for us because we know that the Holy Spirit loves to provide these moments of faith experiences – worship nights and Adoration can awaken these generations that crave sensory experiences. Think about the type of events in which young adults and teens can LIVE the faith. Expect God's miracles to happen and rely on God's miracles. He will move in power when we invite Him to!

– Ask questions and guide them to discovering the answers. Remember that the both of these generations are adept researchers who like to self-educate and question the “why” behind everything. Because of this, there is a renewed interest in Scripture studies among young adults both inside and outside of the Church. They actually enjoy studying what Jesus Himself said and comparing it to what is written in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. They want to discover the reasons we do what we do in the Mass. They don’t want to believe in the Gospel simply because they have to or because someone tells them to, but because they have found it to be true.

– Provide opportunities for service. Remember, that another characteristic of today’s young adults and teens is the desire to be impactful and help others. Look to serve others, especially those that are poor, sick, and suffering. Hosting an event spent volunteering at a homeless shelter or a neighborhood clean-up can attract people who might not ever be interested in anything Church related to join you. It is there that you can begin to build relationships with them.

7.) Involve, Empower, and Equip Them – Remember young people like to feel a part of something, helpful, involved and valued, so ask them to help you! Give them a purpose and a sense of mission. Allow them to make a difference, be involved, DO something, to ACT and not just sit there. You need to give these opportunities or you will lose them. Give them the task of helping to promote things on social media or greet people or bring a snack. Then move on to bigger responsibilities like being on the worship team or giving a testimony or talk.

I experience the importance of this while leading Vacation Bible School in my parish. Two years ago we asked the fifth and sixth graders to attend as campers. They were bored out of their minds and claimed everything was “babyish” while they walked around moping. Last summer, I decided to give them an important role in the VBS. They prepped all the snacks, cleaned up from the crafts, had roles in the skits, and, most importantly, wore the same leadership t-shirts as the older teens. They felt so important and needed. They were incredibly empowered and motivated. It was a complete change in heart and attitude because they were given a meaningful role and shared in the success of the program.

8.) Be Prepared to Try Again and Accept That Sometimes You Will Fail.

“Yes we face obstacles, but the saints always loved a good fight, and we should love a good fight too, because we go forth with this great truth, goodness, and beauty of Jesus Christ.” – Bishop Robert Barron

You might do all of these things perfectly and you still might fail. The person you invest hours in might reject every invitation you extend or the event you plan months for may result in just a few people attending, but we cannot give up the fight. We must keep trying, creatively praying for ways to reach the future of our Church.

Remember that in Romans 5:20, we are told that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. Though this is a time in which more people are rejecting God than ever before, we can be confident that God wants to restore His people and will provide the graces necessary to do that.

“...but where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness, to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” – Romans 5:20-21