



INITIATIVE REPORT

CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

May 2012

The Bernardin Conference

Generational diversity was the theme of the 2012 annual Bernardin Conference, entitled "Ecclesial Communion in Light of Generational Diversity," held March 2-4 at Mundelein Seminary outside Chicago. Forty participants, an ethnically diverse mix of student leaders, professors, theologians, and other professionals, mostly under age 50, gathered to discuss the characteristics of their various age cohorts and to reflect on the implications of generational shifts, as well as ways to bridge what seem to be widening gaps.

In her keynote address, Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, a professor of sociology and religious studies at Emmanuel College in Boston, presented new findings from the "American Catholic Laity Survey," by William D'Antonio, Mary Gautier, and Michele Dillon.

The survey, conducted in May 2011, illustrates the tectonic shift: in 1987 the two oldest generations, known as pre-Vatican II (born before 1941) and Vatican II (born between 1941 and 1960), made up more than three-quarters of Catholics. By 2011, those generations had shrunk to 43 percent. The current majority, with 57 percent, is made up of the two youngest adult groups: the Post-Vatican II generation (born between 1961 and 1978) and the Millennial generation (born between 1979 and 1987). Younger Catholics are also increasingly Latino and more ethnically diverse.

"Do Church organizations reflect these demographic changes?" Sister Johnson asked, noting the potential for cross-generational ministry, prayer, service, and decision-making.



2012 Bernardin Conference Participants

Structures to foster the cross-generational Church are not yet in place, however. Nor do the generations have enough opportunities to get to know each other. At the conference, the younger members expressed a yearning to be mentored and "to share the podium" of leadership, rather than being relegated merely to youth activities. Dylan Corbett, a Millennial who works at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington D.C. on the Campaign for Human Development, a domestic antipoverty program, spoke of the young being threatened by a "consumerist" understanding of communion.

"We see the Church as a product or service that we can select to 'purchase,' use, and discard at will," he said.

The post-Vatican II group spoke of feeling like "the middle child."



Nathan Krawetzke reflected back to the group points discussed on visions for the future of the Church.

"There is a lot of attention given to the Millennials for their new energy and needs," said Kevin Ahern, a doctoral candidate in theological ethics at Boston College. "There is also still a lot of attention on the Vatican II generation who lead the Church now. But what about those of us in between?"



Bernardin Conference continued...

At one turning point, the pre-Vatican II group asked the others, "What is your dream for the Church? What are you willing to do to see it through? And how can we help?" That offer of help was important, said some young participants; it appeared to draw the generations in the room closer together.

During the final sessions, participants laid out concrete action-steps for parishes, dioceses, and other organizations that, if followed, could build up the inclusive, welcoming, multi-generational Church they said they wanted. "Because of our many experiences—generational, cultural, and ethnic—our relationship to the Church is different for each generation, which truly captures the meaning of being Catholic: all are welcome," said Dr. Hosffman Ospino, a post-Vatican II Catholic born in Colombia, who is assistant professor of theology and religious education and director of graduate programs in Hispanic ministry at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry.



Sessions of the conference were rooted in prayer and liturgy.

"The energy of the young together with the wisdom of the older leaders could really vitalize a lot of our exhausted Church leaders and programs," said Dee Bernhardt, a pastoral associate and director for campus ministry for St. Augustine University Parish in Platteville, Wisconsin.

We look forward to incorporating the creative ideas and strategies into our work!

After the conference, several participants shared their experience and learnings from the dialogue. Four of these reflections follow.

"Informative, eye-opening, challenging. These are just three of the words I would use to describe my time at the 2012 Catholic Common Ground Conference. The discussion was educational in that this was my chance to hear firsthand from different generations equally willing to serve and lead the Church far into the 21st century. At last I shared a common space with people from different walks of life who despite their differences shared a common goal, i.e., a willingness to converse about the challenges facing the future of the American Catholic Church. Lastly, there was a renewed sense of appreciation for a lesson I learned many years ago in graduate studies, and that is, honest conversation and a shared experience of prayer and liturgy can lead one to conversion and to better acknowledge the Spirit moving in new ways."

Kari-Shane Davis Zimmerman is an Assistant Professor of Theology at the College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University in Minnesota.

"We don't all see the Church in the same way, but we do all love it and are committed to it. That has remained with me from the Bernardin Conference. In his final public address, Cardinal Bernardin stressed the need for dialogue: 'A dying person doesn't have time for the peripheral or the unimportant... We cannot waste the precious gift of time on acrimony and division.' But beyond dialogue, we also need to see that no one generation has more of a claim to the Church than any other generation. We are all co-workers in the vineyard, regardless of age or how late we've come to the field. No one is replacing anyone. The older generations don't have to 'step aside,' and the younger generations aren't there to 'take up the slack.' The Church is big enough for all of us to work together now as one community of disciples."

Diana Macalintal is the Director of Worship for the Diocese of San Jose.

“Things that last.... in that very famous poem on the virtue of love in St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he reminds us that, in the end, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. (I Corinthians 13:13) Love abides; I experienced it at the Bernardin Conference, as 40 of us from varying generations, ethnicities, and theologies gathered to consider the current polarities of the Roman Catholic Church.

As I followed the dialogue into ever-expanding connectedness, the question, “What can we do to help you?” from the oldest generation present (Pre-Vatican II) encapsulated this abiding spirit of love. Love—of God, our Church, all peoples, and in the end of one another continued to emerge as the thread which ties us all together. The heart of the Risen Christ once again brought me to that humbling, vulnerable place of love from which I can continue to embrace my faith, renew my hope and take courage in love.”

Dee Bernhardt is a pastoral associate and director for campus ministry for St. Augustine University Parish in Platteville, Wisconsin.

“Catholic Common Ground’s 2012 gathering was an opportunity to enter into discernment about the contemporary demands of the Gospel. Through conversation, prayer and humor, we placed ourselves in the presence of the Spirit acting in the here and now.

During our time together, all of us—old, young, lay and ordained, Church professionals and professionals in the world—encountered the beauty and depth of the faith manifested across generations. More importantly, we named and prioritized challenges confronting us in the Church today, a Church more culturally-diverse, a Church called to proclaim the faith robustly in an environment radically transformed by globalization and technology, and a Church called to respond creatively to today’s complex and serious social issues.

Together we came to appreciate the need to promote authentic leadership for today’s Church; leaders equipped to negotiate the demands of ministry and capable of participating in Christ’s work of transforming this world.

In the safe space provided by the Common Ground and in an atmosphere of trust, we were able to engage in open and honest dialogue to discern our response to the challenges of today. A timely opportunity and an uncommon gift!”

Dylan Corbett works at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops as a specialist on the Central and Southwestern United States for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.



Keynote speaker Sr. Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, spoke to generational shifts in the American church.



Diana Macalintal shared her thoughts on characteristics of the Post Vatican II generation

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The Philip J. Murnion Lecture

**Vatican II: Celebrating 50 Years
"The Significance of Gaudium et Spes"**

Professor John W. O'Malley, S.J., Georgetown University

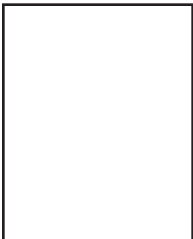
Bernardin Award Recipient

Archbishop Emeritus Daniel E. Pilarczyk, Archdiocese of Cincinnati

June 1, 2012 8:00-10:00 PM

**Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.
McGivney Auditorium**

Free to the public. Register on-line at catholiccommonground.org



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