

## Reflections

by the  
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### Youth today – where are they going?

As Bishop, I have the opportunity at this time or year to be in contact with a great number of young people throughout our Diocese of Eastern Montana. During these months I celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with young people in over 50 different parish communities. These young people are for the most part Juniors and Seniors in high school which means they are completing adolescence and approaching adulthood. I also had the privilege of attending a good portion of the Youth Rally last weekend in Billings where almost 400 young people gathered to celebrate their faith and their identity. Such experiences cannot help but leave some deep impressions on me regarding young people today.

My first impression is one of hope. That hope is not the expected reaction of stating that young people are the hope of the future for the Church and society. Rather, young people offer the Church and society hope now. Fr. Don Kimball, the main speaker at the Youth Rally, repeatedly shared with the young people that if we call young people "the future of the Church or society," then we are telling them they do not have a part to play in the Church or society at this time, and that they have to wait until they are older to be part of Church and society. Nothing should be further from the truth. In a patient and powerful way, Fr. Kimball kept emphasizing that young people must contribute to the building up of the Church and society now because they are part of the Church and society today.

I also consistently discover that in speaking to young people and with young people, they are anxious to hear the Gospel message. But this Gospel message and the teaching of the Church must speak to their lives and to the challenges they face. A hesitancy to relate the gospel message in concrete terms to the lives of young people would mean that religion is not for them. This would be tragic because the message of Jesus and the teaching of the Church speak powerfully to the questions young people raise today.

Young people furthermore have a deep yearning for the sacred and the spiritual dimensions of life. To fulfill this yearning takes time. Yet, so often the adult world imposes so much activity and demands, so much time from young people, we don't give them the opportunity to reflect, to pray, to think about who they are in relationship to God and to each other. Young people have a natural talent and drive to celebrate which is so important for the liturgy, but unfortunately we stifle that creativity far too often.

As young people complete school at this time of year, I look at them and I hopefully recognize the hope they offer to the Church and the world. Young people have boundless energy, unlimited enthusiasm - but they also have the ability to love, to believe, to hope, to care in a profound way. Young people look to us as adults for example, inspiration and encouragement. I pray we might be generous with these gifts to them.

Where are young people going today? I believe they're headed in the right direction. As adults, we can help them in the journey before them and with them and living out the challenge of the Gospel and the Church in our own lives.