



## Executive Summary

The *National Dialogue on Catholic Pastoral Ministry with Youth and Young Adults* was a multi-year (2017-2020) collaborative nationwide initiative focused on enhancing the Church's ministries with young people. The core collaborators include the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM); the Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA); the National Catholic Network de Pastoral Juvenil Hispana (LaRED); the National Advisory Team on Young Adult Ministry (NATYAM); and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

From July 2018 to December 2019, the National Dialogue worked with its national leadership network to host local conversations with youth, young adults, parents, and ministry leaders - to listen to the realities facing them today. Different sets of questions were created for the different audiences and listening contexts: those who were engaged and those who are disaffiliated from the Catholic/Christian faith; those who had gone through the *V Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry* process; and those who participated in consultations in advance of the 2018 Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.



It is estimated that almost 10,000 individuals were reached in about 450 recorded *National Dialogue* conversations, plus the additional *V Encuentro* and Synod conversations that were integrated into the data collection, over the course of 18 months. Due to various question options for the conversations, it was important to find a way to compare the conversations' data even though different sets of questions were discussed. Although the data entry was designed in a way to allow for statistical analysis, it is important to interpret the data qualitatively. The participants in the National Dialogue are not a random sample of the population of Catholic youth and young adults and parents and ministry leaders; therefore, what they said cannot be construed as representative of the larger population beyond those who participated. By focusing on qualitative information and not quantitative and by reporting exactly what was heard, this data is still very reliable. The National Dialogue created a safe space in which participants could honestly give voice to their perspective and strove to include the full diversity of voices that one might expect to find in the population being studied.



**The submitted reports on the National Dialogue conversations provide a rich and detailed portrait of the current state of ministry with young people in the Catholic Church throughout the United States.** Pastoral leaders should not hesitate to trust the faithfulness and breadth of the data that was collected, and to utilize it—in light of the pastoral criteria and directions set forth in *Christus Vivit* and other pertinent ecclesial documents—in their discernment for how best to respond to what has been learned. By looking at combinations of responses across multiple variables, it is possible to discern patterns that provide great pastoral insight into the hopes, needs, concerns, and complaints of young Catholics today, as well as those of the adults who care about and accompany them.

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### Some particular trends that emerged included:

- » The young people in these conversations are **actively engaged in their faith, yet still struggle with the Church.**
- » There is **incredible diversity** among youth and young adults in terms of culture, ecclesial perspective, spirituality, and lived experiences.
- » An awareness and responsivity to this diversity may at times be lost in ministries with a diverse community of young people.
- » Young people and ministry leaders **want more listening** as was found in the model of the National Dialogue, the *V Encuentro*, and the Synod.
- » The participants, by and large, wanted to see Church leadership and their fellow Christians be **more authentic and less judgmental and divisive.**
- » The young people in these conversations have a very **strong sense of mission**: they want to change the world.

### Among the different age groups, other trends emerged:

**Youth** asked the Church for:

- (1) a reimagining of faith formation and Confirmation preparation, away from a classroom model
- (2) greater intergenerational support, dialogue and mentorship
- (3) more youth ministry programming

**Young adults** asked the Church for:

- (1) a more integrated and relevant approach to faith and everyday life
- (2) more guidance and accompaniment during young adult transitions and vocational discernment
- (3) more ministry opportunities for them as young adults, inclusive of increased funding and support for this ministerial area

**Parents and ministry leaders** asked the Church for:

- (1) more formation, as many felt ill-equipped to respond to changing realities
- (2) more resources on engaging the disaffiliated
- (3) a more collaborative, supportive approach to leadership
- (4) a better understanding of one another, as both groups (parents and leaders) expressed frustration with one another

**The recommendations, based on the National Dialogue data and conversations, include the following:**

**1. More intentionally connect the life of faith with the lived experiences of young people.**

*The National Dialogue observed that even active young people feel the Catholic Church does not show how faith is relevant to their daily lives, transitions, and lived experiences.*

**2. We all need to do more synodal listening to one another.**

*The recent experiences of the Synod, the V Encuentro, and the National Dialogue show that synodality is essential, especially listening to those from the peripheries and bringing in the voices of those who are not around the table.*

**3. Address the “authenticity gap.”**

*The National Dialogue revealed that the Church needs to show more empathy and authentic engagement with the young, rather than empty platitudes or impatient judgement of the young and the disaffiliated.*

**4. Increase the investment in accompaniment.**

*We do not walk alone, and we need each other. The National Dialogue, echoing Christus Vivit, saw that the Church must train more people in “the art of accompaniment” with youth and young adults, especially in the area of mental health.*

**5. Expand ministry with young adults.**

*All age groups and conversations with the National Dialogue noted the Church’s significant lack of attention to young adults (ages 18-39) and expressed a strong recommendation to increase, invest in, and expand this ministerial area.*

**6. Reimagine faith formation.**

*There was regular encouragement in the National Dialogue to move away from a classroom model and toward more relevant learning models featuring mentorship, small groups, accompaniment, faith sharing, and authentic witness.*

**7. Reconsider preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation.**

*There was a clear call to reexamine and reconsider how the Church prepares young people for Confirmation.*

**8. Partner with parents and enhance family ministry.**

*Due to the concerns of ministry leaders and parents expressed in the National Dialogue, there must be increased dialogue and collaboration with families and the domestic Church, including the growth of intergenerational/family ministries.*

**9. Transform ministry leadership.**

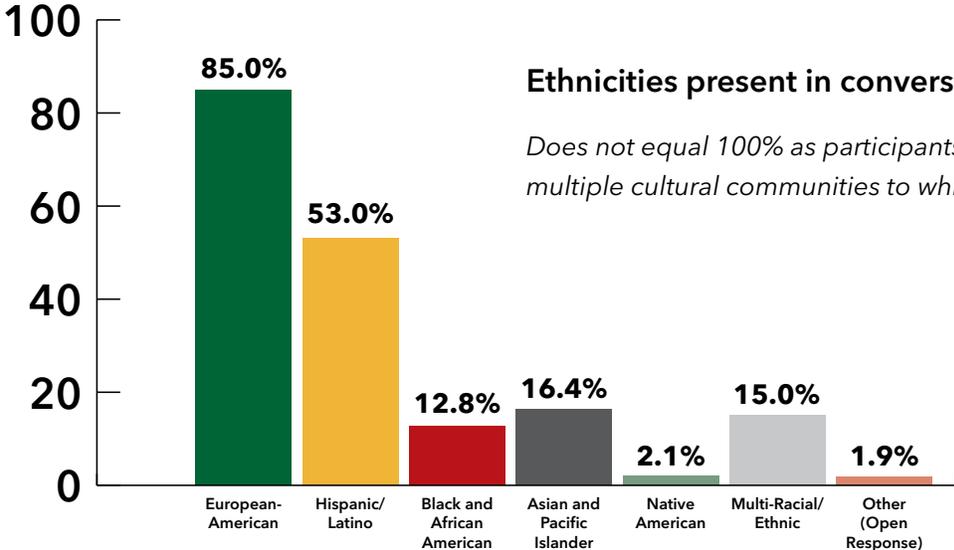
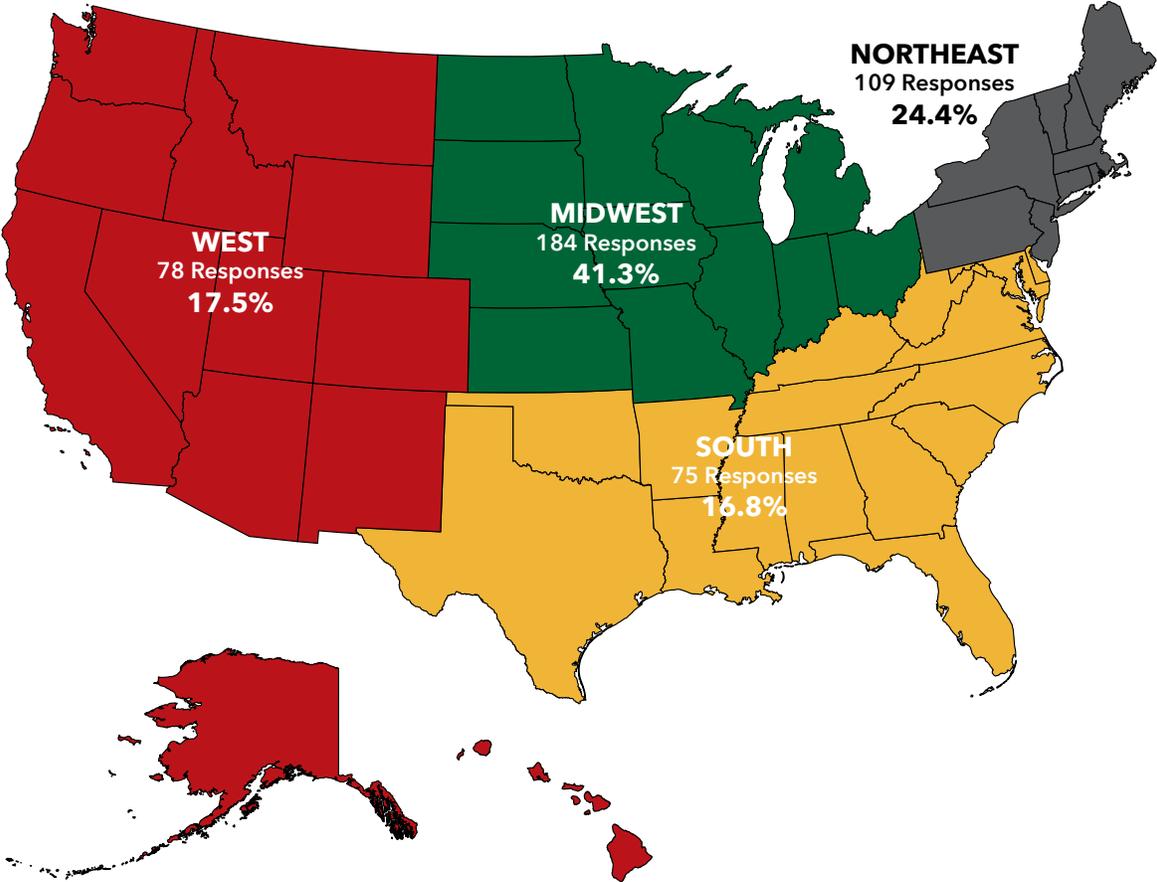
*It was evident in the National Dialogue feedback that the Church needs to seriously address the formation, support, and resourcing of ministry leaders and create a culture of collaboration and unity across ministerial and ecclesial lines.*

**10. Embrace complexity.**

*Because of the plethora of findings from the data, and recognizing the needs of young people, families, and leaders are so vast, there is no “one size fits all” approach that can be taken; rather, leaning into this complexity is highly recommended.*

**Locations of conversations:** does not constitute location of the participants (since national/regional conferences were common settings, see below)

**RECORDED CONVERSATIONS/LISTENING SESSIONS BY REGION**



**Ethnicities present in conversations:**

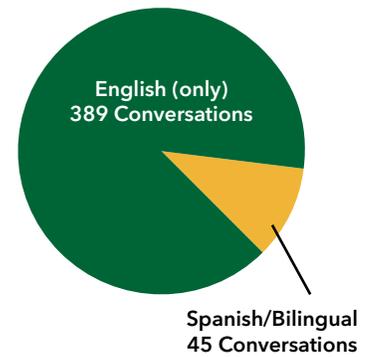
*Does not equal 100% as participants could (and did) list multiple cultural communities to which they belonged.*

### Types of participants:

(broken down by age and engagement with the Catholic faith)

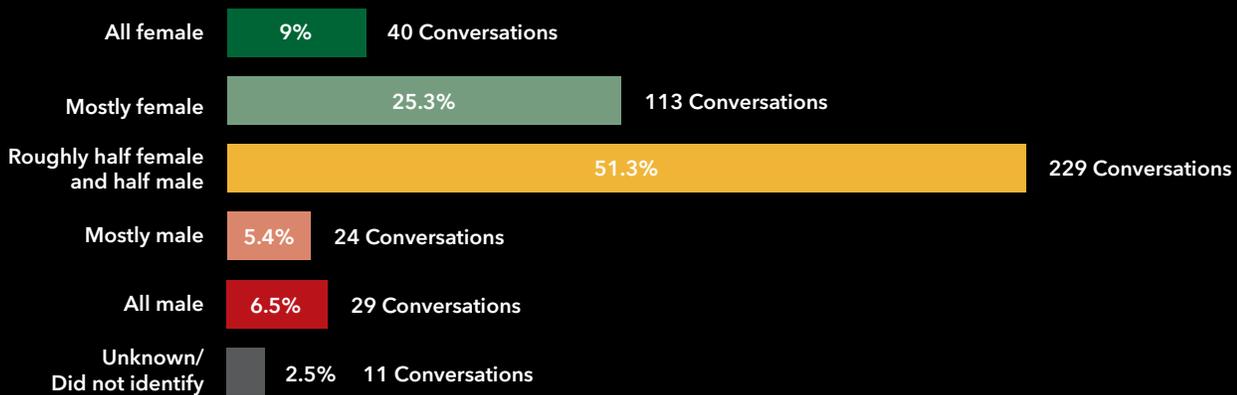


### Languages used:



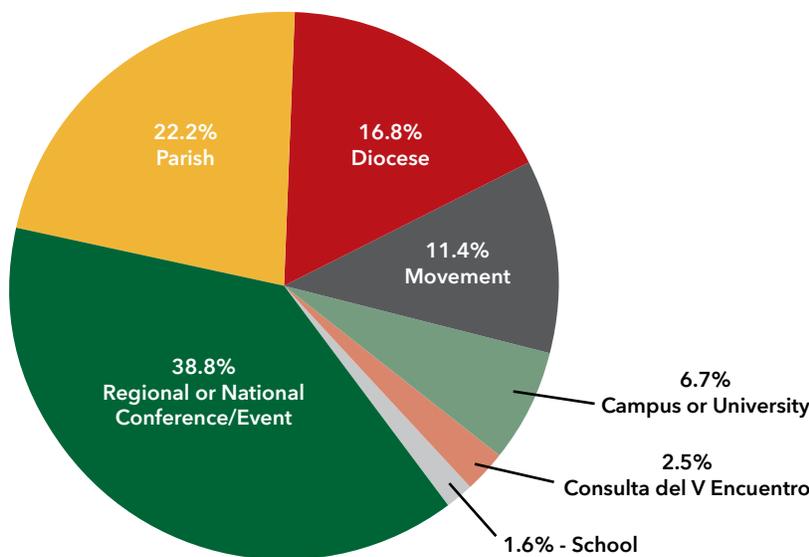
### Gender makeup of the conversations:

Most conversations included both male and female, with a sizable female presence.



### Settings where the conversations took place:

Many took place at larger Catholic events or at the diocesan level, which often includes representation from across a given region or across the United States; however, there are a diversity of settings here.



**Issues and concerns mentioned within the conversations where participants noted the Church needs to understand more about the life experiences of youth and young adults:**

	Number of Responses	Percent of Cases
Feel the church is relevant to their lives	142	53.4%
Are very busy and over-scheduled	141	53.0%
Are frustrated by perceived hypocrisy in the church	134	50.4%
Experience depression and/or anxiety	121	45.5%
Struggle with church teachings	121	45.5%
Have a loving, supportive family	116	43.6%
Use technology and social media frequently	104	39.1%
Have lost faith in church leaders	96	36.1%
Are worried about the future	92	34.6%
Are concerned about the current political realities	90	33.8%
Struggle with their family situations, such as divorce or blended families	88	33.1%
Feel the church is not relevant to their lives	88	33.1%
Are lonely	79	29.7%
Are healthy and doing well	71	26.7%
Have many friends	67	25.2%
Want to change the world	60	22.6%
Are considering a vocation to religious life or priesthood	58	21.8%
Struggle with loss	49	18.4%
Are not interested in the church	38	14.3%
Experience abuse (sexual, physical, emotional)	37	13.9%
Struggle with their sexual or gender identity	36	13.5%
Experience addiction	24	9.0%
Struggling financially	24	9.0%
Engage in pornography	17	6.4%
Do not believe they are loveable	16	6.0%
They want to be accepted/welcomed by the church	12	4.5%
Feel they're stereotyped/bullied/judged for being Catholic by others	9	3.4%
Other	8	3.0%
Have parents that are gay	7	2.6%
Experience school pressures	4	1.5%
Immigration status issues	4	1.5%
Issues with church leadership, especially regarding respect for women in the church	3	1.1%
Peer pressure/being stereotyped for their faith	3	1.1%

**Embarrassment, disaffection, or irrelevance of being Catholic:**

		Frequency	Percent
Youth	Higher Occurrence	57	32.9%
	Some Occurrence	57	32.9%
	Lower Occurrence	33	19.1%
	No Occurrence	26	15.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Young Adult	Higher Occurrence	25	15.5%
	Some Occurrence	46	28.6%
	Lower Occurrence	42	26.1%
	No Occurrence	48	29.8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Older Adult (Parent & Ministry Leader)	Higher Occurrence	33	29.5%
	Some Occurrence	12	10.7%
	Lower Occurrence	32	28.6%
	No Occurrence	35	31.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

We encourage you to read the complete report and to engage with the research documents and appendices found on our website for a fuller understanding of the above.

