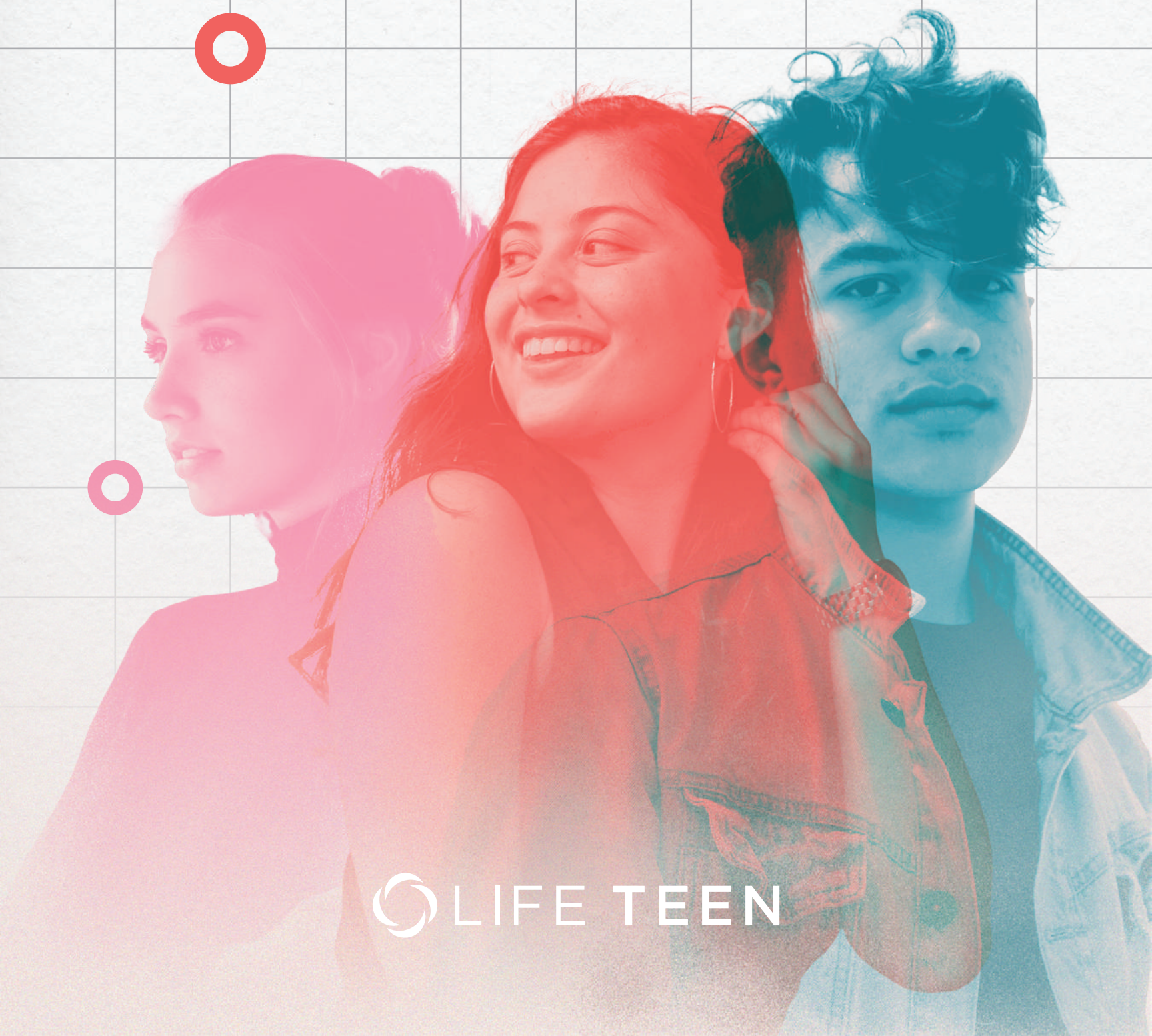


2024 REPORT

# The State of Catholic Youth in America



 LIFE TEEN



# *Young people, do not be afraid to be holy!*

-

*Message from the Holy Father  
Pope John Paul II  
For The VI World Youth Day*

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# I. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present you with the current state of our Catholic youth.

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Life Teen engages over 160,000 teens globally each week. This affords us unique insights into teens' spiritual journeys and struggles. Drawing on nearly four decades of experience, this report outlines the current challenges in youth ministry and the pastoral strategies that are proving to be most effective with teens today.

Today's teens navigate a barrage of pressures that were intensified by the pandemic — from social media's dominance of their lives to depression, gender dysphoria, and political division. These pressures lead to disillusionment and a profound lack of genuine connection. This complex landscape offers a pivotal opportunity for Catholic ministry, as teens' deep-seated desire for belonging and authentic relationships has never been more critical.

The importance of engaging young people in our faith cannot be overstated. While previous generations returned to their faith in adulthood, this does not hold true with today's generation of youth. Instead, the youth need to be actively engaged with during their pivotal teen years. Therefore, parishes must take an active role in our youth's spiritual and developmental journeys. Our outreach must be urgent, thoughtful, and pastoral. We must meet them where they seek connection and belonging. As ministers, it is our responsibility to help them encounter Christ and nurture their faith through discipleship. We are the "first responders" in faith, guiding, supporting, and inspiring them on their journey within the Catholic community.

**This report is intended to show you how.**



# II. Today's Youth

Today's youth, including middle schoolers, teenagers, and adults, belong to "Generation Z" and "Gen Alpha." Generation Z includes those born between 1995 and 2015, while Gen Alpha includes those born after 2010. These generations are unlike any generation before them due to the profound influence of technology and global connectivity on their upbringing.

The Church needs innovation to adapt to the changing cultural landscape and overcome the challenges caused by social media, political division, the school system's state, and the pandemic's impact. It must take a new approach to discussing religion with high school teens, building trust, and presenting the faith in new and relatable formats.

Here are a few key insights drawn from studies done on this generation over the last decade, and what they mean for us:

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research: [Religious affiliation among American adolescents](#)

<sup>2</sup> Time: [You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish](#)

<sup>3</sup> Bussiness of Apps: [A look at Gen Z Mobile Behaviours](#)

Only 24% of  
American Youth  
identify as  
Catholic.<sup>1</sup>



Watches an average  
of 68 videos a day.<sup>3</sup>



Have the attention  
span of a goldfish.<sup>2</sup>

Slay

Rizz

That's Fire



# Faith

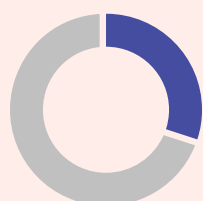
Young people today are more open to spiritual exploration and spiritual experiences than previous generations. This presents an opportunity to shepherd this desire for faith into a deeper understanding of Christ and His Church.



Only 24% of American Youth identify as Catholic.<sup>4</sup>

43%

43% of Gen Z Catholic Youth believe in the True Presence of the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup>



1 in 3 teens (30%) claim a Christian identity but do not have a relationship with Christ.<sup>6</sup>



In 2023, 1 in 3 young people believed in a higher power, up from 1 in 4 in 2020<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research: [Religious affiliation among American adolescents](#)

<sup>5</sup> CARA Eucharistic Beliefs: [Poll 2023](#)

<sup>6</sup> Barna: [The Open Generation](#)

<sup>7</sup> Springtide Research: [The State of Religion & Young People 2022: Mental Health—What Faith Leaders Need to Know](#)

# Get their attention or lose them.

Gen Z has an 8-second attention span, one second less than a goldfish.<sup>8</sup>

They spend 4 hours and 15 minutes daily on social media<sup>9</sup> and consume vast amounts of short-form video content at a fast pace.

Their attention span is short, so talks & content need to be engaging and creative.

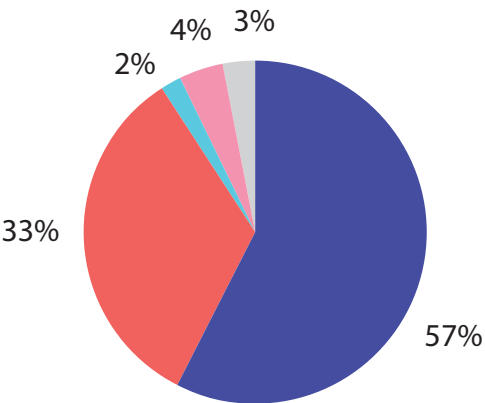


## Offer resources tailored to our vibrant, diverse youth



45% of Catholic youth come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. 33% of Catholic youth are young Catholic Latinos.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for tailored and culturally sensitive resources to cater to the diverse needs of this population.



Total US Catholic Population By Race<sup>10</sup>

White (non-Hispanic)	29,640,000
Hispanic, Latino	17,160,000
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	2,080,000
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1,560,000
Black, African American, African, Afro-Caribbean	1,040,000

<sup>8</sup> Time: [You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish](#)

<sup>9</sup> Bussiness of Apps: [A look at Gen Z Mobile Behaviours](#)

<sup>10</sup> Pew Research: [9 facts about U.S. Catholics, 2024](#)



# Engage with them during critical youth milestones.

According to the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)<sup>11</sup> conducted at the University of Notre Dame, there are two critical decision points for young people in their faith journey:

## 1. From grade school to high school:

Will they continue to be Catholic after Confirmation and in High School?

## 2. From high school to college or the workforce:

Will they stay Catholic as adults?

Additionally, recent pew research shows that religious disaffiliation typically happens between the ages of 15 and 29.<sup>12</sup> We need to engage, catechize, and disciple young people and their families before they make life's crucial decisions.



<sup>11</sup> University of Notre Dame: "National Study of Youth and Religion" (NSYR).

<sup>12</sup> Pew: *Modeling the Future of Religion in America*



# III. The 5 Cries of Youth

9

This report highlights five critical areas impacting Catholic teen discipleship. Addressing anxiety, the need for belonging, the search for purpose, the importance of family, and tackling loneliness requires thoughtful and adaptive approaches from the Catholic community. By understanding

and responding to these areas, Catholic discipleship can offer meaningful support and guidance to today's teens. These trends have been identified through conversations with the thousands of American parishes who use Life Teen Youth Ministry resources.



# 1. Working Through Anxiety

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Teenagers in 2024 are known as the Anxiety Generation<sup>13</sup>. Life Teen data shows a rise in anxiety medications among the thousands of teens that attend Life Teen Camps and Events. We believe this is due to continuous social media exposure, idealized lifestyles, and peer pressure. Current challenges, like gender identity, political unrest, and economic uncertainties, add to their anxiety and worry about the future.

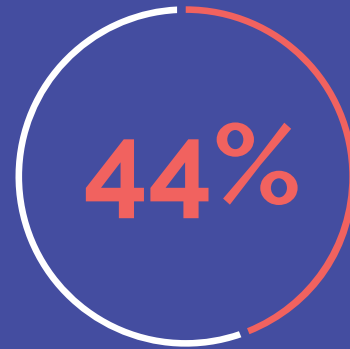
What we can do:

## **Build a stable community**

Catholic formation can address this by providing stable, supportive communities and relationships.

## **Teach on True Hope & Peace**

Provide teaching and encounters for teens to find lasting peace and hope through Jesus Christ.



Almost half (44%) of high schoolers reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless in 2021.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>13</sup> IBX Insights [An Anxious Generation: Anxiety in Teens and Young Adults](#)

<sup>14</sup> CDC [Youth Mental Health and Covid 19](#)

## 2. Finding Belonging & Seeking Community

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Adolescence is a critical period of transition where teens explore and redefine their identities, often distancing themselves from their childhood affiliations related to faith, family, and community. During this formative stage, they actively seek out new peer groups and social environments as a means to discover and affirm their own identities. To put it simply, they are searching for **who** they are, **where** they belong, and **who** they belong with.

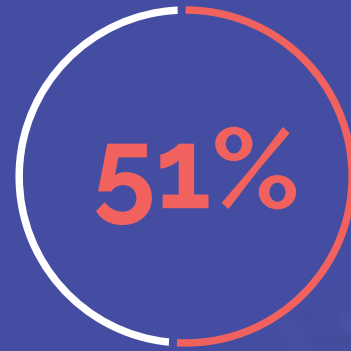
What we can do:

### **Provide a Sense of Community:**

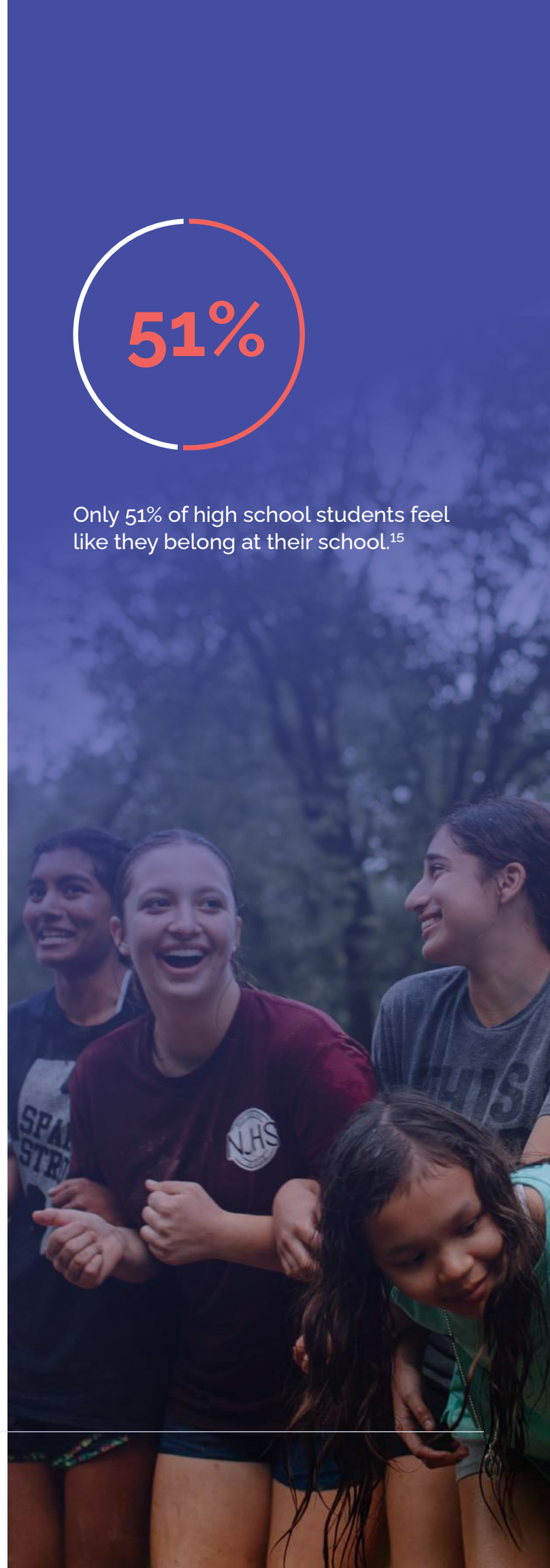
Teens experience a sense of belonging and community through youth groups and church activities.

### **Show Unconditional Love**

Create a youth group at your parish that offers safe spaces for teens to be themselves, away from societal pressures. Catholic communities are crucial for fostering this sense of belonging and helping teens form healthy, supportive relationships.



Only 51% of high school students feel like they belong at their school.<sup>15</sup>



<sup>15</sup> Qualtrics: [Why a sense of belonging at school matters for K-12 students](#)



### 3.

## Purposeful Connection

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Today's teenagers are searching for purpose, seeking answers to life's biggest questions. Teens ask profound questions about their life's purpose and how their faith fits into their personal and global outlook. They want to know what it all means and their role in the universe.

What we can do:

#### **Discipleship:**

Catholic teachings offer a framework for understanding the world and one's role, aiding teens in navigating life's complexities. By walking with young people and forming them as disciples, we can help them find their purpose and have a deeper faith connection.



4 out of 5 teens lack purpose in life<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> Wallstreet Journal: [Why Teens Need a Sense of Purpose](#)

## 4.

# The Need for Family

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In 2024, family relationships are critically important. Parents still have the greatest impact on teenagers' lives, shaping their spiritual and moral development. The family unit serves as a crucial support system, aiding teenagers in dealing with challenges and uncertainties. However, due to the increasing prevalence of divorce, second marriages, and non-traditional family structures, teenagers now have more complex definitions of family and family support systems than before.

### What we can do:

#### **Teach about family and support the family**

Rely on Catholic teachings that emphasize family values to resonate strongly with this generation, reinforcing the role of family in personal and spiritual development.

#### **Build mentorship relationships**

To address the reality that not all teens have a supportive, traditional family, provide a support network within the parish community that includes adult mentorship from strong, holy Catholics.





## 5. Navigating Loneliness

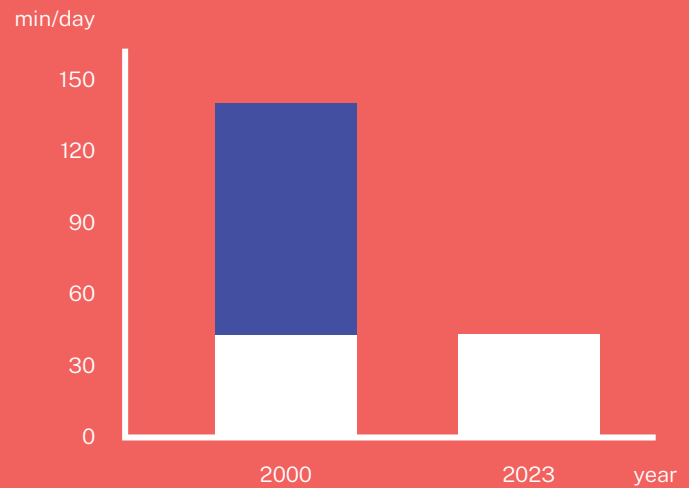
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Loneliness is a common problem among teenagers, even in this era of increased connectivity. Online interactions do not always result in meaningful relationships, leaving teens feeling isolated. The abundance of digital communication options can also lead to indecision and social isolation.

What we can do:

### **Build a stable community**

Counter this trend by encouraging real-life interactions and community involvement, fostering deeper connections, and reducing feelings of loneliness.



Teenagers spent nearly 70 percent less time hanging out with friends in person in 2020 than they did in 2003.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>17</sup> U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy: [Is loneliness in emerging adults increasing over time? A preregistered cross-temporal meta-analysis and systematic review](#)

A group of young people, likely at a religious event, with a purple overlay. The image shows a crowd of youth, some with their eyes closed in prayer or contemplation. A young man in the foreground is wearing a white t-shirt and a lanyard with a badge that says "MORA".

# IV. Effective Models & Strategies to Reach Catholic Youth

## The Five Models

Countless evangelization models have been tried and tested with youth over the past several decades. Some fall flat, others yield fairly neutral results, and others, by the grace of God, flourish and bear incredible fruit year after year. Here, we will discuss the top five models that exist in America.



# 1. Do Nothing

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Parishes that do nothing entrust the formation of youth to parochial schools and parents, or expect young people to engage in ministry like adult parishioners. Often in this model, Confirmation is relied on as a youth ministry program, but once confirmed through this hands-off approach, teens rarely engage in the parish afterward. Confirmation can feel like a “graduation” that marks the end of their Catholic catechesis, rather than the beginning of what can be a fruitful, lifelong journey towards a closer relationship with Christ. Not implementing any youth ministry program is a direct route to disengaged youth, ultimately leading to dwindling parish numbers.



# 2. Do Something

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This model is a step up, yet barely. While doing something is better than doing nothing, it typically means ministry relies on a single, overwhelmed individual with minimal support. We call this the “Lone Ranger” approach. One primary issue with this model is that entire programs often fizzle out when a pastor is reassigned, or the Youth Minister or DRE leaves their role. This often leads to unsustainable and short-lived programs.



### 3.

## The Digital Model

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This hands-off approach relies on digital platforms like Catholic apps, social media content, and YouTube videos. While the content can be compelling to teens because it meets them where they are (often with a phone in hand and access to digital content), it completely misses the mark on providing true connection, meaningful relationships, and the ability to ask deeply personal questions as they explore their Catholic identity and faith.



### 4.

## The Small Group Only Model

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This model looks like separate groups of 4-5 teens meeting regularly without connection to each other or a larger group. While this can offer teens a sense of community and belonging, "small group only" rarely see their numbers grow due to their inability to provide opportunities and community for current teens to invite friends to join and continue to attend. This model often fizzles out due to a lack of sustained interest and participation.





## 5. Large Group Formation with Adult Mentors

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### The sustainable model

This is a team-based model that creates a dynamic, youth-friendly parish environment. This model is sustainable because it relies on a group of youth advocates and ministers rather than a single person. Small groups and mentor relationships can and should be a core part of this model, but the large group ensures that the groups are connected and consistently growing.





# The 10 Strategies for Effective Youth Outreach

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Now that we have discussed the options for what models work with the youth, let's shift to strategies that have proven effective in leading teens closer to Christ.

**Pope John Paul II had many rallying cries to the youth to encourage and inspire young Catholics:**

1. "Jesus Christ is the answer to every question."
2. "Open wide the doors to Christ."
3. "Do not be afraid to be saints."
4. "You are not the future but the now of God."
5. "Be not afraid."

In our almost 40 years of creating, restructuring, and designing programs for the youth, we've found ten effective strategies emerge that meet Pope John Paul II's rallying cries to the youth.





# “Jesus Christ is the answer to every question.”

## Strategies to implement this Prayer:

### 1. Intentional Catechesis:

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Adapt catechesis to resonate with the changing cultures and comprehension levels of youth. This approach emphasizes the need for contextually relevant and culturally enculturated teaching, particularly for Hispanic communities, ensuring that teachings are not merely translated but truly meaningful.

### 2. Undiluted Theology:

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Encourage youth to delve into the profound depths of Catholic theology. Bishop Barron once said: “Young people enjoy asking about and discussing the big questions, from God's existence, to how to be a good and moral person, to the problem of suffering. A disconnect takes place when we meet these intellectual questions with watered-down catechesis.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of trying to make messages overly “relevant,” engage the youth with the full spectrum of Christian teachings and the big existential questions they often ponder.

<sup>18</sup> Word on Fire: [Bishop Barron on Not Dumbing Down the Faith: Answers to Young People's Pressing Religious Questions](#)



# “Open wide the doors to Christ.”

## Strategies to implement this Prayer:

### 3. Accompaniment:

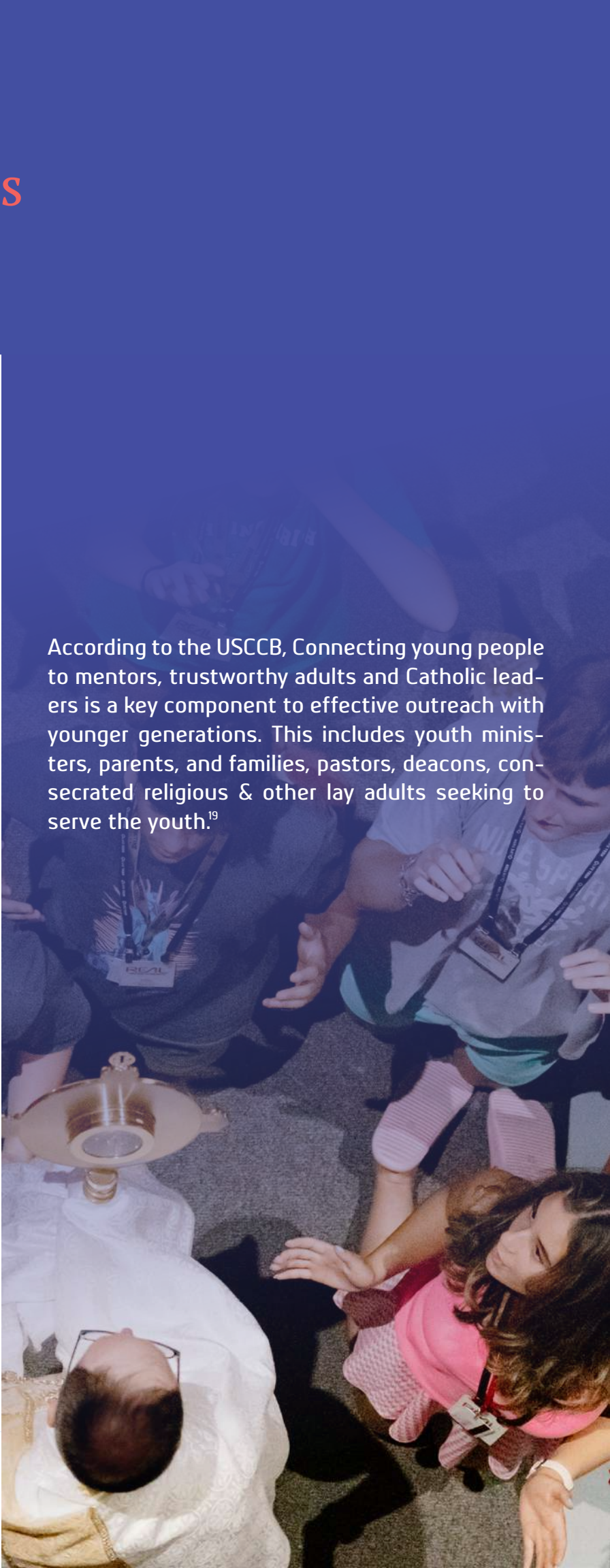
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Today, the Church is seeing a record number of brand new youth ministers that are ready and willing to mentor teenagers. These ministers need innovative & authentically Catholic resources.

### 4. Digital Evangelization:

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Use digital platforms to extend the Church's reach, providing teens with accessible, faith-based content and community support wherever they are; this is crucial in today's digital-first landscape.



According to the USCCB, Connecting young people to mentors, trustworthy adults and Catholic leaders is a key component to effective outreach with younger generations. This includes youth ministers, parents, and families, pastors, deacons, consecrated religious & other lay adults seeking to serve the youth.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> USCCB: *Realities Facing Youth and Young Adults in the United States*



“Do not be afraid  
to be saints.”



## Strategies to implement this Prayer:

### 5. Provide Meaningful Opportunities to Serve:

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Connect youth with volunteering opportunities that enhance their sense of purpose and community involvement to encourage their inherent desire to contribute.

### 6. Host Encounters with Christ:

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Facilitate intimate spiritual experiences like Eucharistic Adoration and Praise Nights. This allows teens to actively engage with their faith in a communal setting.



# “You are not the future but the now of God.”

## Strategies to implement this Prayer:

### 7. Equip the “Called”:

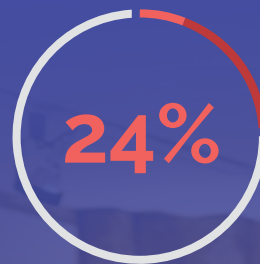
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To manage and mentor young groups effectively, provide comprehensive training to youth group leaders, especially those working with diverse age ranges.

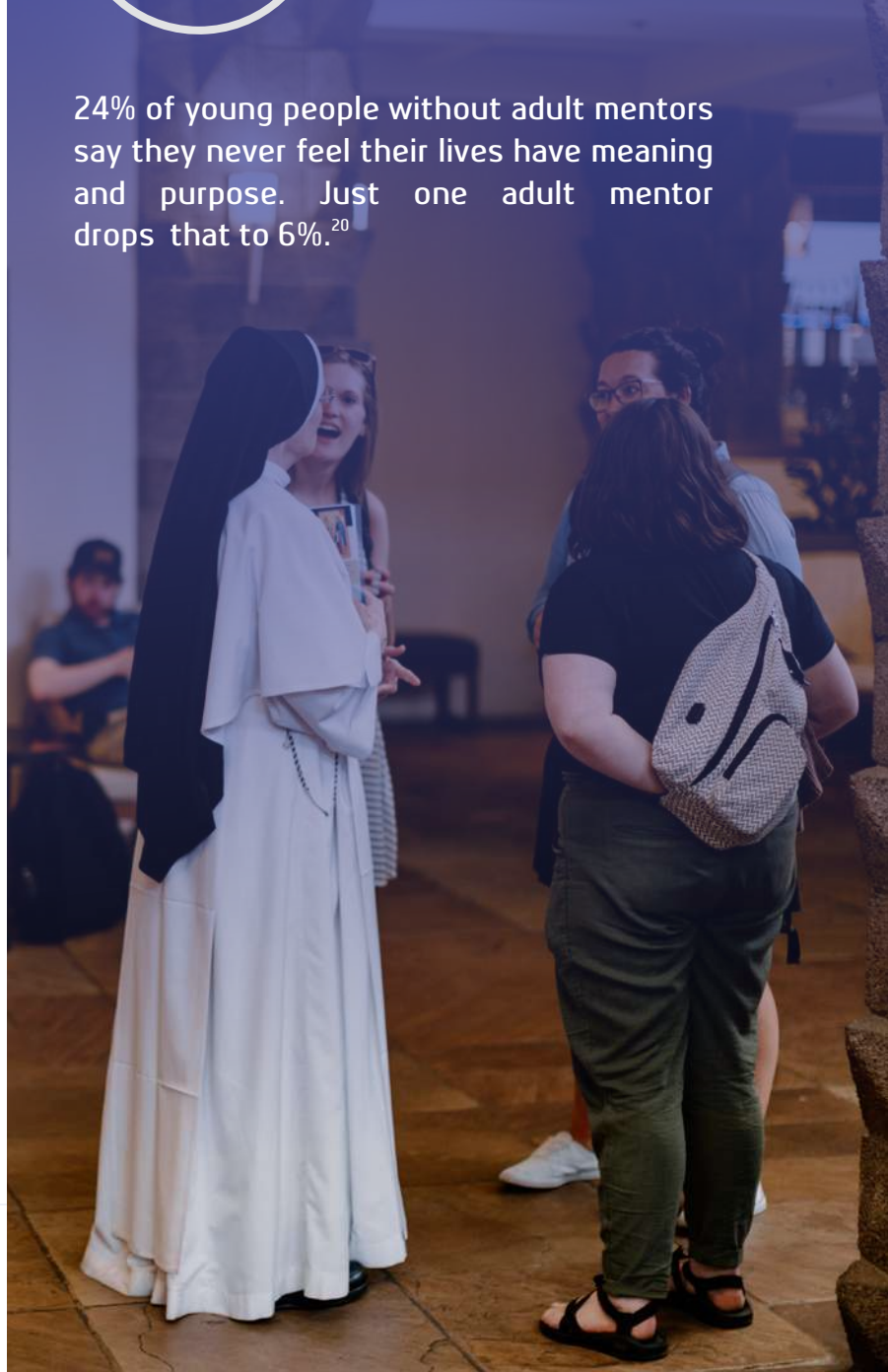
### 8. Follow a “Gen Z Approved” Formula

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Structure content delivery in engaging, digestible segments interspersed with interactive discussions to recognize Gen Z's unique attention spans and interaction styles. Tailor environments to meet teens' unique preferences, ensuring spaces are appealing and safe to foster a welcoming atmosphere for spiritual and communal growth.



24% of young people without adult mentors say they never feel their lives have meaning and purpose. Just one adult mentor drops that to 6%.<sup>20</sup>



<sup>20</sup> Evidence-Based Mentoring: [Mentoring is Key for Lonely Gen Z](#)  
20



Pope John Paul II Rally Cry #5

“Be not afraid.”

## Strategies to implement this Prayer:

### 9. Adopt a Mindset of Abundance:

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Shift from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset in ministry planning. Actively recruit and expect robust volunteer participation, inspired by faith in God's provision, to build a vibrant, supportive community for youth.

### 10. Accompany teens in finding their purpose:

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Accompaniment is like mentorship, but it is not primarily a “one-way” teaching relationship. By fostering moments of encounter and then helping teens to unpack those experiences in relationships, teens learn to pray and listen to the Holy Spirit.

# V. Life Teen is Part of the Solution



Once the effective models and strategies for engaging our youth are understood, they can be strung together like beads on a rosary. There are many options for next steps, such as taking these insights and implementing them yourself at your parish. Or, partner with us to help implement all of this because that's exactly what Life Teen does. We've been hard at work creating Catholic content and programs that lead teens closer to Christ since our humble beginnings in 1985. Just to give you an idea of the breadth of our experience, here are some stats about Life Teen.





# Our Impact

37+

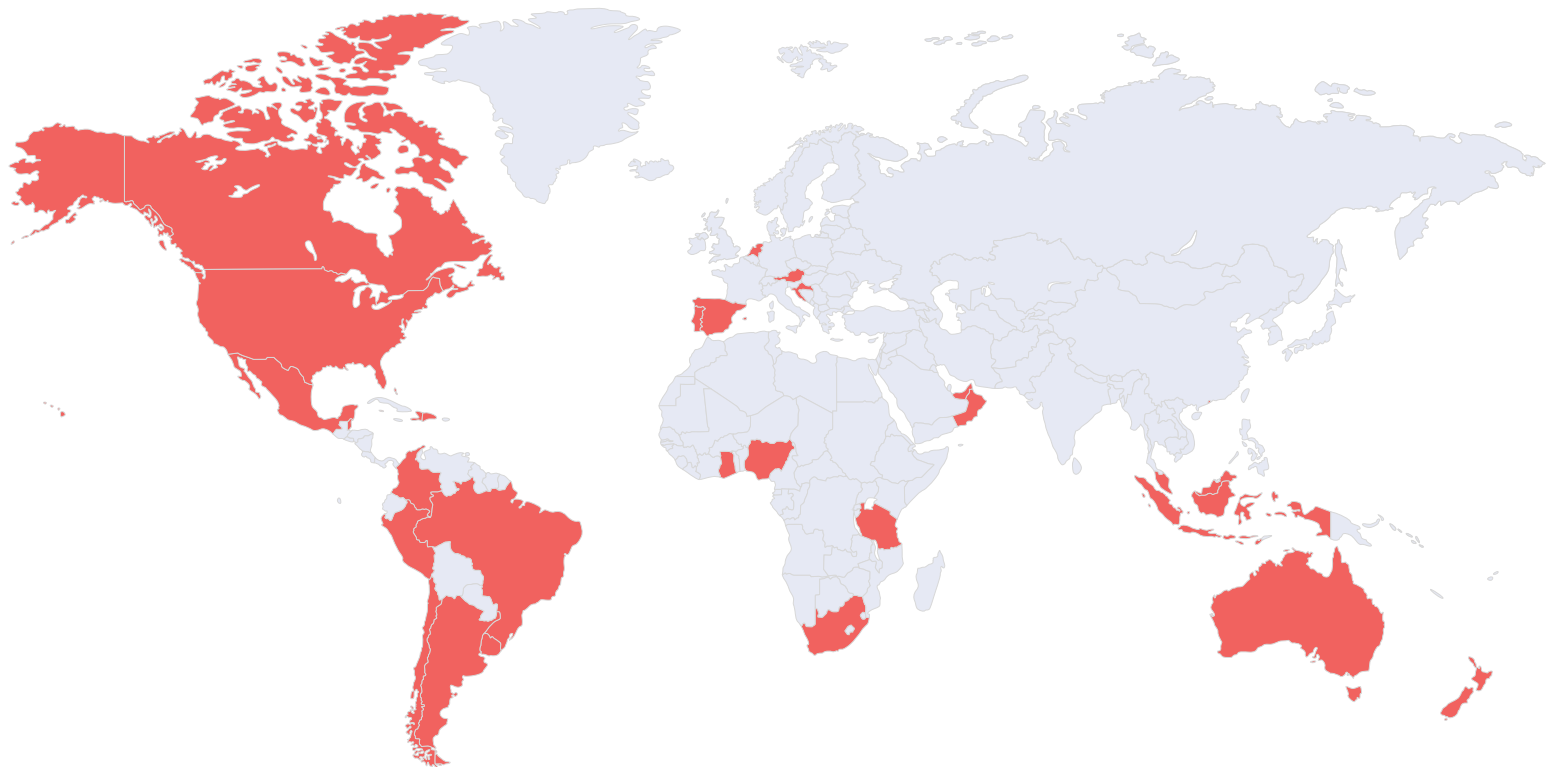
Years leading teens to Christ

1600+

Number of parishes with a current Life Teen program

30

Life Teen can be found in 30 countries



Spain, United States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Tanzania, Brazil, Portugal, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Chile, Slovenia, United Arab Emirates, Austria, Oman, Uruguay, Argentina, Bahamas, Peru, Hong Kong SAR, Cayman Islands, Netherlands, Mexico, Belize, Malaysia, Nigeria, Haiti, Columbia.



1,000,000+

Teens have attended a Life Teen program, camp, or event.

300+

Young Life Teen missionaries who evangelize youth each year at camps and events worldwide.



Life Teen strongly supports religious vocations.

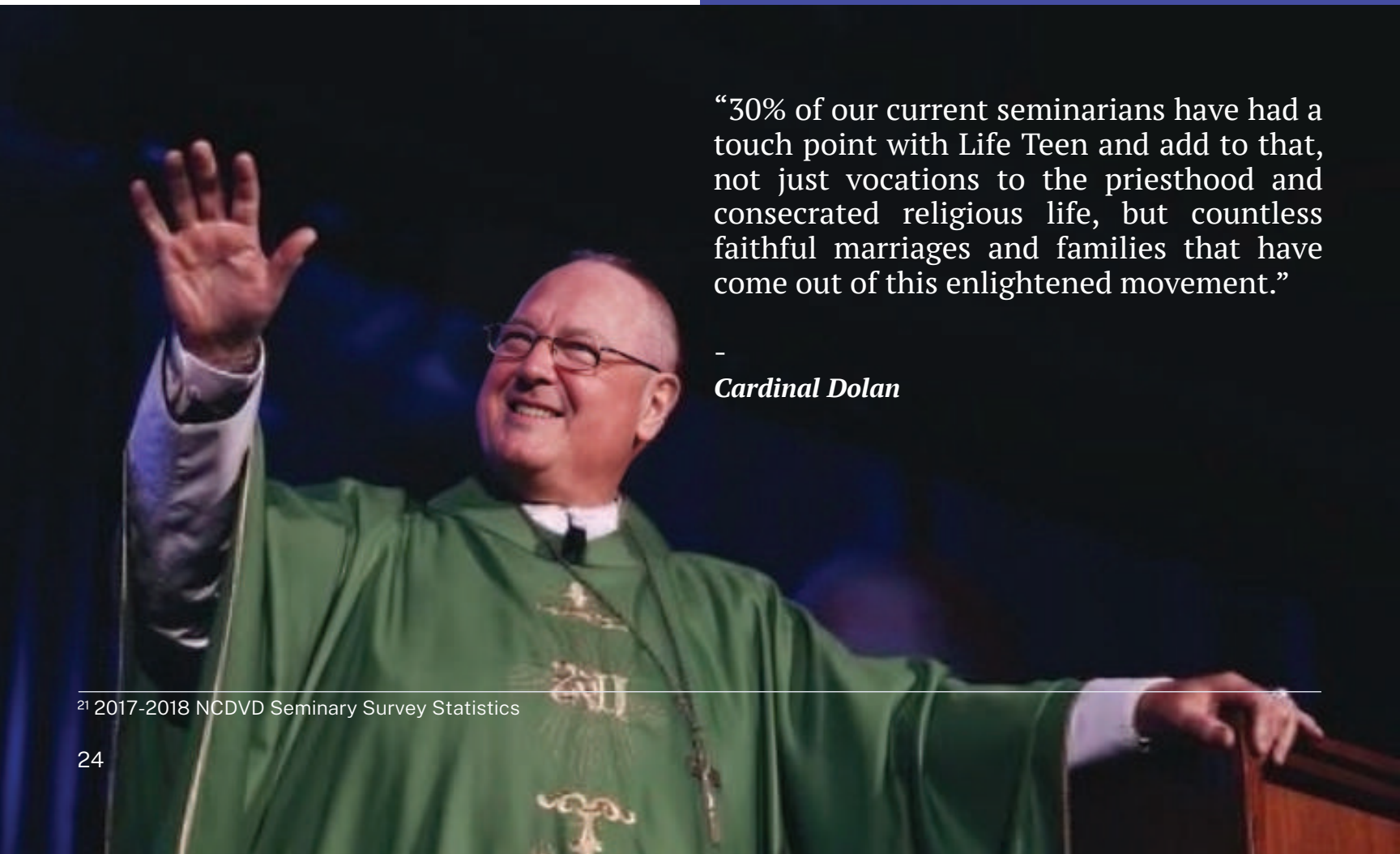
35%

Of seminarians come from parishes implementing Life Teen.<sup>21</sup>

“30% of our current seminarians have had a touch point with Life Teen and add to that, not just vocations to the priesthood and consecrated religious life, but countless faithful marriages and families that have come out of this enlightened movement.”

—  
*Cardinal Dolan*

<sup>21</sup> 2017-2018 NCDVD Seminary Survey Statistics





# Life Teen: Youth Ministry Made Simple

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While we can't book your rooms or set up chairs, we can enable your leaders to focus on what they do best: engage your youth. Life Teen simplifies youth ministry by providing extensive resources, such as meeting and retreat plans, parent letters, social media posts, volunteer training, and Bible study guides. Additionally, personal support is readily available through calls, chats, or meetings to assist with brainstorming, finding resources, and offering prayer support.

**You can start Life Teen at your Parish by purchasing a subscription online.**

There are multiple Life Teen Subscription options to cater to specific age groups and ministry sizes, ensuring that every parish can find a fit that suits their needs. Here is a breakdown of our subscription offerings grouped for High School Teens and Middle School Teens:



# High School Teens: Life Teen Subscriptions

## Life Teen Kickstart for Small, Rural, and Urban Parishes:

### Features:

Designed to be implemented by 3 volunteers while maximizing benefits for teens. Includes ongoing training, high-quality print and online resources, and community access. This model is scalable and can be upgraded as youth ministry at the parish grows!



Kickstart Digital and Print Resources

### Subscription Cost:

Monthly: \$50/month  
Annual: \$500/year



Kickstart boxes with fresh print resources get shipped directly to your door, including leader guides & bonus materials.



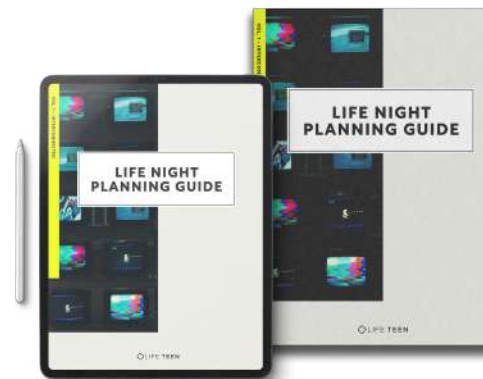
## Life Teen Life Support: For High School Students

### Features:

Offers responsive and engaging resources suitable for both large and small group settings. Includes three annual resource shipments and digital library access to thousands of online resources, including dynamic videos.

### Subscription Cost:

*Print & Digital:* \$995/year  
*Digital Only:* \$795/year



Life Support Digital and Print Resources, including Liturgy Support to help plan youth mass!

## Life Teen Purpose: Confirmation Catechesis Program

### Features:

Combines a dynamic Kerygma-based curriculum with digital tools. Includes materials for teens, parents and sponsors to ease administrative tasks.

### Subscription Cost:

*First Year:* \$299  
*Subsequent Years:* \$199/year

With Current Life Teen Subscription:

*First Year:* \$199  
*Subsequent Years:* \$99/year



Life Support boxes with fresh print resources and gear get shipped directly to your door 3 times per year!



Confirmation Digital and Print Resources

## Middle School Teens: EDGE Subscriptions

### EDGE Support: For Middle School Students

#### Features:

Equips parishes for vibrant middle school ministry with resources for youth nights, retreats, and small groups. Includes three annual resource shipments and digital library access to thousands of online resources.

#### Subscription Cost:

*Print & Digital: \$700/year*

*Digital Only: \$600/year*

## Combined Subscriptions for Middle & HighSchool Teens:

### Life Teen and EDGE Combo Support:

#### Features:

This subscription covers both high school and middle school teens by offering Life Support and Edge Support.

#### Subscription Cost:

*Print & Digital: \$1,595/year*

*Digital Only: \$1,395/year*



EDGE Support Digital and Print Resources



EDGE Support boxes with fresh print resources and gear get shipped directly to your door 3 times per year!

### Life Teen and EDGE Premium Support:

#### Features:

Includes everything in Combo Support plus one training conference registration and a \$100 Life Teen store credit.

#### Cost: \$1,995/year



# Other Resources

## Ministry Leader Training

Training Events for Ministry Leaders: Designed for Priests, Religious, DREs, Youth Ministers, and Adult Volunteers (Core Team).

### Genesis Conference (Startup Training)

**Audience:**

New to youth ministry or new to Life Teen programs

**Purpose:**

Comprehensive introduction to youth ministry

**Benefits:**

Hands-on experience, practical steps, and spiritual renewal



## Catholic Youth Ministry Convention

**Audience:**

All youth ministry personnel

**Purpose:**

Advanced training tailored to today's parish needs and teen engagement

**Benefits:**

Keynotes by top Catholic speakers, practical breakout sessions, sacramental renewal

## Empower Training

**Audience:**

Adults from your parish that volunteer to help with your youth program

**Format:**

One-day local training, with many locations across the country

**Benefits:**

Affordable, quality training; team building; fresh content



## Youth Camps, Events, And Experiences

### Life Teen Summer Camps

#### Goal:

Deepen teens' spiritual lives in a home-away-from-home setting

#### Activities:

Daily Mass, small group formation, worship, and sacramental encounters

#### Life Teen Summer Camp Locations:

Covecrest (GA), Hidden Lake - Middle School Camp (GA), Wild Sky (TX), Golden State at Whispering Winds (CA)

### Events for Teens & Young Adults

#### Key Events:

##### XLT Eucharistic Adoration:

Deep spiritual engagement

##### Life Teen Leadership Conference:

Leadership and discipleship training for young leaders in high school

##### Steubenville Conferences:

Life Teen partnership with Franciscan University to sponsor intense evangelizing encounters for teens. Multiple locations and dates



# College Age Young Adult Opportunities

## Formation, Retreats & Missions

### **Life Teen Men's Retreat:**

Brotherhood, restoration, inspiration

### **Life Teen Women's Retreat:**

Renewal, inspiration, sacramental grace

### **Life Teen Restore Mission Camp:**

Community service and faith action

### **Life Teen Missionaries:**

Full-time mission year to build vibrant faith communities

### **Life Teen Campus Bound:**

Ensures a smooth transition for teens on their way to college.





# VI. Take Action

Life Teen has been helping parishes effectively evangelize youth for almost 40 years. Over the years, we have continued to adapt and change our approach as needed to ensure timeliness and relevance within our resources. What has never changed is that our Life Teen programs are centered around encounters with Christ and with each other, fostering both faith and community. We believe faith comes alive and is fostered most directly through parish life.

“It is just a perfect example of the New Evangelization that recent Popes and the whole Church has been calling us to.”

-

***Ralph Martin,***  
*Member of the Pontifical Council for the  
New Evangelization*



# Let's Talk about Life Teen for your Parish!

📞 1-800-809-3902

✉️ [support@lifeteen.com](mailto:support@lifeteen.com)

🌐 [lifeteen.com/cym](https://lifeteen.com/cym)

To download or share a copy of this report, visit [lifeteen.com/2024-report](https://lifeteen.com/2024-report)





# Let's Talk about Life Teen for your Parish!

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