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**Topic: The 21st c. Catholic Priest in the Diocese of St John's Basseterre: Answering
the Call to be a Prophetic Voice to the Church's youth**



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Catholic Priest in the Diocese of St John's, Basseterre: Answering the Call to

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Abstract

Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* observed that the increasing number of youth and their “growing presence in society and likewise the problems assailing them should awaken in everyone the desire to offer them, with zeal and intelligence, the Gospel ideal as something to be known and lived” (72). To attend to the cry of the young people, priests with their prophetic voice are called to minister to youth in their space. To seek to comprehend their cares and worries, the commitment of the priest-prophet is vital.

The synod on Synodality (a “journeying together”) initiated by Francis, in 2021, provides a useful tool for the task the Diocese of Saint John’s-Basseterre faces today in reaching the youth. The key elements of the synod: Communion (coming together), Participation and Mission are vital tools for the 21st century priest in Antigua. Youth associate with those experiences and instances which make them feel welcomed and appreciated. A new evangelization focussed on the young people requires a combined effort from the entire Church. The Saint John’s diocese has realized this need and also to establish appropriate spaces where members of the young Church can learn and develop together and where adults can meet them. The Saint Lwanga Youth Centre is just one such space enabling the priest to answer the call to be a prophetic voice to the Church's youth.

Keywords: young Church, Saint John’s-Basseterre, prophetic voice, evangelization, synodality

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INTRODUCTION

Every Christian is called to be a prophet. In biblical terms, the prophet is divinely inspired, called by God to proclaim a radical message; to guide, correct, pass judgement—all for the sake of bringing his people into a right and loving relationship with him. This role often makes the prophet prone to sacrifice and suffering.

The call to be a prophet extends uniquely to priests, who belong to the ministerial priesthood and are to minister to all regardless of colour, religion, race, gender or age (Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*). For the sake of the Church today and its future, priests must find new ways of reaching the young Church and young people of today. Priests in the Diocese of Saint John's-Basseterre are called to exercise this responsibility with some urgency.

It is clear youth in the St John's diocese are not being fully nurtured in the Catholic faith. While young people may receive valuable guidance in some ways, the question remains, are our young people receiving the guidance they need from their priests? Do the youth find in them the ready listeners for which they long? Could the perceived gap in communication between priest and the youth contribute to the falling away of so many from the Church after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation? The exodus of youth after the sacrament is true not only of the Antiguan Church; it is true also of the Church in the wider Caribbean, and many other places in the world. The Church needs to find out why young people are not active in church, and then it must find ways of addressing the issue.

This research aims to discover why so many young people disappear after their Confirmation, only appearing perhaps at Christmas and Easter celebrations, funerals, and marriages. It will recommend how they can be incorporated into church management and so

contribute to the institution's smooth running. It will propose ways by which young people can remain engaged in the life of the Church. I hope this work would also motivate Catholic priests in the diocese to commit themselves totally to their ministry. In the end, I hope to arrive at ways to help both the youth and priests within the diocese, to work together to achieve the spirit of a new evangelization among the young people.

The Diocese of Saint John's-Basseterre includes the countries of Antigua and Barbuda which lie in the eastern arc of the Leeward Islands of the Lesser Antilles, separating the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea. Antigua is 650 kilometres southeast of Puerto Rico, and Barbuda lies 48 kilometres due north of Antigua. Other islands which make up the diocese are, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Monserrat, the British Virgin Islands, and Anguilla. Antigua, the largest island, is 21 kilometres across and 281 square kilometres in area, or about two-thirds the size of New York City. The capital of Antigua and Barbuda is Saint John's, located at St. John's Harbour on the northwest coast of Antigua. The principal city of Barbuda is Codrington, located on Codrington Lagoon.

In this work, youth refer to persons between the ages of 15 and 30: some at school, others working. Interviews are conducted mainly among members of this group. One phone interview takes place with a priest in the diocese.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one discusses the role of the priest as he engages the call to a new evangelization. It also considers the concept of synodality on which the whole Church is reflecting at the time of writing. The second chapter considers to what extent the young people in the Diocese of Saint John's are engaged in church activities. The role of the priest as a prophetic voice is the central

theme of chapter three which also highlights the need for priests in the diocese to have a missionary spirit.

Methodology

To establish how the 21st century Catholic priest in Saint John's, can be a prophetic voice for the Church's youth, this research uses the quantitative approach: the collected data are analysed, and findings are displayed. Data have been sourced chiefly through the online platform, due to limitations caused by COVID-19. Interviews were conducted online, and questionnaires distributed via WhatsApp and emails.

The data collected from interviews and the questionnaires have been assimilated into charts and graphs to illustrate how the youth have been engaged in church activities. The collected and tabulated data will demonstrate how priests within the diocese have attempted to reach the young people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In his 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), Paul VI said “circumstances invite us to make special mention of the young. Their increasing number and growing presence in society and likewise the problems assailing them should awaken in everyone the desire to offer them with zeal and intelligence the Gospel ideal as something to be known and lived” (72). He identified a need to attend to the encroaching problems affecting the youth. The need is even more acute today.

In 2018 Francis, in his annual message for local celebrations of the XXXIII World Youth Day (WYD) told young people, "Do not allow the spark of youth to be extinguished in the darkness of a closed room in which the only window to the outside world is a computer and smartphone." The Archbishop of Castries in his second pastoral letter “Time for Unity, Fidelity and Gratitude” exhorted Church leaders to make sure “at every level of Church, the youth be inspired to live their faith as missionary disciples with greater commitment and service to God, community, and country” (Rivas 2020).

The key question for the Church in Saint John’s must be, how do we reach the youth and keep the spark from dying. John Paul II seemed to propose a way, “The young are the best apostles of the young,” he said (qtd. in Policy of Lasallians 2020). This may be because of their innate generosity, their openness to the future; because they are on the same wavelength, have a special ability to grasp the difficulties of their peers, share the same difficulties, and better understand their ideas and plans. If the young people are not ministered and their needs are not met, there will be no future Church. It is necessary for each member of the faithful, more so the priests of the diocese to become more engaged in the life of the Church if they want to have a vibrant future Church.

In working closely with youth, ministers get to see first-hand the ability and promise of the young people but also come to terms with their frailty which puts them in a better place to help their clients. In a meeting of young Lasallians,¹ in Strasbourg in 1994, Gabriel Ringlet, then vice-president of the University of Louvain in Belgium, said:

I think that it is urgent today, to teach about frailness. At home, in school, in the Church, at work, in marriage. There is no dishonour in recognizing one's own mistakes, fissures, cracks, wrinkles . . . whether you are a parent, spouse, teacher, rector, priest. The unique greatness of Christianity is to be bold enough to say that God is fragile. It is bold to say that in each person, even in the most miserable, 'there is a crack that opens to another universe.' It is a great vocation for schools today! To invite each person to reach their inner selves. To allow each one to discover their own promised land. To encourage each one to speak. To help each one to descend to their most secret truth (qtd. in Rodriguez 3)

Ringlet stresses the importance of priests discovering the young people's weaker points. This, he says makes it easy to engage with them and win them back to the Church (Rodriguez 34).

The Caribbean Reality

“Entering into the experience of youth in the Caribbean means looking into the situation in which youth find themselves, says the AEC Youth Commission (2). It will mean being able to understand the culture in which the young people grow and the hardships they endure. Once the minister can understand the environment of the young people, he or she will be in a better position to evangelize them. The priest needs get to know the world of the youth; to consider their needs,

¹ Young Lasallians is an international movement, promoted by the International Council of Young Lasallians (ICYL) and the Regional Council of Young Lasallians (RCYL), keeping young adults engaged in the Lasallian mission through faith sharing, service with the poor through education, and community building.

anxieties, questions, desires, hopes and offer them the Gospel, which is always Good News (Rodriguez 4).

The AEC bishops noted:

Youth need to be met at their space who desire a deeper sense of belonging and of self-esteem, along with identity exploration and opportunities for fulfilling their vast potential in transforming society and renewing their Church. In their arena, making the right choices and decisions is a great struggle. Often young people lack the skills and parental support to cope with problems, creating undue stress in their lives. This situation causes them not to desire to be named among any church community since no help which they have gained from it (AEC Youth Commission 3).

In “Empowering Youth for Discipline and Service” the AEC bishops state that priests by their ministry and personal presence must become gifts to be shared according to their ability and charism, reaching not only those who come to them but the *wayward* one.

A Special Mission

Francis, in a 2018 message to young people stated, “Never think that you have nothing to offer, or that nobody needs you. Many people need you. Think about it! Each of you, think in your heart: many people need me” (Maipú). In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the pope states “each new generation needs new apostles. This means a special mission for you. You, young people are the first apostles and evangelizers of the world of youth, assailed today by so many challenges and so much that is threatening” (12).

The befriending of everyone to Jesus is very crucial to make sure the gospel reaches all. John Paul II's message to young people for WYD XII urged them: the more you cling to Jesus the more capable you will become of being close to one another, and insofar as you make concrete

gestures of reconciliation you will enter into the intimacy of his love. To be Christian means to be missionaries—to be apostles. It is not enough to discover Christ; one must bring him to others (2008).

At an earlier WYD, the pope urged the Church repeatedly and persistently to proclaim the gospel to all humanity. This summons to a new evangelization characterized his papacy. In his address, the Pope emphasized the potential of the young person. He called the youth to discover the treasures that lay within them. The Pope said, “Each one of you discovers him or herself, his or her personality, the meaning for him or her of existence, the reality good and evil. You also discover the whole world around you - the human world and the world of nature” (1989).

A Renewed Self-Understanding

The Church has long understood its mission to proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it. Today, it also sees as vital, reaching those who no longer associate with it. The Second Vatican Council called the Church to a renewed self-understanding to reach to all and accommodate all. John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* pointed out, “my direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the urgency of missionary activity” (1). And, Paul VI’s words are still relevant. He notes: “to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but vitally, in-depth and right to their very roots) (in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*, always taking the person as one’s starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God” (EN 20). Because of the need to re-evangelize and find new methods of doing so, the Church re-evaluated her way of evangelization, and “new evangelization” was born.

“We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church,” said Paul VI. “It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is, in fact, the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists to evangelize” (EN 14). In this way the Church is faithful to its founder’s words: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matt. 28.19,20).

CHAPTER ONE

1. New Evangelization

New evangelization refers to the ministry by which Catholics seek to bring back into the fold those who have stopped following the faith. Speaking to Latin American bishops in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1979, John Paul II declared that the fifth centenary of the first evangelization of the Americas (1492–1992) should mark “the beginning of a new era of evangelization” and that, “evangelization will gain its full energy if it is a commitment, not to re-evangelize but to a New Evangelization, new in its ardour, methods, and expression”(CELAM 9). In *Evangelium Gaudium*, Francis wrote, evangelizers “take on the smell of the sheep,” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time” (24).

Benedict XVI in his apostolic letter *Porta Fidei* (Door of Faith) reminded the clergy that their main concern should be to promote and sustain a “stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith” (7). In a 2012 discussion on the “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”, the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops reaffirmed that “the new evangelization is a summons addressed to all” and is carried out in three principal settings. The three settings: ordinary pastoral ministry (to inflame the hearts of the faithful), outreach to "the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism" and evangelization to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.

The new evangelization calls for a sacrifice from all Church stakeholders, especially the priest. Activating inactive Catholics is a most laudable pastoral aim and is certainly part of evangelization. Among those inactive Catholics are the young people who must be reached in this process. A new sense of boldness is required to enter into each of the interwoven worlds and look for avenues of dialogue with the world searching for God in a new complexity of human interaction (Prowse 260).

John Paul II used the term new evangelization to reawaken and elicit renewed efforts in a new missionary and evangelizing undertaking. For him, this term does not mean redoing something which has been inadequately done or taking up the first evangelization again, or simply repeating the past. Instead, it is the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today (*Lineamenta* 5).

1.1 Priest's Role

The Catholic faith teaches us that, there are three offices to which each individual ascends once he or she is baptized. Just as God's people in the Old Testament had their prophets, priests, and kings, so in the New Testament God's people finally meet their ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus Christ. He is the summit of a long line of prophets, priests, and kings, even the very best of whom were flawed and fallible, and none of whom were all three at once. But Jesus was the fulfilment, the Prophet, Priest, and King par excellence. The priest, by sharing in Christ's priesthood, is called to speak with the heart and voice of the prophet.

The priest is not only to minister to those who are already present in the church: to reach out to those who do not show up in the church, matters. A priest who stands at the altar "in persona Christi" (in the person of Christ) is called to proclaim God's word following in the footsteps of

Christ. Priests must reach out to young people who have not yet come to appreciate the generosity and mercy of God, who are often impatient with their shortcomings or in danger of an unrealistic idealism. They need guidance in their spiritual journey to return to the fold.

Liston observes that so many young people are open to the good news about their dignity and are hungry for joyous belonging expressed in celebration and are not able to hear it in the classroom context or the fast-moving world and materialistic society. It is the responsibility of the priest to reach, most especially, the vulnerable young people who cannot find peace and tranquillity. Also, the young people in the Caribbean desire a deeper sense of belonging, self-esteem, identity and opportunities for fulfilling their vast potential in transforming society and renewing the Church (Youth Commission 3).

1.2 Synodality: Journeying Together

The synodal process is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is a journey that ought to change an individual or re-energize a Christian. This process entails listening which is oriented towards discernment. It requires the believer to learn and exercise the art of personal and communal discernment. Members of the church faithful listen to other, through the faith traditions and observes the signs of the time to discern what God is saying to one another. By this process, each stakeholder is geared towards accompanying another.

Synodality denotes the particular style that defines the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working.



Image 1: Synodality: Diocese of Saint John's-Basseterre

On the World Day for Consecrated Life, February 2, the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Religious (CLAR) reiterated its commitment to promoting change in the exercise of authority in the Church and to restore the spirit of Christian service to fulfil its prophetic role in society. "It is time for us to go forward by making ourselves small with the people, to promote the dynamics of collaboration and co-responsibility, to articulate the participation of all," it noted.

To journey with young people demands association and reaching out to them wherever they are. Francis urges all his brother priests who are shepherds to smell like the sheep, which will happen as they diligently serve their flock (Chrism Mass). In defining synodality, he says, it is "nothing other than the 'journeying together' of God's flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord," which God expects of the Church in the third millennium (50th Anniversary of Bishops Synod). Whenever people of God journey together those among us who are weak are energized and the encounter becomes most possible. In journeying with young people, they feel appreciated, listened to, and their sense of responsibility and leadership increases.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Youth Engagement at St John's

Over 200 questionnaires were distributed to young people in the diocese and some 180 responses were received. From the data received some 90% of the young people who responded agreed that the opportunity for them to discover their potential has been provided while 10 percent said they felt nothing had been put in place.

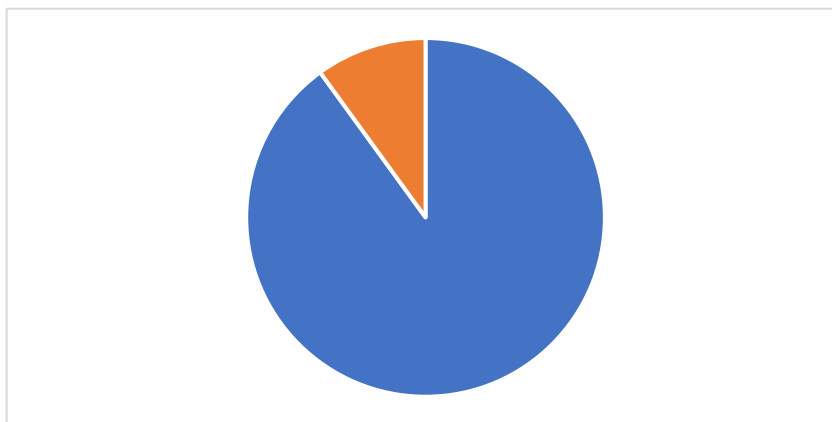


Chart 1: Youth Engagement

90% agreed opportunity is given; 10% disagreed

Entering the experience of youth in the Caribbean requires attending to the environment in which the youth find themselves, both the physical and spiritual situations (Youth Commission 2). It means providing a space where the needs of the youth can be met.

In February 2022, Bishop of the Diocese of Saint John's-Basseterre Robert Llanos opened the Saint Lwanga Diocesan Youth Centre in Saint John's Antigua. It will serve as a meeting place for young people, helping them to build their spiritual lives and to hear the call of the Lord to serve others and so advance the Church's overall mission.

The centre will provide after school care, and homework assistance, support care and counselling, personal development through programmes to enhance life skills, self-image and vocational motivation. Programmes on health and safety essentials, time-management, work/life balance, school/life balance, backyard gardening, craft training, spiritual development and entrepreneurship training will be key features of the centre's curriculum. Job placement programmes, support through life transitions, social interaction and professional clinical counselling support are also part of the centre's vision (Jordan).

2.1 Recognition



Photo 1: Youth at opening of Saint Lwanga Youth Centre (Catholictt.org)

A Pew Research Centre survey of 2008-2017, found that younger adults are less likely to identify with religion and, in many parishes, youth attendance in church has declined because youth no longer find the church socially and spiritually relevant to their lives. Young people also feel discouraged at times when their effort and gifts are not acknowledged. Many young people

find it hard to give their commitment or even to take part in any event when no one credits their presence or seek to journey with them and encourage them.

It is notable, however, according to the findings of the survey conducted among the youth of Saint John's, 80% of young people within the diocese have had an opportunity to participate in some way in church activities. With the establishment of the new youth centre, youngsters will be able to discover their various talents and gifts and, those who have already realized them, to be mentored or helped to rediscover them.

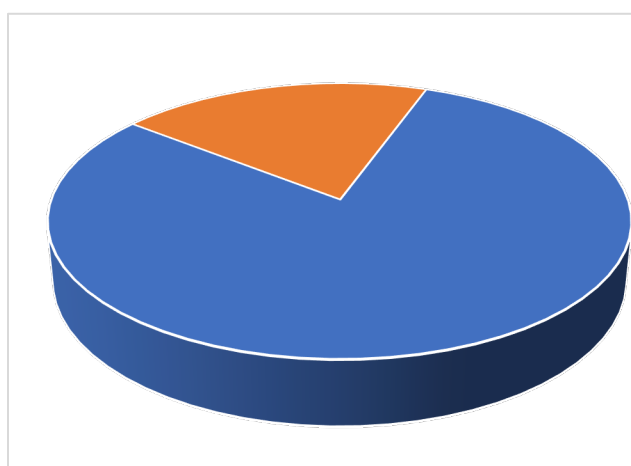


Chart 2: Recognition

80% Recognized; 20% Not Recognized

The recognition of talents and gifts was emphasized by the AEC president, then Bishop of Dominica Gabriel Malzaire, when he spoke to the graduating class of CAST² in 2021. He was “amazed” at the possibilities and creativity that went into some of the CAST productions. He noted the enhanced use of social media during the pandemic. He hoped graduates would continue to showcase how to spread the Good News through the productions they had so creatively done. Referring to Pope Francis’ World Communications Day 2022 message, he commented, “we are

²The CAST (Communication for the Antilles Specialist Training) Programme, a comprehensive communications training programme, began with an orientation session on Saturday, January 16, 2021. A total of 28 participants participated in the orientation, coming from dioceses of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC): the Dioceses of Willemstad, Curacao; St George’s-in-Grenada; Roseau, Dominica; St John’s-Basseterre, Antigua & Barbuda; Belize City and Belmopan, Belize; the Archdioceses of Castries, St Lucia; and Nassau, The Bahamas.

losing the ability to listen to those who are in front of us, both in a normal course of everyday relationships and when debating the most important issues of civil life” (Jordan, Cast).

Malzaire told the CAST grads, “I think you have come to an understanding of the indispensability of communications that we are about communication. The Church is about communication; the Good News of Jesus Christ is about communications. And we have been given the privilege to use the modern means of social communication to enhance our mission and I think you are certainly well-positioned to help the entire AEC to delve into that area” (Jordan, CAST).

Because making the right choices is such a great struggle, young people need sound support. As they reflect on their anguish and ambiguity, their hope and vitality, idealism, and disappointments, they should be able to look to the clergy and youth coordinators for help. The newly built Saint Lwanga centre should provide a space for all this.

2.2 Participation

Without the necessary skills and lack of parental support to cope with problems, young people are placed under great stress. With parents’ input and in collaboration with the Church, young people’s grievances and worries will be tackled rightly. When members of the Christian community or church get involved in youth ministry, the bonds among the young people are strengthened. Young people in the Caribbean region, the AEC noted, desire a deeper sense of belonging and of self-esteem and opportunities for fulfilling their vast potential in transforming society and renewing the Church (Youth Commission 3).



Photo 2: Youth get-together, Diocese of Saint John's

A youth group and ministry to youth offers a path for young people to discover their deepest heart's desires. They come to see the Church as helping them fulfil these desires and are motivated to grow in participation and communion with the Church. At Saint John's, youth need to play a part in the governance of the Church.

In tune with the AEC's primary goal of empowering youth for discipleship and service, the data collected demonstrates that the Saint John's diocese has understood the great need to give young people a chance to participate in Church affairs. Through this form of participation, the young people will come to know their limitations and be in a better position to serve. This will need to happen in a spirit of openness which will be created by the authenticity of the trust that the Church places in them. Opportunities for leadership training at Saint John's is ongoing within the diocese and rooted in a biblical concept of leadership and service facilitated by youth leaders and the priest coordinator.

Those who offer themselves to guide the young through leadership forums and church activities must have a sound knowledge of the Bible if they are to do so effectively. In addition,

they must understand modern influences on Christianity, so as to identify with the youth and build meaningful relationships with them.

In today's digital world, a Church that adopts technology in its growth strategies has high chances of attracting the youth and sustaining their involvement. At Saint John's, the new centre should aid the youth in their use of the communication technology, permitting them opportunities to use technology as a channel of ministering to others or engaging others in essential religious conversations. In the process, they will remain highly attuned to the youth ministry, thereby finding the church relevant once more in their lives.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Priest as Prophet in 21 century

“Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet, and king,” says the Catechism of the Catholic Church. “The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them” (783). The authority which the priest exercises flows from his participation in these offices. As one called to speak for the Lord and empowered by him, the priest must speak with a prophetic voice. People desire to hear the voice of the prophet. They recognize and respect it when they discern it. But many would ask today, where are the priest prophets? Many may not associate the role of a priest with that of a prophet. For them, “a priest says mass, gives people the sacraments, and conducts funerals hence the prophetic aspect is seen to be the cultic” (O’Sullivan 37)

The Antilles Episcopal Commission calls priests to recognize that the young people are gifts to the Church. Indeed, they are the young Church today and the future church (Youth Commission 3). To attain this goal, greater efforts must be made to work with the young people. The notion of prophet need not conjure up the image of a fiery orator, angrily and arrogantly, denouncing the evils of others. The work of truth and of justice, which are at the heart of prophecy, can proceed quietly, even without words (O’Sullivan 38).

Fr George Williams, a diocesan Roman Catholic priest working in Saint John’s had this to say about the prophetic call of the priest: “The Church in Antigua has the respect of the society at large, it is always held in great honour, because of the Catholic Church position in the world. As one may recognise the world order is changing so is the effect on the Church and its moral

positions. But the Church's prophetic voice is needed and so priest, and other members of clergy must recognize this and witness to the prophetic moment."

3.1 Empowering the Youth

Although the Church faces unique challenges in its work with the youth of Antigua today, Fr George is hopeful: "The state of young people in the Church is always cause for concern, hence the Church must remain relevant to the present needs, and so the sacraments must be seen in a deeper light of personal and communal commitment. If the Church continues to relate to the reality of youth in the society, they will see the need to remain in church. So far, we have a vibrant group of young people, and they are greatly involved at all levels of encounter in the parish."



Photo 3: A vibrant group of young people (Saint John's)

Often making right choices is a great struggle for young people because they lack skills, and church and parental support. To address these problems, church leaders, especially the priests, must see to it that young people are involved in leadership, participate in suitable seminars and workshops. It is happening now through St Lwanga Youth Centre But since not all young people come to the centre or church they ought to be met where they are.

3.1.1 Leadership Involvement

In her article, “7 Ways You Can Support Your Youth Leadership”, Patricia Lotich notes, “Balanced churches understand that a multigenerational approach is the most effective way to sustain and grow a church. It is also a way of maintaining the young people in the Church whenever they are committed. Churches need young, old, and everyone in between to maintain a balance of demographics and to draw from the gifts and resources of each group”. Given the chance, each individual and more so the young people will learn from their experiences. Youth will lead others.



Photo 4: Building a "civilization of love"

Lotich continues, “life is difficult and confusing in today’s society.” It is easier for young people to confide in their young leaders about many of life’s issues and challenges than in those from an older age group. “This constant weight can discourage young people and even their youth leaders if they do not have the support they need. Caring for these important leaders is crucial to sustaining and growing a vibrant youth program”.

To motivate the young people, Church leadership should include at least one young person in the church leadership committee. In this way the young people on the committee will benefit from experiences of the adults and be further helped in reaching other young people. Caribbean youth researchers have discovered that youth in the Caribbean are both resilient and despondent

(Brathwaite; Parra-Torrado). Youth view problems within their country’s political systems and (Stern & Balestino) they want to participate in their democracies (CCYD 2010), but they feel that they do not have a voice (Zimmerman).

This research found an appreciation of the importance of youth inclusion in the leadership team of the St John’s diocese. Some 30% of those in leadership were young people. The act of allowing young people to take part in leadership enables many voiceless young people to be heard.

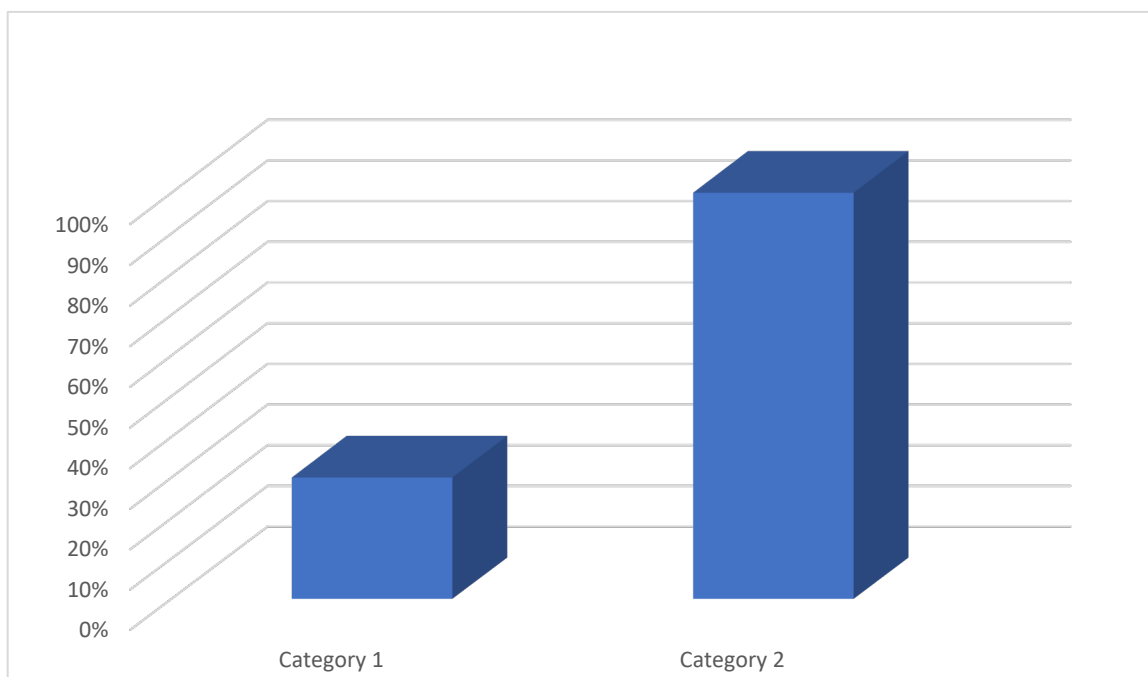


Table 1: Youth in leadership

3.1.2 Seminars and Workshops

Lotich states “Youth ministry is multifaceted and require skills like in teaching the Word, facilitating the meeting process, dealing with pastoral issues, managing volunteers, and responding

to demanding parents. Each of which requires training and experience.” These skills can be attained through seminars and workshops which young people should attend.



Catholic Diocese of St. John's - Basseterre - Photos | Facebook.

At the 2019 Jamboree held in Saint Kitts and Nevis, under the banner of “Youth Building a Civilisation of Love”, young people in the Diocese interacted with one another and shared their various talents. The presenters who mostly were young adults made a great impression the youth who gathered for the event.

“Opportunities for leadership training should be ongoing within each diocese and rooted in a biblical concept of leadership and service. Attitude and skills needed to minister effectively should be integral to the training” (Youth Commission 11).

In opening the doors for more training, the self-esteem of those young ones who never felt accepted in the Church and had no opportunity to exercise their gifts will begin to grow. The leadership training should include some theoretical aspects: Who is a leader? What do leaders do? But such training must provide practical opportunities for the participants to become involved in actual leading. Reflection after these experiences will help the participants to learn and develop as further leaders. Saint Lwanga centre promises to be and, since its inception, has been a place

where seminars and workshops are conducted. The survey showed that so far 50% of the activities which were planned to take place there have begun.

3.1.3 Meeting at their Space

Young people need a space to call their own. This space is at any meeting point where they can gather and be reached despite their personal situations. This place is found whenever the adults respect those spaces.

One of the young people Kiara Thomas, who attended the jamboree in St Kitts, wrote, “The jamboree taught me to appreciate the little things in life and humility as we were forced to get out of our comfort zones and live humbly” (CatholicTT 2019). Within this space, the priest, as prophet, is called to help the young ones to find meaning in a world of confusion. He is the “one who has vision, perspective, and awareness, who tells and does the truth when all around are people who are telling and doing what is not true. Also, one who can see through lies, pretence, and sham” (O’Sullivan 39).

John Paul recognized the places and circumstances in which young people find themselves. He said, at the 12th WYD, “the people of the younger generations who believe in Christ will, once again, become a living icon of the Church in her pilgrimage along the roads of the world. Meeting in prayer and reflection, in the dialogue that unites beyond all difference of language and race, in the sharing of ideals, problems and hopes, these young people will experience living the reality promised by Jesus: ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them’” (Mt. 18.20). Whenever the young people are met at their space, great opportunities for evangelization and re-evangelization (i.e., reaching out to those who no longer follow the faith) are realized.

In occupying the space offered at the Saint Lwanga Diocesan Youth Centre and by participating in the activities offered there, the youth will come to appreciate the value of listening, as described by Miriam Juarez of the Diocese of Belize City: “ in being listened to, we also expect to listen to others and that’s not something easy but there’s a technical component and spiritual realm to it because listening to someone takes on sharing faith and experience and I think that having that love for neighbour and for oneself and God, are essential parts of the listening process” (qtd. in CatholicTT 2021)

At Saint Lwanga young people have been able to receive professional help. And the clergy of the diocese have been part of a team that interacts with young people there. Some 85% of the young people expressed their satisfaction with the help they received. Only 15% did not feel the centre would lead youth to take part in church affairs.

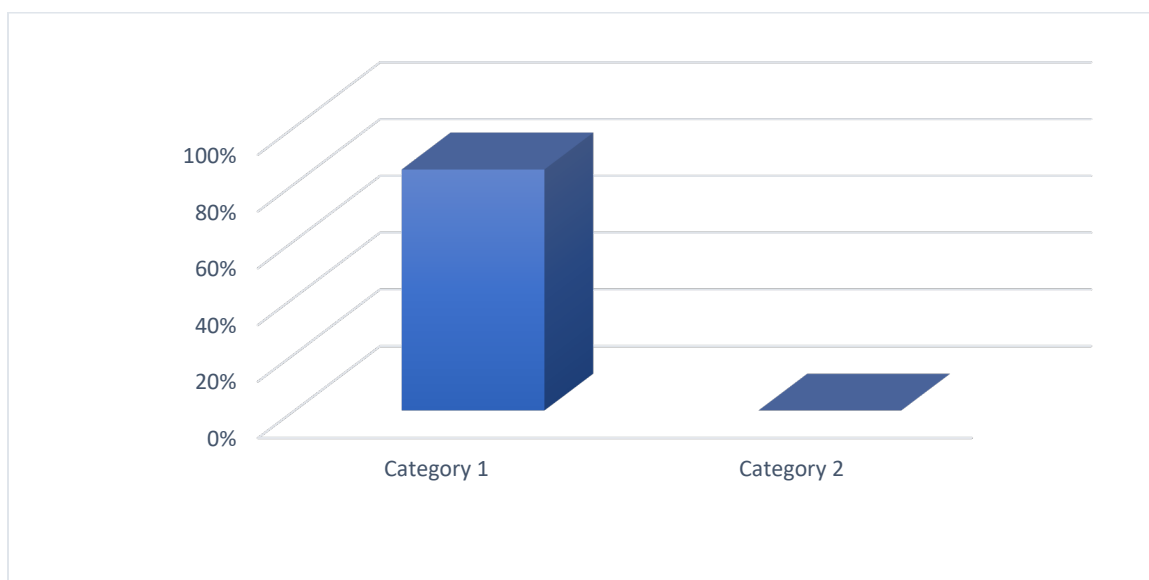


Table 2: Hope for Saint Lwanga

Category 1: 85% Satisfied that they are met at their place; Category 2:-: 15% Not satisfied

3.2.0 Conclusion

Once the word of God has been preached to our young people through the prophetic voice of the priests and there is “practical application of scripture and tradition in their life situation, the young people will grasp the power of the Gospel and wisdom of tradition as it applies to them. They will want to share it with others and to evangelize”(Youth Commission 10).

Neglect of young people by the Church leaders results in them not being active in the Church. The priest who fulfils his role as prophet is called to “help youth be a part of the shared experience of the faith of the Church and then guide them to a deeper personal faith ... that has a Caribbean, Catholic expression. This Catholic identity then needs to be integrated into their life. Helping youth discover their heart’s deepest desire and finding that the Church will help them fulfil these desires, will motivate youth to grow in participation and communion with the Church” (Youth Commission 4).

As in other areas of life, recognition and appreciation of the young people is key to energizing them and helping them to commit fully to the Church’s mission. In the parishes, priests should implement and offer support through youth leadership and workshop seminars. Once youth have experienced the Gospel sufficiently through the prophetic voice of a priest, “they will be able to enter into social service and social action. Usually, those youth in the stage of accepting the faith, will be willing to be involved in social service, while those who have appropriated faith within, are willing to undertake some steps in the transformation of society” (Vision 11)

Work has clearly begun, in earnest, in trying to cater to the needs of the youth in the Diocese of Saint John’s-Basseterre. The Lwanga Centre is a clear indication of that. Further, my research does not show a clear neglect of priests in fulfilling their responsibilities and being the prophetic voice that the young people need to hear. But, more needs to be done. Very likely, the absence of

youth from the Antiguan Church that mirrors a pattern seen elsewhere in the world is a complex issue, in which all stakeholders have a part to play. What seems undeniable is that the priest has a key role and that youth development through the Church in Antigua would not sustain its present momentum or make progress without the priests taking seriously the call to be a prophetic voice for the youth.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

1. Is there a youth group in your parish?

Yes No

2. Are you able to meet with the priest in charge when you have an issue?

Yes No

3. Is there a Church program to engage the youth

Yes No

4. Are young people part of the leadership team in the parish?

Yes No

5. Do they have a part to play in church management?

Yes No

6. Has the priest set time for guiding and counselling the youth in the parish?

Yes No

7. Are the youth's queries listened to?

Yes No

8. If a youth group exists, does the priest meet with members, at least monthly?

Yes No

9. Is there a continuing program to help youth stay in Church after confirmation?

Yes No

10. Is there a regional or diocesan youth gathering to motivate them?

Yes No

11. Are the youth independent or still under their parents' care?

Yes No

12. Are the youth given special responsibilities at Mass?

Yes No

13. Are there seminars or workshops conducted in the parish for the youth?

Yes No

14. Is the church/ parish providing you with helpful instruction for your daily life?

Yes No