

# Youth and Liturgy

## What Youth Say

Vibrant liturgy engages the whole mind, body, and heart and connects us more deeply with community and strengthens our faith.

### From the Interviews

"David praises the Lord leaping and dancing." The reason I know that is because of an '80s movie, but I know that is in there [the Bible]. Mass is supposed to be a sensual experience, not sensual in any sense that you might be thinking, but as in the five senses. We should be praising God with our entire bodies. With our hands, we need to clap. We need to sing. Mass should be joyful.

Saint Teresa of Ávila said, "Lord save me from stone-faced saints." Saints are joyful people, and I think we need to be more like them. God is on the altar, and if God walked right into this room, I think all of us would be amazed, and we would want to worship him with all of our body, with all of our senses, our mind, our being. And that's what I think we're trying to get at during the teen Mass, but I think the adults want us to remember where we are.

## What Adults Say

Youth who are involved in liturgical roles bring a powerful presence and energy to the community, and the community takes pride and joy in the youth.

### From the Interviews

The young people decided to interpret the Passion in relation to what is going on around us. For me, personally, it was a very powerful medium to convey and reach out to people about what suffering with Jesus Christ meant. The kids wrote the play, and it was based on the stations of the cross. It was all contemporary vignettes. It was really powerful.

I am also impressed when it comes to liturgy on Sunday morning. This is one parish where we have a tremendous number of high school students involved with service, both girls and boys. The pride they take in that, the confidence with which they are focused, the friendliness that they bring to it, and the respect that they have commanded from [others]. The parish is really proud of them.

## What Youth Say

Leadership in liturgical ministry helps us uncover our gifts and experience affirmation for them, connects us with the community, and gives us a deeper understanding of what's being celebrated. Music uniquely adds to our ability to participate and engage fully in the liturgy.

### From the Interviews

The way I interact and I strengthen and I show my faith is I play music. At church I go up there and I play bongos. I play drums, and it's just, the vibes I get when I'm done from the people—I helped make these people get up and dance, and shout, and clap their hands. It's this crazy vibe I get when everybody just has big smiles on their faces at the end of the song. Everyone is enjoying Mass.

At this church now I also do lectoring. It's not really a youth lector. I don't think there are any other youth lectors. Being one of the only youth lectors, it feels important because you get to represent the youth and their speaking skills with adults that are there.

I am a very musical person, so I think that is why it's a touchstone for me. But if you draw people in that way and then you pray together, and it's like—it's such a unique experience.

Our voices had lifted them up because everybody in the choir was crying too because we felt that God was helping us sing his praises.

## What Adults Say

Good liturgy is a priority, and it includes music that is contemporary, homilies that youth can relate to, and youth as liturgical ministers.

### From the Interviews

Another thing that is not working is the homily, the boring homily. To me, I think it's an insult to the young people, if they (priests) cannot be inclusive enough on a subject to include the entire parish. It should include the youth and the adults as well. If you want them to be part of the Church, then you need to talk to them while they are there. I think that is a big problem.

He came to church by himself when his parents really weren't practicing faith. He became a lector. He would memorize the whole reading himself. He would proclaim it without looking down. Somehow by putting the time into reading, it really nurtured his relationship with Christ. It is also a tremendous value to the community to see a young persons proclaim so well.

(The extracts from interviews on this handout are quoted from "Effective Youth Ministry Practices in Catholic Parishes" a joint research project of the Center for Ministry Development and Saint Mary's Press, in collaboration with the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. The 2002 study is being published in *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, forthcoming).