

Chaplain's Bulletin March 12, 2023



Dear Folks,

I recently saw the movie “Jesus Revolution.” It’s a fictionalized documentary of a real event, a Christian revival in the 1960s. It involved a Baptist Church that has grown stagnant, and then some hippies showed up. The pastor embraced their presence and sought to connect with them and involve them. This upset some of the long-standing members of the Church who liked things the way they had been. The pastor chose to keep connecting with the newcomers and working with a hip young preacher (played by Jonathan Roumie, the guy who plays Jesus on “The Chosen”), and some of the long-standing parishioners left. They chose their comfort zone over evangelization. The Church gradually grew enormously, though not without difficulty (of course).

The movie makes the point that the young people had been lied to. They were told that casual sex would bring them love and that LSD would connect them to transcendence (LSD, Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, was a powerful and dangerous hallucinogenic, and we were all amazed that one drop would be a dose. We had no idea that fentanyl would be coming). When some found that it didn’t work, they were open to another message. Many were brought to embrace Jesus.

Now comes the question, what should we do today. We know that young people have been lied to, being told that casual sex and drugs will make them happy, that feelings are the highest measure of reality, and the meaning of life is something they make up for themselves. Many are depressed, many are lost, and there are an alarming number of suicides. It sure would be nice to bring more of them to Jesus.

An important thing to note is that modern young people are not hippies. They are children and grandchildren of hippies, and they have very different perspectives. It would be a terrible mistake to assume that we can attract them by doing what we think we would have wanted when we were their age.

A lot of young families are drawn to more traditional, more reverent liturgies. If you go to where the Old Latin Mass is celebrated, you will find lots of young people. I don’t suggest that the solution is that we all go back to the Missal of 1962 (I don’t know how to do it, and I never studied Latin in the seminary), but I suggest that what we were taught in the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s could stand to be questioned, and that being willing to move out of our comfort zone for the sake of the mission of the Church.

I’m not arrogant enough to say I’ve figured out exactly what will bring in droves of young people (and why should you believe me anyway?). I am bold enough, however, to suggest some principles:

- We accept that being a parishioner does not mean being a customer, but a coworker in mission.
- Therefore, it is not about our preferences, at least not primarily.

- Programs and gimmicks have not succeeded in making deep change. We need to examine our own behavior, and how we act as ambassadors of Jesus.
- As I've said before, we can all work on doing a better job of telling the Gospel story (learning in practice what is effective in connecting to people), working together as community (welcoming, inviting, and reconciling), worshiping God (yes, we can get better), and helping people in need.
- We can start small. We can learn something new about our faith and share it. We can tell someone something good about our faith community. We can introduce ourselves to someone in church that we don't know. We can create a holy moment (show someone a bit of the love of God).
- Laughing at the pastor's jokes is encouraged but not required.

If we do what we can, God will use us.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim