



SPARKS FROM ASHES

AN ASH WEDNESDAY YOUNG ADULT EVANGELIZATION PLAN

*Blow the trumpet, Zion! Proclaim a fast! Call an assembly!
Gather the people! Notify the congregation!*

Joel 2:15-16a

**A special initiative from the Diocese of Joliet Young Adult Ministry Office
for use in the parish community in preparation for and during Lent**

What's This All About?

We are asking each and every parish in the Diocese of Joliet to take at least *one action step towards evangelizing young adults* in their twenties and thirties on Ash Wednesday or throughout Lent this year.

Ash Wednesday is a perfect opportunity for Catholic churches to capitalize on the increased number of young adults who will be returning to church that day.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Joel also challenged the religious leaders of his own day to prepare for those who would be returning to the Temple for worship: “Blow the trumpet, Zion! Proclaim a fast! Call an assembly! Gather the people! Notify the congregation! Assemble the elders! Gather the children and the nursing infants! Let the bridegroom quit his room and the bride her chamber!...” (Joel 2:15-16). How often do we look at Ash Wednesday as an opportunity to do the same and prepare for the influx of young adults who will come our way?

In this packet, we have enclosed several suggestions on how to take that one action step towards the evangelization and re-evangelization of young adult Catholics – to truly see sparks rise up from the ashes. Remember, though, that these are just the first stepping stones towards a larger goal of evangelization and mission. Above and beyond these suggestions, the Diocesan Young Adult Ministry Office (www.dioceseofjoliet.org/yam) is always available to any parish looking to use Lent (or any other experience) to develop an intentional outreach to men and women in their late teens, twenties, and thirties.

If you're ready to begin *right now*, turn to page seven (7) of this packet for a list of ready-to-go evangelization ideas and action steps. For more background, keep reading.

In addition, only 7% of Catholic young adults in the Millennial Generation consider their Roman Catholicism a strong part of their personal identity, whereas 24% of Generation Xers and 25% of Baby Boomers feel the same way about their faith lives.¹

These trends are increasing each year, and anecdotally, each of our parishes can attest to the lack of young people in the pews on Sunday, let alone being active participants in the life and ministry of the parish community.

Another growing issue for American Catholics is the decreasing number of young adults entering lay, vowed, or ordained ministry in the Church. In 2005, the median age for a layperson working in the parish (excluding religious) was 52, compared with a median age of 45 in 1990. Similarly, more than 90% of current pastors were born before the year 1960.² These sobering figures show that there is a growing generational gap between those in leadership of our parishes and dioceses and the expanding population of inactive or semi-active young adults in need of outreach and evangelization.

Figure 2: Generational Trends for Lent

<http://cara.georgetown.edu>

When asked: “Do you do any of the following during Lent?”

Percentage responding “yes” to each of the questions.

	<i>By Generation</i>			
	Pre-Vatican II	Vatican II	Post-Vatican II	Millennial
Do you abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent?	64%	59%	59%	61%
Do you typically receive ashes at Ash Wednesday services?	58%	40%	40%	50%
Besides giving something up, do you do anything positive, like giving additional money to the needy or trying to be a better person, during Lent?	50%	45%	41%	40%
Besides meat on Fridays, do you give up or abstain from anything else during Lent?	33%	34%	38%	46%

from *Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics* (“Lenten Practices,” pp. 84-88)
 © Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, Washington D.C., 2008

¹ *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church*, ed. William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier (Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2007), p. 20-21.

² Both of these statistics are quoted in *Lay Parish Ministers: A Study in Emerging Leadership*, David DeLambo (National Pastoral Life Center, 2005), p.46.

Each Ash Wednesday, however, the Church is given a gift. A good number of inactive and semi-active young adults (not to mention other generations of adults who attend Catholic Mass less frequently throughout the year) make their way to Ash Wednesday services all across the country, as well as engage in other Lenten practices.

In comparison to the 15% of Generation Xers and 17% of Millennials who attend Mass every week (from Figure 1), these numbers are significantly higher: 40% of Generation Xers and 50% of Millennials are attending Ash Wednesday services, with equally impressive numbers for other Lenten practices such as fasting, abstaining, and almsgiving (as seen in Figure 2). In another question in the same CARA report, the results showed that over 25% of adults (of any generation) who come to Mass only a few times per year and 63% of those who attend monthly will still regularly attend Ash Wednesday services each and every year. What is even more interesting is how different the numbers are between these Lenten practices and the percentage of millennial young adults who identify themselves as Catholic (7%). For some of this youngest adult generation, it seems, Ash Wednesday has greater importance than the Catholic Church overall.

So why do they return for Ash Wednesday, when it's not even considered a Holy Day of Obligation in the Catholic Church? The reasons are incredibly varied and are unique to each and every individual, but a few trends have emerged from the research and from the anecdotes of young adults over the years:

- Those who grew up Catholic have ingrained within them a subconscious Catholic identity, and receiving ashes on the forehead is one of the outward signs of that personal tradition and experience.
- Related to this, the ashes might evoke a sense of nostalgia for a childhood or youth when they had a good experience of church and family; getting ashes on the forehead is a way to remind themselves of those earlier, less stressful times.
- During certain times of year (notably in Advent and Lent), the general American culture adopts a greater appreciation of all things spiritual or religious. Added to this, there is also a renewed sense of wonder and awe during these seasons than at other times, which leads a number of people back into a church community.
- Since Mardi Gras and the Lenten Fast have become part of the pop culture lexicon, there is greater awareness of Ash Wednesday among young adults (plus, like Christmas, this religious holiday is also listed on most secular calendars).
- The winter months are times when depression, loneliness, and lack of purpose sinks into people's lives, especially among young adults. Getting reconnected to a spiritual or religious experience becomes a priority, and Ash Wednesday is the physical expression of that need for meaning, purpose, comfort, or direction.
- If a young adult has been thinking of (yet still procrastinating) getting more in touch with their faith or personal spirituality, Ash Wednesday might be a way for them to make another "new year's resolution."

- When young adults see others on the street on Ash Wednesday morning with ashes on their foreheads, they might simply be reminded to go, or feel a certain sense of “peer pressure” to go get their ashes, too (“it’s what everyone’s doing”).

There are probably countless more reasons why young adults return to church for Ash Wednesday, but regardless of the reasoning behind the return, the trend is real. For one day a year, people are definitely coming back.

In addition to Ash Wednesday, young adults have other “moments of return” to the faith, when they seek a greater connection to God or to the Church (or because of pressure from a religiously-active family). These “moments” include holidays like Christmas and Easter, but also involve returning to a church for friends’ and family members’ weddings, baptisms, or funerals. And because the Church is seen as a place for pastoral care, comfort, and guidance, young adults also have “moments of return” during times of personal anxiety and grief such as job loss, relationship break-ups, health or medical issues, economic hardships, or during times of national or international crisis. Still for others, an all-too-quick “moment of return” takes place when couples simply want a church wedding or a baptism for their newborn child.

Unfortunately, these one-time visits do not often translate into a renewed sense of commitment to the Catholic faith or to the parish, despite young adults’ best intentions to get back into the habit of churchgoing. These are all called “moments of return” because, for the vast majority of young adults, they are all brief and short-lived.

This sobering reality of the lack of long-term participation among young adults in the Church today does not mean all is futile. Rather, Ash Wednesday – over and above the other “moments of return” like holidays and special life occasions – is a great opportunity for evangelization that parishes can easily capitalize upon.

Ash Wednesday is unlike Christmas and Easter because it is not a family holiday. No one really has to rush off to an “Ash Wednesday Dinner” with parents or grandparents after the service. Young adults who come on Ash Wednesday are coming by themselves or with other people their age. And unlike weddings and funerals with much preparation and pastoral care, Ash Wednesday is short, simple, and to the point.

In addition, Ash Wednesday has a full season of forty days already built in for churches and communities to use to follow up with the young adults. Since Lent is indeed a time that some young adults use to get closer to spirituality and the Church, it’s a great fit.

But how often do our churches use Ash Wednesday as an opportunity for evangelization? More often than not, our parish leaders are busy with liturgical or environmental details to bother with the newcomer who walks through the doors. We find ourselves fixated on fine points rather than on the biblical commands to “welcome the stranger” (cf. Romans 12:13, Leviticus 19:33-34) and to “go out into the whole world to spread the Good News” (cf. Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20). Imagine what would happen if we spent as much time on the hospitality and outreach to the seeking and searching young adult as we did on other matters on a day like Ash Wednesday. Imagine what it would look like.

In one of the readings on Ash Wednesday each year, we hear the prophet Joel give us a vision of what that might be. He seems to be speaking to two audiences: first, the seekers and searchers to whom he says “Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger and rich in kindness...” (Joel 2:12-13); second, to the community of worshippers that will be receiving those seekers, to whom he challenges “Blow the trumpet, Zion! Proclaim a fast! Call an assembly! Gather the people! Notify the congregation! Assemble the elders! Gather the children and the nursing infants...” (Joel 2:15-16). It seems Joel foresees a day very much like Ash Wednesday, when the people return to worship with the community once more. But will our churches accept his challenge to make the return a celebratory and welcoming experience for the newcomers?

In addition, we must raise practical questions for our parish community such as:

- How is the Ash Wednesday liturgy formatted to enable a new person to feel connected to the parish community right away?
- How would people in the community, especially young adults in their 20s and 30s, know about the Ash Wednesday services at your church? What is the marketing strategy for Ash Wednesday and Lent for your parish?
- What are the roles of the pastor, as well as the pastoral staff, the liturgical ministers, the ushers and greeters, and active parish leaders throughout the services on Ash Wednesday? Following up from that, are there opportunities for any of these people to interact with a newcomer that day and if so, how?
- In what ways does the parish community (especially the parish leaders, pastoral councils, staff, and others) prepare for the arrival of newcomers on Ash Wednesday and throughout the Lenten Season?
- How will the community follow-up with those young adults who attend for the first time on Ash Wednesday or during Lent? What is the strategic plan to make sure newcomers will come again soon?

To truly make *Sparks from Ashes* work in your parish, it requires some advance preparation, good marketing, serious commitment from ministry leaders and staff, and a compassionate heart for the young adults that are searching and seeking for a spiritual experience when they arrive in our parking lots on Ash Wednesday.

Once we take an honest look at how we prepare for and carry out our work on Ash Wednesday and during Lent, we can start to work towards making this time of year an evangelization experience for young adults and newcomers of all generations. And then, we may very well see sparks rise from the ashes and give new life to our journey of faith.

What follows are several ready-to-go ideas for Ash Wednesday and Lent, prepared by the Diocese of Joliet Young Adult Ministry Office.

Ash Wednesday Evangelization Ideas

Suggestions for Outreach to Young Adult Catholics

To put it simply: use Ash Wednesday to connect with young adults and other newcomers and semi-active Catholics. Make a concerted effort towards taking advantage of the fact that many young adults return to church on this special day. The opportunity may not come around for another twelve months (and for some, even longer).

Just implementing one of the following ideas is a great first step. Certain ideas will work for certain parishes, but not for others. Carefully discern which idea or ideas work best for your church, your parishioners and parish leaders, and for the young adult men and women living and working in your community.

For any help in the discernment or the implementation of the evangelization ideas, please feel free to contact Paul Jarzembowski in the Diocese of Joliet Young Adult Ministry Office at (815) 834-4047 or email pjarzembowski@dioceseofjoliet.org.

Ash Wednesday Soup & Discussion Night

After the Ash Wednesday evening service, invite young adults to a time of discussion and networking. Provide (or have parishioners donate) a few meatless soup choices (tomato, potato, broccoli cheese, onion, vegetable, etc.) and bread, plus some simple drinks (water, lemonade, juice, etc.). The discussion portion can either be informal or structured on topics such as Lenten practices, what to “give up” for Lent, the Scriptures, Catholic traditions, almsgiving, social justice, or something of interest to the parish or to the young adults. At this gathering, be sure to get young adults’ contact info and follow up with them throughout Lent over email, phone, Facebook, or other means available.

Ash Wednesday Theology-on-Tap

After the Ash Wednesday evening service, have a Theology-on-Tap session (either at the parish or out at a local restaurant). Bring in a speaker to talk on an issue pertinent to Ash Wednesday or Lent, or a topic of your choosing. The speaker can be an outside guest, but many young adults would appreciate the pastor or associate pastor being present for them in this setting. If you need to pre-arrange a menu with a restaurant, select items such as meatless salads, soups, pasta, pizza, or fish.

Ash Wednesday Service Project

Either in the evening of Ash Wednesday or on the Saturday or Sunday immediately following, offer a young adult service project, showcasing the Lenten virtue of almsgiving. Young adults are very interested in service and charity work today, so giving them this experiential moment of faith will remind them of the importance of the Church’s mission role in the world. Doing the service project with other young adults will also be a good chance for the participants to network and meet others their age who share their faith and passion for justice. Service project ideas can include: Habitat for Humanity, local soup kitchens or shelters, PADS, helping at a local nursing home,

assisting a pregnancy center or adoption agency, visiting patients in a hospital, gathering food or goods for a second-hand store, cleaning up local parks or other environmental projects, among other creative ideas. And as always, be sure to capture young adult participants' contact information and follow up with them in the days after, inviting them to keep involved and meet up with fellow participants in the weeks to follow.

A Stations of the Cross Tour

Each Friday in Lent, gather with young adults at your parish and either: a) attend Stations of the Cross at your church and head out to a bar or restaurant afterwards, or b) travel to a different nearby church each week for their Stations service and head out to a restaurant near that parish afterwards. The key thing here is to expose young adults to the Catholic tradition of Stations of the Cross. Promote this on Ash Wednesday for the newcomers and young adults in attendance that day.

Young Adult Leaders for Stations of the Cross

Whether on the Stations Tour at other churches (described above) or at your own regular Stations services, consider inviting some young adults to lead the Stations of the Cross on one or more of the weeks of Lent. These roles can be: readers, cross bearers, program distributors, greeters, or musicians; or the young adults could act out or incorporate film, media, and music into the presentation (of course, this would need to be arranged in advance with the pastoral staff or liturgy planning teams). It is a proven fact that young adult participation in Catholic ritual and events will significantly increase the likelihood of these men and women coming again in the future. On Ash Wednesday, target young adults in the crowd to help lead certain weeks of Stations. A direct invitation that day will go a long way towards getting these men and women excited about the project.

Lenten Small Christian Communities

Organize a young adult small faith-sharing or Bible Study group for no more than five weeks during Lent. Meet on the same night each week at the church, at a young adult's home, or at a local restaurant, coffeeshop, or sandwich place. Use your church's small group resources or consider getting young adult-focused small group programs from an organization like Renew International (www.renewintl.org). Advertise these small groups on Ash Wednesday and have young adults sign up for them after the services.

Lenten Movie Nights

Similar to small groups, consider hosting a weekly movie night for young adults (with an informal but catechetical discussion afterwards). The movies can be popular films the young adults are familiar with, or could be organized around a similar theme (religious movies, social justice-themed films, superhero stories, etc.). This movie night can be hosted at the church or at a parishioner's home in the community and be sure to have popcorn and movie snacks available. Resources for conversation can be found in books such as the *Lights, Camera... Faith!* movie lectionary series authored by Sr. Rose Pacatte and Fr. Peter Malone (Pauline Books & Media). Again, advertise the movie nights on Ash Wednesday or get young adults to sign up in advance.

Jesus Movie Nights

In a format similar to the above movie nights, use specific Jesus films (i.e. *Jesus of Nazareth*, *King of Kings*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, *Passion of the Christ*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Ben Hur*, etc.) to tackle a particular event in the life of Christ (perhaps related to the Sunday gospel or perhaps events leading up to Christ's Passion). After showing clips from different films, discuss how the visual experience affected them, how it differs or compares to their interpretation from reading it in the gospel text, or how the different movie versions tackle the same event differently. These conversations will open young adults up to thinking more critically about the life of Jesus. Again, promote this series on Ash Wednesday, as well as in local newspapers and media outlets, as this kind of event might appeal to those outside the parish community as well.

Welcome Postcards

In the pews on Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent, have special Welcome Postcards for newcomers (many of whom will be young adults). These welcome cards should be eye-catching and attractive, and should also include short but pertinent information on the parish, the website, and a notice that if they are new or would like to know a little bit more, they can contact certain individuals at the parish.

Newcomer & Visitor Cards

In each pew, have several visitor cards with little golf pencils for newcomers to fill out when they attend your church on Ash Wednesday, or other Sundays in Lent (or throughout the year). The card should include: name, address, phone, email, age or birth date, and questions about interests, ministries, or ideas they have (or if they would like to speak directly with a pastor or spiritual director). Again, from the cards you receive back on Ash Wednesday, there will be a good number of young adults. Collect the cards in the collection basket at offertory (or in the back of church after the service or mass), and in the week following that liturgy, be sure to follow up and contact the new people, or at the very least, send them a welcome note in the mail or email, inviting them to come back anytime or asking for them to stay connected.

Ash Wednesday or Lenten Worship Aid

On Ash Wednesday especially, and throughout Lent, provide a worship aid with details of the songs, responses, prayers, Scripture readings, and even the reason behind certain aspects of the liturgy. For newcomers, having this worship aid will help them better understand and feel a part of the worship life of the parish. Have ushers distribute these worship aids in the narthex of your church or have them easily available on a table when they arrive. In these programs, you can also include announcements, invitations, and other information (and encourage the young adults to take them home with them as a reminder of the events that might be listed in the worship aid). In general, worship aids are very helpful to young adults and newcomers since many missal books are hard to follow and a bit overwhelming for a first-time attendee. Detailed worship aids can be a service to the young adult who might not know what to do (or forgot what to do since the last time they were at church), but is too afraid to ask. Consider offering worship aids year-round at your parish, beginning with Ash Wednesday this year.

Ash Wednesday or Lenten Six Pack

In the weeks leading up to Ash Wednesday or Easter Triduum, give all active parishioners a “six pack” of cards with information on the upcoming holy days. Challenge every parishioner to find six other people they know, especially young adults, who don’t regularly come to church to invite them to come to the upcoming services, masses, or special liturgies you want to promote. This “six pack” system will encourage evangelization by all members of your congregation, and also be a quick and easy way for active Catholics to invite newcomers to their church. The cards should be attractive, simple, and list the basic information necessary (dates and times of masses or services, location of the church, and contact info for the church); there can also be a note of welcome and invitation on the card to whomever is reading it. Ideally, they should be about the same size as a business card, and the “six pack” can fit into a simple carrying case that the active parishioners can easily put in their pockets or purses and distribute to those they meet throughout their daily lives.

Evangelization Posters in Church

Display posters throughout your church for newcomers. These posters can be simple with a quick statement like “Got questions? Ask us.” Post these in hallways, doorways, restrooms, in the vestibule, or other places around the parish campus. This will also help regular parishioners know to be more welcoming of newcomers and young adults. Display these posters on Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent.

Giveaways for Young Adults

Consider offering giveaways for young adults or newcomers to your parish. These can be small crosses, bookmarks, booklets, or other small tokens of appreciation. Tangible items are often appreciated by a tactile generation like young adults; often times, these newcomers will place that object in a special place, reminding them of their experience at your parish during Ash Wednesday or Lent.

Online Lenten Retreat – *A Busy Person’s Retreat*

Starting Ash Wednesday, invite young adults to participate in an online (virtual) “Busy Person’s Retreat.” These can be done through www.bustedhalo.com or through the Diocese of Joliet Young Adult Ministry office (call 815.834.4047). The virtual retreat works because it counters the objection of young adults who claim to be “too busy” to do activities related to the Church. A virtual retreat allows them to do this on their time.

Carpool to Young Adult Ministry Events

During Lent, consider offering a number to call for young adults looking to carpool or caravan to activities and programs for young adults in your area (including Theology-on-Tap, Spirit & Truth, Young Adult Retreats, etc.). For a list of the upcoming events in your area that you can carpool towards, log onto www.dioceseofjoliet.org/yam/. On Ash Wednesday, post the list of events to which you will be attending in the bulletin or in handouts given to young adults that day.

Lenten Service & Justice Series

Beginning Ash Wednesday, offer several nights for young adults focused on social justice or service work in the community. These can be either formational in nature or hands-on. If your parish already has a similar program, consider offering a special young adult component to the program to make it more attractive to young adults.

Finding God Series

Similar to the Service & Justice Series, offer sessions throughout Lent using Ignatian spirituality (i.e., finding God in all things). Young adults are very aware of their everyday life (work, family, sports, pop culture, finances, etc.), so offering workshops on how to find God in those everyday matters may be attractive to the younger generation during the season of Lent.

***New Movers* PNCEA Campaign**

Use the *New Movers* program (available through the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, PNCEA, at www.pncea.org). This program gives churches a list of the men and women who have recently moved into a selection of zip codes near your church. This would be an excellent way to target new households in your area and to connect with many new young adults (statistics show that about half of new movers to an area are young adults). You can use this list to send invitations to your church for Ash Wednesday or any of the other Lenten experiences your parish hosts, as well as throughout the year to other programs, opportunities, and events that young adults and other newcomers might really enjoy.

***30-Hour Famine* Retreat**

Using the format of (or similar structure to) the *30-Hour Famine*, offer young adults a unique way to experience poverty, stressing the concept of almsgiving and fasting in Lent. Offer this thirty-hour retreat for young adults only so that participants also get the chance to meet others their age in a comfortable setting. If you do not have the time or interest in a thirty-hour program, you can make this a ten-hour one-day experience (without the overnight option) or other variations of time that work for your community and for the young adults to whom this is offered. Have a planning and invitation team ready before Lent, and advertise this retreat on Ash Wednesday.

Young Adult Vespers

Young adults today enjoy the rites and rituals of tradition, tangible signs of the mystery of God. Consider hosting an evening Vespers Service during Lent for young adults (and ideally led by young adults). The Vespers Service can include multimedia, dynamic preaching (it is also good if the preaching came from a young adult their age), and a sense of awe and wonder (be sure to use dark lighting, candles, comfortable seating, aesthetic art and environment, modern imagery, etc.). Schedule the dates for upcoming vespers services before Lent, and advertise this on Ash Wednesday.

Young Adult Reconciliation Service

Prior to the end of Lent, consider offering a reconciliation service just for young adults (or a specific demographic of young adults like college students, young engaged or married couples, young singles, etc.). This service can include readings and testimony from young adults and speak to their lived experience. Reconciliation can be a powerful way to bring young adults closer to the Church if done well. Advertise this service on Ash Wednesday and all throughout the season of Lent.

Seder Meal for Young Adults

During Lent, offer a young adult Seder Meal to remind them of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, and specifically the Last Supper. If your parish already provides a Seder Meal for the adults, consider offering a young adult component to the program with specific advertising and outreach to these people. Have young adults bring food or participate in the prayers of the meal to get them involved with the life of prayer of the parish community. This project is good for young adults, who see such religious diversity in the workplace and in their family lives. Hosting a Seder Meal acknowledges the fact that the Catholic Church recognizes and affirms the religious diversity in the world around them. Be sure to advertise this special event on Ash Wednesday.

Prayer Partner / Mentoring Program

Prior to Lent, gather some active parishioners and ask them if they would be mentors or prayer partners with young adults during the Lenten Season. These mentors can be assigned based on career, geography, interests, or by gender; on Ash Wednesday, have young adults sign up for this mentoring experience (it can be labeled as having “prayer partners” from the community) and quickly connect them to the involved parishioners. These partners or mentors are great ways to build a relationship between young adults and the people of the parish, and thus develop a closer connection to the Church. At the end of Lent, consider a potluck or other social event for all mentors and partners.

Young Adult Prayer Book

On Ash Wednesday (and throughout Lent), offer young adults a special prayer book with prayers they can use throughout Lent. Consider designing and editing a prayer book for them specifically (an example is available through the Diocese of Joliet Young Adult Ministry Office; call 815-423-4047) with prayers of young adult saints or patrons (i.e. Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, St. Timothy, St. Maria Goretti, Pope John Paul II, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, among others). If you do not want to produce your own book, consider ordering a young adult-friendly one from a bookstore or national distributor.

Almsgiving / Fasting/ Praying Lists for Young Adults

On Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent, offer young adults a page on ways to practically experience one of the three main aspects of the season: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Offer a page for each of these areas; the list should include easy-to-follow ideas that young adults can get involved with right away. You can post this list on your parish website or distribute hard copies in church during the Lenten season.

Young Adult Listening Session

During Lent, have a “listening session” for young adults to voice their cares and concerns about the parish, the Church in general, or about their spirituality. Offer a “beer and brainstorming session” where, on a given night or weekend afternoon, young adults can come together to offer their thoughts or brainstorm ways to bring their peers back to church. The pastor or pastoral staff and leaders from the parish should be present, so that young adults realize that the Church listens to their issues. Promote this session on Ash Wednesday and throughout the Lenten season.

Young Adult Mass

Sometime during the Lenten season, offer a Young Adult Mass (either as a teaching mass or a simple liturgy focused on young adult spirituality and concerns). Invite young adults to participate in the liturgical roles. Advertise this special worship service on Ash Wednesday and throughout the Lenten Season.

Stress Relief & Meditation Night (A New Kind of Rosary Night)

Stress is a big concern for young adults today, and the Catholic Church has an excellent stress-reducing tradition in the rosary devotion. Exposing this tradition to young adults is a great idea, but can be hard at face value. Instead, consider offering a rosary event through the lens of stress relief and meditation. Invite young adults to a quiet space with candles, aromatherapy, meditation music, balance balls, yoga mats, or other relaxation items. During the time together, offer up the Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary (since it is the season of Lent) and meditate together on the prayers. Advertise this special Stress Relief Night in the program or bulletin on Ash Wednesday, as well as in local media and newspapers since this might interest other young adults in your community.

St. Patrick or St. Joseph Socials

During the Lenten Season, the feasts of St. Patrick (March 17) and St. Joseph (March 19) are great opportunity to gather young adults together for “meet and greet” socials. Consider offering a St. Patrick’s Day event (either a trip to the Chicago parade, an evening at an Irish restaurant, or an evening on Celtic spirituality) or St. Joseph’s day event (an Italian St. Joseph’s Table or a night out for young adult fathers). By doing this, young adults not only can have a chance to meet others their age, but also discover more about two important Catholic saints. Promote whatever is offered on Ash Wednesday.

Catholicism 101

Invite young adults to a “Catholicism 101” series starting in Lent, which explores the basics of Catholic spirituality and traditions. If young adults return for Ash Wednesday or during the Lenten Season, many are curious about Catholic customs; this program offers them an opportunity to learn more. One good resource for this is the “Why Catholic?” program throughout Renew International (www.renewintl.org), and there are many others that are equally effective. Promote this series on Ash Wednesday.

Spring & Summer Sports Leagues

Consider putting together a spring or summer sports league for young adults (volleyball or basketball in the spring, softball or beach volleyball in the summer). Promote this on Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent, and have sign-up sheets in the back of church. If enough players are found, gather some young adult leaders for the teams and host them in your church (or connect with other parishes in the area for a regional or diocesan-wide young adult sports league). Sports are great way to connect inactive young adults.

Young Adult Parish & Worship Leadership

Consider a “preferential option” for young adults in the leadership of your parish community. This Lent, make a concerted effort to extend an invitation to young adults “a place at the table” such as a position on your parish pastoral council, in ministry leadership teams, or in visible roles in church worship such as Eucharistic ministers, lectors, cantors, and so forth. As reported in *Lay Parish Ministers: A Study of Emerging Leadership* (David DeLambo, 2005), the median age of parish leaders is ever-increasing and fewer young adults are being given the opportunity to step into parish and diocesan leadership roles, paid and volunteer alike. Added to this trend, Generation Xers and Millennials are traditionally averse to “signing up” for leadership opportunities (in both society at large and especially in churches and faith communities). However, many are more than happy to accept these roles if a pastor or an active parish leaders makes a direct personal invitation to them, acknowledging their gifts and asking them to a specific, manageable task in the parish. This Lent, be intentional and extend these personal invitations to the young adults you meet, even if it means doing so in the vestibule before or after Mass on Sunday. Young adults will appreciate you taking the time to personally invite them, and will most likely say “yes” to your offer.

These ideas are just the beginning. If you have additional ideas that you would like to contribute and share to the Sparks from Ashes project, please contact Paul Jarzembowski in the Diocese of Joliet Young Adult Ministry Office at (815) 834-4047 or email him at pjarzembowski@dioceseofjoliet.org. Ideas will be posted online at the Diocesan Young Adult Ministry website, www.dioceseofjoliet.org/yam/.

Quick Resource Guide

The *Sparks from Ashes* project just gives a brief overview of the issues confronting the Catholic Church today in regards to young adults, and a few ideas about evangelization and outreach. However, there are even more great ideas out there. Below are several of the resources with more information, statistics, and ideas that have contributed to this evangelization campaign (and ones that parishes can use year-round).

For even more help in using these resources or in developing outreach initiatives for young adults, feel free to contact Paul Jarzembowski in the Diocese of Joliet Young Adult Ministry office at (815) 834-4047 or email pjarzembowski@dioceseofjoliet.org.

Statistics & Demographics

American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church
William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007.

Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice
Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan L. Gonzales, Jr.
University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

CARA Special Report: "Young Adult Catholics" (Fall 2002), ed. Mary E. Bendyna
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Georgetown University, 2002

Young Adult Catholics and Their Future in Ministry
Dean Hoge and Marti Jewell, National Association of Lay Ministry, 2008.

Lay Parish Ministers: A Study of Emerging Leadership
David DeLambo, National Pastoral Life Center, 2005.

Young Adult Catholics

Googling God: The Religious Landscape of Men & Women in their 20s & 30s
Mike Hayes, Busted Halo Books & Paulist Press, 2007.

Seeds of Hope: Young Adults and the Catholic Church in the United States
Tim Muldoon, Paulist Press, 2008.

God Moments: Why Faith Really Matters for a New Generation
Jeremy Langford, Orbis Books, 2001.

The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry
Fr. John Cusick and Katherine DeVries, Orbis Books 2001.

Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB Publishing, 1997.

Busted Halo Ministries: An Outreach of the Paulist Fathers
<http://www.bustedhalo.com> (includes articles on young adults, podcasts, guides, etc.)

Evangelization and Outreach

From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish
Robert S. Rivers, CSP, Paulist Press, 2005.

The Mission Driven Parish
Fr. Patrick J. Brennan, Orbis Books, 2007.

Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How to Bring the Good News to Others
Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, Servant Publications, 2006.

The Evangelizing Catholic: A Practical Handbook for Reaching Out
Frank P. DeSiano, CSP, Paulist Press, 1999.

The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations
Dan Kimball, with forwards by Rick Warren & Brian McLaren, Zondervan, 2003
(this is a non-denominational Christian resource for young adult evangelization)

Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States: Tenth Anniversary English & Spanish Edition
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB Publishing, 2002.

The Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association (PNCEA)
<http://www.pncea.org> (includes links to resources, guides, online helps, seminars, etc.)



Most of these resources are often available through regular booksellers and online stores. Some can be directly ordered through certain websites, such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' documents and materials through PNCEA. If you have additional questions or have more resources to share, contact Paul Jarzembowski at the Diocese of Joliet at (815) 834-4047 or email pjarzembowski@dioceseofjoliet.org.