

Faith and Cultural Challenges in Diaspora Youth

1st International Conference of the Eparchy of Keren

Presented by

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TOPICS

- ❖ Faith Issues
 - ❖ Formational and Catechetical Needs
 - ❖ Language Barrier and Parent-Child Communication
- ❖ Cultural Issues
 - ❖ Parent-Child Communication
 - ❖ Generational Conflict/Misunderstanding
 - ❖ Emotional Feedbacks
 - ❖ Friends, Dating & Marriage
 - ❖ Parent-Child Educational Expectations & Goals

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Faith: Formational & Catechetical Needs

Presented by
Sefanit Mekonnen

NEED FOR EVANGELIZATION

In our post-modern society, unfortunately the story of salvation has been forgotten. Faith can NOT be assumed! It must be fought for. Just because our parents and grandparents worshipped and believed a certain way does not mean our generation will automatically do so as well. With everything around us telling us we are fools for believing in God, we need a Church willing to fight for us.

- ❖ Do our youth know that we serve a God of Love who is madly in love with them? Do they know that they were created by this Love and will never truly be happy until they respond?
- ❖ Has our youth heard the Gospel? Have they heard the story of salvation? Do they know who Jesus is and what he has done for them?
- ❖ Do our youth know the great gift we have been given in the Holy Spirit? Do they know that they have been given this gift in the sacraments and thus have everything they need to live as Christ taught?

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THE INDICATIVE BECOMING THE IMPERATIVE

Thankfully, most of our generation would claim their Catholic heritage. To ask however, what it means to be a Catholic would be a different story. In the actual living of our lives, there is not a lot of difference between our lives and the rest of the world. To say that we are Catholic is to say that because of God's abounding love, we have been offered salvation (John 3:16) and by God's surpassing grace we have accepted and are seeking a life of holiness (1 Timothy 6:12).

- ❖ Do we seek constant conversion? Do we seek to root out sin in our lives? Are we striving for holiness as we seek heroic love of God and our neighbor?
- ❖ Are we matching our lives to what we claim to profess? Do we really believe in God or not? Do we have lives dictated by Christ's teachings or the world's pressures?
- ❖ What are we doing to live our faith? How is our life different from our pagan friends? Do we frequent the sacraments? Do we pray daily? Do we read our bibles?
- ❖ Do we realize that we are the saints of the next millennium (JPII)? Do we even want to become saints?

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SEEKING GOD'S WILL

Since coming to America the focus has been first on survival and then, seeking financial and material success. Although this is good and necessary, the message that has been passed on to our generation is the primacy of the material and/or temporal. Typically success is defined in a very narrow way; i.e. by level of education and career choice (whether one is a doctor or engineer). With these kinds of restrictions however, this leaves very little room to genuinely seek God's will for our lives.

- ❖ If God has created us each unique and knows us by name, how can this be a realistic expectation?
- ❖ We are not lost sheep! Do we believe God has a plan for our lives? Do we trust him enough to say yes to this plan?
- ❖ This leads to little to no fostering of religious vocations.

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NEED FOR BASIC CATECHESIS AND ONGOING FAITH FORMATION

Because of the cultural and language barriers, growing up our families were not heavily involved in American parishes. Sacramental preparation may have been the extent of formation. Although seeking to preserve our cultural traditions is a good thing, the necessary catechesis was not supplemented by our own faith community. The amount of adult Catholics in America who no longer practice their faith has taught us that mere sacramental preparation is not enough! Our generation is hungry for the truth. We want to learn about our faith. We must also remember that here in America we are surrounded by a multiplicity of religions, faiths and belief systems. We are constantly challenged about our beliefs. If we do not properly catechize ourselves, we are vulnerable to being pulled away by other faith traditions.

- ❖ What are we doing as a Church community to pass on the faith to younger generations (i.e. retreats, conferences, bible studies, etc)?
- ❖ Does our generation know basic tenants of our faith? If not, what are we doing to change that?

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Mass Language Barrier & Parent-Child Communication

Presented by
Gherima D. Woldemariam

SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL (VATICAN II)

- ❖ Opened in 1962, under Pope John XXIII
- ❖ Discussed the "Matters of Concern" that the Catholic Church faced
- ❖ "The Council has recognized that, in some cases, the use of the Latin tongue can be a hindrance of devotion and can make it difficult for a person to pray the Office as it should be prayed."

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TRADITION OR NECESSITY?

- ❖ As any great inventor knows, "necessity is the mother of all invention."
- ❖ Even though some traditionalists opposed this move, it opened the doors to more exposure of Scripture and understanding during Mass.

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POR EJEMPLO

- ❖ Padre nuestro, que estás en el cielo. Santificado sea tu nombre. Venga tu reino. Hágase tu voluntad en la tierra como en el cielo. Danos hoy nuestro pan de cada día. Perdona nuestras ofensas, como también nosotros perdonamos a los que nos ofenden. No nos dejes caer en tentación y líbranos del mal. Amén.

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CHALLENGES THAT FACE OUR YOUTH

- ❖ Ge'ez versus Tigrinya
- ❖ Lack of Understanding
- ❖ Disconnection
- ❖ Disengagement

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TEACHERS AND CLERGY

University Methods' courses teach the following tenants:

- ❖ Teachers as facilitators of learning
- ❖ Engagement of students
- ❖ Modeling of correct strategies and writing styles
- ❖ Challenging all learners and their learning styles

THE PRESERVATION OF OUR FAITH & CULTURAL VALUES

"Finally, each and every Catholic.....must retain his own rite wherever he is, must cherish it and observe it to the best of his ability." (Vatican II)

- ❖ The Preservation of our Faith & Cultural Values
- ❖ Parental understanding of related issues
- ❖ Family support & encouragement
- ❖ Religious Community
- ❖ Experts

Generational Conflict & Parent-Child Communication/Dialogue

Presented by
Daniel Ghilwet

DIFFERENCES IN GENERATIONAL UPBRINGING

- ❖ Many of the typical Eritrean customs clash very heavily with traditional American customs
 - ❖ Education
 - ❖ E.P.M. Effect (Engineering, Pharmacy, Medicine only majors that can be obtained)
 - ❖ Residency
 - ❖ Living with Family until after college... sometimes even longer!
 - ❖ Relationship with Family
 - ❖ Extremely family oriented
 - ❖ Community over Self ambitions

DIFFERENCES IN CULTURAL NORMS

- ❖ Communication/ Emotional Feedback
 - ❖ American Culture:
 - ❖ Individuals wear their emotions on their "sleeves"
 - ❖ Communication is very open
 - ❖ Words of Encouragement and Congratulations are seen more evidently (Specifically between Parents and Children)
 - ❖ Eritrean Culture:
 - ❖ Emotions rarely shown.
 - ❖ Communication is Open but comparatively less than in American Culture.
 - ❖ Reason for this:
 - ❖ Reserved for meaningful occasions.
 - ❖ Higher expectations.

DIFFERENCES IN CULTURAL NORMS

- ❖ Role of Father and Mother
 - ❖ Last 50 years the United States has seen a transition in the roles of both the male and female
 - ❖ The role of the man in a household is transitioning into secondary obligations.
 - ❖ More and more women have begun to engage in career obligations on top of the traditional Matriarchal duties.
 - ❖ Coincidentally Eritrean households have also seen a similar trend

AMERICAN VS. ERITREAN GOALS

American

- ❖ American Culture demands individualistic ambitions
- ❖ Want to obtain tangible possession
 - ❖ Money & Power
 - ❖ Cars
 - ❖ Clothes

Eritrean

- ❖ More community oriented
- ❖ Uplifting not only ourselves but each other
- ❖ Want to have more intangible possessions
 - ❖ Happiness, family & success

- ❖ The dilemma thus occurs when raising children in the U.S.
 - ❖ How can we still keep our Eritrean Culture and customs intact while still adapting to the values and norms of another country?

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Friends, Dating & Marriage

Eritrean vs. American Philosophy

Presented by
Merih Ocbazghi

DATING & MARRIAGE

Dating and marriage are two issues that cause some of the biggest problems between parents and their children in our community. Neither side is truly satisfied, so it's clear that the system in place is not working. How can we make it better?

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DATING COMPARISON

Eritrean

- ❖ Don't date until you're ready for marriage, typically after college is finished.
- ❖ Pros
 - ❖ More mature during dating
 - ❖ Better chances of success with partner
- ❖ Cons
 - ❖ Limited experiences,
 - ❖ HIGH pressure situations

American

- ❖ Date around, and find the qualities you like with people you won't marry.
- ❖ Pros
 - ❖ More life experiences
 - ❖ Less commitment/fear of being "found out"
- ❖ Cons
 - ❖ Tend not to take things seriously
 - ❖ Don't really know the people

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DATING & MARRIAGE

- ❖ It's well known knowledge that the typical Eritrean parent wants 3 things from their son/daughter's relationships
 - ❖ The person must be Catholic
 - ❖ The person must be Eritrean
 - ❖ The person's family comes from the same region as your own
- ❖ How realistic is this?
 - ❖ How many people do you know that fit this criteria?
- ❖ Everyone wants to respect their parent's wishes; and would love to follow what their parent likes in a significant other.
 - ❖ How can both sides make things easier on one another?
 - ❖ What sacrifices can the sides make?
- ❖ What's more important; you're happiness or your parents' approval?

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HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

- ❖ Parents feel that their wishes are not being properly respected.
 - ❖ Should the youth try to appease their parents more than they do now?
- ❖ The youth feel that their parents are not being understanding of their unique situation.
 - ❖ Should the parents more accepting of different possibilities in relationships?
- ❖ On one hand, parent's who trust how they raised their children should trust the people that their children decide to date as it is (in a small way) a reflection of their upbringing.

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HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

- ❖ On another hand, children should respect their parent's opinion on what will most likely be the last life decision that their parents want direct input into.
- ❖ Each case is unique to the persons involved; which is something that is being ignored. Especially with things as complicated as relationships, blanket statements and checklists will never work. It will take open and frank dialogue between the two sides, no matter the discomfort.

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Parent-Child Educational Expectations & Goals

Presented by
Tefatsion Sereke

EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATION

Parents

- ❖ Very high academic and career expectations.
- ❖ To provide better opportunities for their child/children.
- ❖ To build sound educational foundations.
- ❖ Influence child's career aspirations
- ❖ Sense of accomplishment

Child

- ❖ Utilize the opportunities provided.
- ❖ Attain higher level of education whenever possible.
- ❖ Make sound and rational decision in educational choices.
- ❖ Live up to parents implied expectations.
- ❖ Make parents proud.

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GUIDANCE IN CAREER CHOICES

Parents

- ❖ It is important for parents to consider children's interests.
- ❖ Not everyone is meant to be a doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer.
- ❖ To pressure the child into studying something that is not really for him/her could merely insure his/her failure at it.
- ❖ Which might also be followed by shame, depression, low self-esteem, rebellion, frustration, and even suicide.

Child

- ❖ Know your educational strength and weakness.
- ❖ Identify your educational goals and interests as early as possible.
- ❖ Discover and uncover all careers that may be of interest to YOU.
- ❖ Create a clear vision and a roadmap (path) to accomplish your educational goals.

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EDUCATIONAL CONFLICTS

- ❖ A child has a field of study that he/she is interested in, but the parent has a totally different goal for him/her.
- ❖ The child wants to be an artist; his/her parents want him to go to med-school and become a doctor.
- ❖ The child wants to be a political scientist; his/her parents want him to be an engineer.
- ❖ The good intentions of the parent can be misunderstood
- ❖ There is a strong belief by parents that the preferred field of study will provide good chance of succeeding economically.
- ❖ They feel that the social sciences and arts in general do not offer as much potential for financial success as do engineering, medicine, business, and law

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PARENTAL PITFALLS

- ❖ Many parents may want their children to work in a highly paid and prestigious field.
- ❖ Social snobbery
- ❖ As a form of competition with their friends and relatives whose children may be studying or working in a prestigious field.
- ❖ Parents have therefore to watch out that they do not push their children above their capabilities.
- ❖ Aside from the preferred fields, many other jobs can adequately support a family.
- ❖ Great example of this is many of our parents.

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THE RIGHT BALANCE

My mother said to me, "If you are a soldier, you will become a general. If you are a monk, you will become the Pope." Instead, I was a painter, and became Picasso.

-Pablo Picasso

- ❖ Children must find a career that matches your interest.
- ❖ One that provides spiritual, emotional, psychological, or social rewards, rather than monetary ones.
- ❖ Don't chase other peoples dream... follow your own.
- ❖ Make a name for yourself (i.e. as Picasso)

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QUESTIONS/COMMENTS?



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Sacrament of Reconciliation By Musie Meghisteab

Confession

- Language:
 - Members of our community are unable to articulate their thoughts in English.
- Shame:
 - Some are reluctant to confess because they fear that the priest will easily recognize their voice due to their accent and look down on them
- Knowledge:
 - Some just don't know what requires confessing
 - Some don't know the difference between a mortal and a venial sin

Confession

- Result:
 - They are unable to confess and receive absolution
 - Children of those parents grow up without understanding the full value and need for confession
 - These individuals are unable to have a meaningful relationship with their priest or parish
 - "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 11:29-30)

Confession

- "My people perish for want of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)
- "with all thy getting get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7)

Thank You For Your Time!

