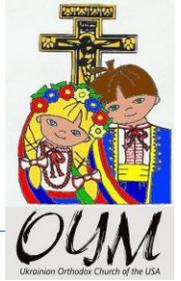


Youth Sobor 2019 – Session 2 – Struggles and Solutions for our Youth



The Youth Sobor delegates discussed the different struggles they face in the world and within the church. Once identifying these struggles, they brainstormed ways in which the church may support them in over-coming and working through these issues.

Struggle within the World

Struggle – Peer Pressure – The delegates identifies a multitude of areas through which we feel immense peer pressure such as alcohol/drug use, material possessions, school activities and status, social media, etc.

How the Church Can Support –

- Make your parish a ‘safe space’ for our youth where they do not need to worry about being pressured to make poor choices
- Host or participate in Pan -Orthodox events, so we have alternate activities
- If youth fall to peer pressure and make a wrong choice, don’t judge them, be honest but loving and help them get back up.

Struggle – Mental Health and Breakdowns – Many of our youth struggle with mental health issues and the pressures of stress. They don’t feel as if they have anywhere for help.

How the Church Can Support –

- Provide youth with opportunities to “re-charge” and “de-stress” such as retreats, summer camp, youth days at church.
- Create a space in the church for a “chill out’ room or corner. Somewhere they could go for some quiet time.
- Let them know who is in their adult support system at church. Who can they turn for an open ear?
- Clergy – Set aside devoted time (once a week, once a month) when youth can arrange to meet with you privately if they need to. REMIND them that you are available and there for them. We have a lot to remember and often forget these things.

Struggle – Conflict with school and teachers. Youth are often expected to choose school activities and assignments over church services and related functions. Our youth who attend Catholic school often find themselves at odds with their teachers in explaining our beliefs.

How the Church Can Support –

- Clergy and Parish Boards can offer to provide letters of explanation to provide excuse for missing school or an event. LET YOUR YOUTH AND FAMILIES KNOW that this is an option for them. Be available to call the school if needed.
- Clergy – speak to teachers or administrators at Catholic schools to help them understand the needs of your parishioner who attends there.

Struggle – Feeling as if you are “not good enough” to attend the college of your choice

How the Church Can Support –

- Have the parish provide a “sounding board” service, where youth could practice speeches in front of an audience, get help with college entrance papers, etc.
- Use social media to help youth understand that not being “1st” or the “best” is OK. You are successful where you are at in your ability.
- Set up discussions on vocation with your high school students.
- Set up a mentor system of parishioners with high school seniors to check in with them and aid them in the application process
- Encourage THE WHOLE parish to “check-in” with your juniors and seniors to ask how their process is going and “cheering you on”

Struggle – Fear of not making your parents proud of you

How the Church Can Support

- Provide parent opportunities for workshops on parenting, Orthodox parent groups that meet regularly, resources and article for parents on
- Train youth workers to be able sit and talk with youth and help them determine different ways to approach parents in discussions
- Clergy, Youth Workers and Parishioners – Go out of your way to support the POSITIVE things about your youth. Let them know that you see their accomplishment and talents.

Struggle – Fear of not being good enough

How the Church Can Support

- Have more discussions with youth on how God’s sees us, His unconditional love and God’s expectations for us
- Discussions on self-worth

Struggle – Having friends...but not really – Our youth often feel that friendships are hollow. Facebook says you have 1000 friends, but you feel like you really have none. This can make youth feel very alone.

How the Church Can Support

- Provide open discussions with youth about friendship – What is real friendship? During life transitions, how do we handle changes in friendships? How do we handle losing friends? Etc.
- Engage with our youth in social media. Give them real friends and mentors from the church to connect with.
- Sponsor or take you youth to more pan-Orthodox events. This provides more opportunities to make real friends who understand you and where you are at.
- Let your youth know that you are there for them when they are having difficulties with friendships. That they have people they can talk to.
- Provide more opportunities (retreats, events, etc) for youth of the UOC of the USA in your area/deanery. This way our youth can meet one another and forge friendships there.
- Sponsor “Camp Reunions” in your area/city/deanery. This would be for all ages not just youth.

Struggles Within the Church -

Struggle – Small numbers of Youth in the Parish

How the Church Can Support

- Learn to be better at evangelizing in your area to grow the parish
- Teach our youth how to be better at evangelizing

Struggle – Social & Moral Issues (Suicide, LGBTQ, Abortion, Sex Before Marriage, etc.)

Youth often feel as if we do not receive real explanations about the church’s standing on social and moral issues. When we ask questions, the answer is often “Because that is what the church teaches” and nothing else. This is confusing and doesn’t provide us with the knowledge and understanding to discuss these issues or make serious decisions about them. Many of our youth are struggling themselves with these issues. Having no real answers about what the church teaches and why does not help them in their struggle.

How the Church Can Support

- Have REGULAR discussions with our youth on these issues. Discuss and explain, just don’t dictate.
- Help our youth to understand that you can disagree with someone’s decisions or views but that you can still love them and have them in your life.
- When our youth make a choice or make a wrong decision or is in a life struggle – don’t shun or shame them. Treat them with love. Help them through this difficult time. Be Christ to them and for them. Let them know they can turn to the church and not someone else.

Struggle – Negative and Toxic People in the Parish – Parishioners who may have negative attitudes deeply effect our youth’s desire to be in the church family.

How the Church Can Help

- Promote and develop better communication in the parish on all levels.
- Encourage youth and the whole parish to pray for one another – especially those with whom we might have conflict.
- Encourage the parish to find the positives in one another and not the negatives.

Struggle – The children of our clergy meet different struggles than other youth in the church. They often feel as if they are constantly being judged and held to a higher standard than other youth their age. This can create a lot of stress for them and create negative feelings for the church.

In the aftermath of the scandals in the Catholic church, many of our clergy children are questioned about the integrity of their own fathers.

Our clergy children often feel as if they don’t have the same support system being that their “dad” is the parish priest. They often don’t know who they can turn to in times of need or for spiritual guidance.

How the Church Can Support

- Give our clergy kids a break. Clergy and faithful need to support our clergy children and not judge them.
- Have spiritual fathers talk to their parish about the situation in the Catholic church and how we as Orthodox Christians can be compassionate and discuss the issue.
- Help clergy kids connect with spiritual fathers who are not their dad