

Youth Sobor 2022

Struggles and Solutions for our Youth



Growing upon the work of the 2019 Youth Sobor, the 2022 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 – Procrastination – The delegates identified that they struggle with procrastination because of lack of motivation, distractions(phones, friends, social media, choosing meals and partaking), and a cycle of procrastination. This causes stress/anxiety, inability to complete tasks to the best of their potential, stress on relationships with family, friends, teachers and colleagues. Procrastination can and has led our youth into bad/poor situations.

How the Church Can Support –

- Bible studies would help with bringing groups of youth together to discuss struggles and bringing focus to our lives through scripture.
- Parishes could provide times and a quiet space for youth to meet with adults to help them complete work and tasks and work on time management skills
- Having adults that are there to support, motivate and pray for us when we need that extra push – not criticize.

Struggle – Body Image and Appearance – Many of our youth struggle with body image (weight, figure, fitness, clothes, make-up) appearances (material possessions) due to pressures from society. This is a huge and prevalent stress on our young people.

How the Church Can Support –

- Promoting loving yourself the way you are – helping youth to really understand they are created in God’s image and that is beautiful.
- Providing a support group with adults who have struggled with body image issues. The support groups could bring in professionals to work with the group on promoting positive body image. Using the support group to view ourselves through Christ’s eyes and not the world’s.
- Providing one-on-one support for youth who are not comfortable in a group setting. Letting youth know how to reach out to attain this type of support.

Struggle – Being a Failure – The participants identified the following factors as contributors to the feeling of being a failure in their lives:

- **When you are not able to meet your expectation for yourself.**
- **Fear of disappointing others, especially parents and coaches**
- **Comparing yourself to others and their achievements**
- **Feeling like you are unnecessary/unwanted in a situation**
- **Not meeting others' expectations for you**
- **Over-thinking**

How the Church Can Support –

- ALL ADULT FAITHFUL – should take the time to REALLY talk to our youth and check in with them. We realize that there is not always time for real conversations but even a short conversation can be meaningful instead of superficial. If youth tell you they are struggling with school, sports, etc. – don't just tell them "don't worry - it will get better". Take them seriously and listen. If needed, refer them to their spiritual father for further help. (If a young person does talk to you about a serious issue, it is important to understand boundaries and limitations of confidentiality. A young person could be hurt if they confide in you and you share that confidence without letting them know first. However, you as the adult must also always be upfront with our young people about your level of comfort and appropriateness when discussing delicate issues and when you may need to bring in another person or parent to the discussion.)
- Don't put your expectations on them. When our youth share their plans and expectations for the future, encourage them in those goals. For example, they may choose a job that is not financially lucrative such as a social worker, but they are passionate about helping others. Don't focus on the negatives such as low pay or the difficulties of the position, encourage them to serve God where they are being called. It is ok to discuss those challenges but don't discourage.
- Provide parent workshops on how they can support their children on their life's journey from an Orthodox perspective. Bringing in professionals in psychology and vocational development could help parents better understand and help their children at this important time of life.

Struggle – Mental Health – The participants voiced that their parents and other significant adults have difficulty recognizing the state of their mental health. They also struggle in general with mental health and self- harm/comparison to others.

How the Church Can Support –

- Bring in professionals to work with youth on how to stay mentally healthy, perhaps an Orthodox mental health professional. It is important to our youth that this struggle be given a safe place of discussion with the church instead of their only options being outside of the church.
- Providing classes for clergy, youth workers, with mental health professionals discussing how to help our youth maintain their mental health relating to all aspects of life but especially life after Covid and use of social media.
- Make safe spaces in your parishes for youth and parents to come and talk about mental health.
- Have regular prayer services for those struggling with mental health
- Adults need to recognize, it is "ok" to "not be ok". Don't judge us when we are feeling down, or tell us that we need to be happy. When we are struggling with mental health issues,

anxiety/depression/social anxiety – we are not just “being sensitive”. Please recognize that we are working through something and need your support and prayers. If you aren’t sure what to say, just give us a hug and tell us you love us.

How the Church Can Support in all our struggles

- Give us snuggles and hugs (appropriately 😊)
- We need to be reminded about the tools of the church – confession and communion. Regular discussions on the importance of the sacraments in our lives and how the sacraments grow and change with us is vital to our mental health.
- Clergy – please really take the time to get to know each and every one of your youth. It is difficult to come to someone to discuss your struggles when you don’t know them.
- Talk and listen to us – we want to know you and for you to know us! Create a real relationship with us not just one on the surface.
- Be a protective blanket for us.

Struggles Within the Church -

Struggle – The Youth Sobor delegates overwhelmingly identified that church services can often feel too long and that there is an excessive amount of standing still. This can be difficult if you have focusing issues and attention deficit. It can also lead to boredom and not being able to stay in a church mind-set.

Adults also expect small children to be able to sustain these expectations and not take into consideration their developmental level. The sustained standing can make it difficult to focus on the Liturgy itself, participation and singing.



How the Church Can Support

- Don't judge people if they sit down. You may not know why they need to sit. They are building their spiritual and physical stamina just like everyone else.
- Encourage families and youth to attend services regularly so they can build the stamina needed to focus during the longer services.
- We would encourage the clergy and laity of parishes to discuss the pace of services. Liturgical services that are too fast or too slow lose their prayerfulness and make it difficult to focus and participate.
- It is difficult to sustain focus and physical standing when we don't fully understand what is happening during the service or how to "fill the silences." For example, there may be a pause while waiting for the Great Entrance to begin, educating our youth on how to pray and find peace within the silence would help. Silence is not boring but it can be if we don't know how to exercise those muscles.
- It is hard to pray when you don't know what is going on. Our parishes need to provide more extensive instruction and practical opportunities to live and learn about the liturgy.
- Encourage youth to join the choir. Don't just ask them to come. Actually, teach them and mentor them along the way!
- Provide ALL youth with opportunities to be full participants in the liturgy by serving at the altar, holding candles, reading the epistle, being greeters, etc
- Provide teaching liturgies on designated days or special learning workshops where the liturgy is broken down and discussed in an ACTIVE hands-on way not just lecturing.

Struggle – Social & Moral Issues (Suicide, LGBTQ, Abortion, Sex Before Marriage, etc.) – The 2022 Youth Sobor is re-affirming this statement from the 2019 Youth Sobor, it is still very relevant and important.

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 affect our youth's desire to be in the church family. Youth can often feel judged instead of loved. (This statement is modified from the 2019 Youth Sobor).

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.
- Study scripture and share scripture concerning not judging our brother/sister but loving our neighbor.
- If you have nothing nice to say, say nothing at all.
- Be patient, be kind, be respectful – be Christ and live in His image.
- We all make mistakes, help our parishes grow to become forgiving when someone has been judgmental. Go to confession. Go to one another and ask for forgiveness if we have hurt someone with our words and judgements. Be open to accept the apology.

The Youth Sobor participants identified additional struggles that were not fully developed. They are listed here for your consideration:

Struggles in the World:

- Addiction to Social Media
- Frustration with relationships
- Pressure to do more activities
- College preparation
- Gaining more responsibilities
- The existence of homelessness/having more than others/injustice of poverty
- Making choices
- Confidence/self-worth
- Friendships

Struggles in the Church/My Faith

- No youth programs – not enough youth in my parish
- I don't speak Ukrainian – I don't feel welcome
- Not consistent church school
- I feel excluded when half the service is in a language I don't understand
- Don't live near a UOC parish, we have a long commute
- Small attendance at our parishes
- Drama! Parish boards seem stressed and angry
- Not many altar servers
- Parish building is run down and there is a lack of money or the parish will not spend the money to fix it
- Mostly elderly parishioners and no one my age
- I question my faith
- My parish doesn't let me do things because I am "too young"
- Being told the priest can't pray for non-orthodox people
- Being told we love everyone but then condemn others for their beliefs and choices
- Peer pressure to conform in church
- Understanding what is going on and what the words mean
- Staying awake
- Staying silent
- Wishing for opportunities
- Distractions
- Showing up on time
- Adjusting after Covid