



CCEE SYMPOSIUM

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HE WALKED BY THEIR SIDE (Luke 24:15)

Accompanying young people

to freely respond to Christ's call

28 – 31 MARCH 2017

TESTIMONY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Simon Janssen

Dear.....

My name is Simon Janssen, I am 21 years old and I am from the Netherlands.

I would like to share with you my experiences and my vision on accompaniment of the youth in the Catholic Church, and in specific in the Netherlands. I would like to do that in three points. Firstly, I would like to tell you about the situation of the Church in the Netherlands. Next, I would like to share about my life with Christ and the Church so far and I would like to close with my vision and recommendation on accompaniment of the Youth.

1. The situation of the church in the Netherlands.

I'd like to start with some numbers. In 1975, 38% of the Netherlands was Catholic, these days, 23% of the Dutch citizens calls themselves Catholic, but less than 1% of the Dutch citizens visits the Church weekly¹. When I sit in Church and look around, I see mostly grey hair, or no hair at all. Parishes are being merged and the Catholic youth day is, for now, not being organised because of lack of income(and interest).

Nevertheless, some great activities are organised by several different communities and organisations. Such as the teen summer and winter camp of the charismatic renewal, the eastern trilogy and others

2. My experiences in the Dutch Catholic church.

I was born and raised in a catholic family. Evening prayer, going to masses on Sundays and attending catholic summer camps was normal. In my young days, I knew two things; 1. masses were boring; especially until I did my first communion; it was the one hour being punished even though I did nothing wrong. However, after my first communion it was more easy for I was helping the priest on the altar and I could walk around during masses. The second thing I knew was that my catholic parents weren't crazy. So even though I was not doing much with it I knew there was a God and it was not weird to believe in him.

As I became 13, i went to a Teen summer camp organised by the Catholic Charismatic renewal. It was my first encounter with non-pipe organ Christian music, but also my first encounter with personal prayer. People shared what God had done in their lives and for the first time I was invited to make a personal decision to be open to God. During adoration I told Jesus in a very simple prayer; Lord, I want to walk with you, show me what is good. In response God gave me so much happiness in my heart that I knew that it was good.

¹ Kaski Radboud University

Although my own parish didn't organise much in the church, from this day on I started to attend and organise all sorts of catholic activities. Every summer I went to the same camp, and in December I went to the winter version of it. For my parents were in the Emmanuel Community I also attended monthly weekends, and later I started organising them. Every of these activities helped me in four ways: Building catholic friendships by doing crazy stuff (like walking in the forest from 23.00 to 03.00 and getting lost), getting input on several subjects, especially the controversial subject like ethics and theology of the body. Also, the couple that was responsible was interested in everyone and very open. This way I felt really welcome the way I am. And last but not least: The sacraments and prayer time. We had praise, adoration, Priere du freres, possibility to confess and daily masses. These four things were very important to me.

1. The friendships helped me to realise that although, I was the only catholic in high school, I was not alone. These open warm friendships helped me to be myself and I could really rely on my friends, for I knew that we were living the same things. It even got me and my friends to start a catholic praise band.
2. input: At the Camps, or the weekends, we had input about different subjects. This information helped me to understand my own faith, but also to defend it when it was attacked, for example in school.
3. At every weekend or camp, there were people that were not especially responsible for something. They were only there to talk. Whenever you had questions; about faith, about sex, about life or about friendships, they were open for a conversation, and these conversations were confidential. This helped me so much to understand things in my own life. How to implement my faith in daily life
4. Prayer and the sacraments: it learnt me to pray when i was at home, it gave me great joy to praise together or to celebrate mass together and it gave me so much grace.

After this high school, I attended a gap-year program with the Emmanuel community: the Emmanuel school of mission. The most important thing for me is that I was invited to share my faith, in the streets, in classrooms and with other events. To completely strange people I shared how God touched me, and that made it easier for me to share the same to people that are standing nearer to me.

Now, I'm studying in Nijmegen, which has a very good catholic student group, and I am a member of the Emmanuel community. This is a commitment members retake every year. This brings me to my last point: inviting and inviting for commitment. I was welcomed in the Emmanuel Community, and after several events, I was asked to commit and to help out in the community.

So now I have a household; a prayer and sharing group in the community, and I have accompaniment. A one hour talk with someone from the community(also laity). This person helps you to realise where you are standing in your faith and relationship with Christ, but does not give you advice. He (for males) can be seen as a mirror.

I like points; so here is my 6 point recommendation for accompaniment of the youth.

1. we need strong examples; we need to see our parents, accompanateurs, priests, brothers and sisters loving God and we need them to be enthusiastic about Jesus. It shows us that, although the world tells us differently, we are not crazy.

2. We need friendships: people around us that we can rely on, talk to, share our difficulties with and just to have fun. For me when I was sixteen, this helped me to not get drunk with my friends from school, but spend the weekend learning to play praise songs together and sharing about my faith.
3. We need Input: we need information about our faith, about how we can explain catholic teaching and so much more. As I said, this helped me to defend and explain my faith, but as I understood more, It helped me in growing in faith.
4. We need to talk: We need to share our difficulties with persons with experience in life and in faith. As it may be a lot of questions when we are young, later; it becomes a mirror where it can help us to see where we are standing and how our relationship with God is doing.
5. We need prayer and the sacraments. We need to learn to pray, to learn to make time to pray and we need the grace given by God in the sacraments; especially in mass and in in the sacrament of reconciliation.
6. we need to be invited to go to activities that help us grow in faith, and if we are invited, we need to be invited to commit. We live in a society where commitment is rare, because the youth thinks that commitment makes you less free; instead they need to be invited to give themselves in the parish, in communities or at activities to see that commitment gives you so much more.

So i'll repeat the six points:

Examples, friendships, input, talking, prayer and sacraments and we need to be invited, and be invited to commit.

If you have any questions, I'll be very happy to answer them.

Thank you very much.