CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: Good morning. A warm welcome to everyone who is here [in Pope Auditorium] and also to our audience members in the McNally Amphitheater, watching us by video feed this morning. My name is Christine Firer Hinze. I’m a member of Fordham’s faculty of theology and am honored also to be the director of the Ann and Francis Curran Center for American Catholic Studies. On behalf of all of us at the Curran Center and our co-organizers, Peter and Margaret Steinfels of the Center on Religion and Culture, I extend the warmest welcomes.

For the Curran Center, this conference represents the culmination of a series of reflections on generational issues in the Church that has been going on for us since 2006. In one way, this gathering is a finale, but in another way, we see it as a launching pad for a fresh initiative on this important set of issues.

Last evening — and some of you were with us — we considered the data about twenty-somethings in relation to the Catholic Church through the lens of thoughtful social science. In that discussion, we saw that the “who” of twenty-somethings today is heterogeneous. This cohort is culturally, politically, ethnically, religiously diverse. Their expressions with relationship to faith are also diverse.
We also saw that the data is something on which the thoughtful social scientists don’t always agree. That made for some interesting conversation last night — and most importantly, of course, how we interpret that data.

Today’s series of panels and discussions will examine some of the key experiences and challenges in all areas — social, relational, cultural, sexual, spiritual — that shape the ways twenty-somethings respond and relate to the Church.

What I’m asked to do this morning, before we start our first panel, is a series of things. First, I want to do some thank-yous. Secondly, I want to reflect for a few minutes, in relationship to last night, about what it is I see us doing today. Thirdly, I’ll do some housekeeping issues, organizational issues.

We are deeply, deeply grateful to those many people who have made this gathering possible: Fordham University, the directors and administrators and the Board of Advisers of the Center for Religion and Culture and the Curran Center; in terms of working for this particular program, most especially, at the Center for Religion and Culture, Patricia Bellucci, the program manager, and at the Curran Center, Maria Terzulli, our administrator; and the many, many people here at Lincoln Center helping us with the logistical facilities, technical, food, everything; our student and faculty volunteers, all of those people without whom this would not be happening today.

We are especially honored to have with us and to be able to thank in person today representatives of two families whose amazing financial generosity has made this conference and our ongoing work possible. Among us today are Mr. John Curran, of the Curran Center and the John and Connie Curran Foundation, and Mr. and Mrs. Jack and Jeanette Walton and some of their family members. We want to especially thank them. (Applause) It’s really neat that they are with us. If you see them, you can thank them individually in person. Thank you so much.

What are we doing here today? As you know, we hope to deal today with the obvious issues, but also to touch the chords of the not-so-obvious and maybe more important aspects of these two, might I say, mysterious realities. Who are twenty-somethings? But also, what is Church? I think there’s a mystery on both sides of this relationship.

A Scripture text kept coming to mind as I was thinking about these introductory remarks. It’s from 2 Corinthians, where St. Paul says, “We hold a treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”
The subject we are touching here will be the topic of lively debate about issues and so
forth, but this subject concerns our hearts, as well as our minds; love, as well as
knowledge. As relationships always are, the one we’re examining today can’t be easily or
simply defined or captured. Part of the story of young people and the Church concerns
the disappointment and the frustrations that institutions evoke. The clay pot of the
Church and its people are not only fragile; they are cracked — cracked pots. I include
myself.

But I propose that it’s the unfathomable beauty and truth of the divine, refracted however
fragilely, however imperfectly or partially in the lives of our young people and in the
old/new, lost/found, sinful/saved ecclesia gathering called Church, that is the ultimate
source of a longing to connect — and we know the word “religion” — religare means “to
connect” — that continues, I think, to draw them and us to each other, young people and
the Church, those of us who are older and those of us who are younger. There is a longing
to connect, to religare. Yes, yes, yes, we will be talking about the issues, the institutions,
the data, and that’s all very important. But it’s the priceless treasure, it’s the inexhaustible
mystery, it’s the ultimate joy and surprise of encountering the fountain of love and life
that each generation of believers so cherishes. That’s why we stick with an institution
that’s a cracked pot, and the institution sticks with us who are cracked pots as well. That
is what each generation so cherishes and so passionately hopes will not be lost to the next.

So the Church, the ecclesia, is the gathering of a motley crew that spans the centuries and
the world, who have repeatedly found themselves found in and by a great love, a love that
Christians discover as the God of Jesus Christ.

This poignant and powerful trope has animated every detail of the planning of this
conference and all those who have worked on it, and I hope you will discover it percolating
in everything that today holds.

Now some organizational details: Throughout the day, we are going to solicit your
questions and your comments. In your program and in the back and all around we have
these little yellow sheets. We are very, very eager to have you share your perspectives,
your questions, your comments. During the sessions, you may want to write them — and
we encourage you to write them — to the speakers. You might want to direct it to the
topic, to a panel member, so forth. It says you can direct it to a certain place or person.
Our student assistants will be collecting these. At the end of each session, we will have a
short question-and-answer. We will use the cards. Peter Steinfels — the intrepid Peter
Steinfels — has a mobile microphone, and he will attempt to give a couple of people a chance.

You see the schedule. It's very tight, and we want to stay on time. We moderators will do our part, and the speakers by staying in their times. We will beg your patience; all the questions won't be answered. However, we will be doing serious follow-up on the website for the “Lost” conference, inviting our speakers, our panelists, and others to make commentary on your questions and comments. So you will see more of what you do today. There are red boxes in Pope, gold boxes in McNally for putting these in throughout the day. Please, please, please fill up the boxes today so that we can continue the conversation on the website and in other venues.

All these sessions are being videotaped. They will be posted in about a week.

Administrative announcements: We have books by many of our speakers that are on sale. If you are here in Pope, turn to the right and you will see the table. If you’re in McNally, you can come through the passageway over to the Lincoln Center side. There are a number of books by our authors relevant to our theme. We encourage you to take a look at those and consider purchasing them.

Without further ado, we will go into our first session on time. Good morning, everyone up on the stage. We’re so delighted to have with us this fine group that will start us off and be the model panel for all to follow. And I can say something to you about that.

What we have in each of our panels — the first four in particular — are two well-known personages who we thought would bring some really interesting data, material, insights, background, and so forth to our topic, and then in each case, two respondents who are close to the experience of twenty-somethings, who are living that out or have recently lived that out themselves, in different ways, shapes, and forms. We asked our respondents to come ready with a couple of things to say, but also simply to respond to what the panelists have to say. So there is an element of spontaneity we worked in here, which we hope will make it snappy and interesting. We appreciate everyone’s willingness to go with that.

This session blends from last night into today by continuing to look at what’s going on with the world of twenty-somethings, as it’s both studied and experienced by diverse groups of this cohort: “On Your Own?” Student loans, job searches, finding friends and housing, the parish and social scene, looking at the various challenges facing twenty-somethings, and what might be the implications for religious communities.
For our panel speakers today — and what we will do is have very brief introductions for each session, relying on the fact that you have your program with a full bio of each speaker. So I’ll just give a very brief introduction. I will introduce all four of our speakers. Then we will have a little discussion ourselves and then we’ll take some questions.

We’ll start with David Campbell, who is the John Cardinal O’Hara Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame and the founding director of the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy. He is also coauthor of *American Grace*, which is the book that is out there for sale, for one thing, but also his coauthor, Bob Putnam, was on our stage last night. So we welcome him.

Carmen Maria Cervantes is the executive director of Instituto Fe y Vida, an organization dedicated to empowering young Hispanics for leadership in Church and society. She is an international speaker with extensive experience in Pastoral Juvenil Ministry with Hispanic youth and young adults, and many other important leadership roles in the Church.

Our two respondents: Jennifer Sawyer is a 2009 alumna of Fordham College, Rose Hill. She currently works in television production. Our second respondent, Greg Eirich, is lecturer in discipline at Columbia University. He teaches courses in sociology and other social sciences. He is a Ph.D. from Columbia and a 2000 alumnus of Fordham College, Rose Hill — and also the recent father of a baby —

**GREG EIRICH**: You’ll hear all about it.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE**: Okay. So a variety of life experiences, a variety of perspectives. We’re eager to get going. I was thinking of the timeframe. It’s sort of like texting 160. After 160, you can’t put anything else into your text message. I will be a mean timekeeper. I’ll tell you, one more minute, and I’ll tell you time is up. Without further ado.

**CARMEN CERVANTES**: I’m here to talk a little bit about the Latino-Hispanic perspective on this issue that we are dealing with. I will start by setting our a very small historical and pastoral framework as a contribution after the different insights that we received yesterday, on which I want to jump and refute several of the things that were being said. Then I will go into explaining a little bit about Pastoral Juvenil and why it is so important in this country and so misunderstood. Finally, I will deal with the study area,
the academic area.

We were told yesterday that when a generation passes, Hispanics are more similar to the general population. In certain ways, yes, and in certain ways, it’s not. We know now that from the first generation, the immigrants, we are about 75 percent Catholic. There is one generation in the middle that now is being called 1.5. They are the kids that arrive in this country very young and are raised in this country, but who really are a mix of both cultures. We don’t know how many of the young adults of that population are Catholic. But when we go to the second generation, it’s about 62 to 65 percent Catholic, and when we go to the third and more, it’s only 50 percent Catholic.

One of the greatest influxes that we had in the Latino population has been in the last 20 to 30 years. That really brought a very large influx of young adults. With that, we brought the Pastoral Juvenil to the United States. Pastoral Juvenil is a different way of dealing with the evangelization, catechetical formation, and pastoral work of youth and young adults. There is a big problem for us, because there doesn’t exist anything similar in the mainstream population. We didn’t even realize the differences until around 1996, when our first books came out bilingually and we started to be able to dialogue and to see where the confrontation came.

The main reason is that the United States is very, very organized according to the schooling. You go to the junior high, senior high, university, campus ministry. In Latin America, we don’t have that kind of separation. We have the separation by age at eighteen. So our ministry runs from fifteen to sixteen, to twenty-four, twenty-six, until people marry. It’s an accompaniment during that time of maturation.

Another big difference is that here, when you are dealing with youth, you have the youth minister making the decisions and it’s a top-down ministry. The Pastoral Juvenil is done like that. It’s a peer ministry. It started in the 1940s. It really took a very different wind, very, very strong after Vatican II, in which the youth and young adults were seen as laity in the same status as the adults, we will say, with the same vocation and mission. What happens is that Pastoral Juvenil is a peer ministry, is led by young adult leaders; it is not led by ministers. The adults have a function of being advisers to the leaders that are the ones that do the ministry. But the ministry doesn’t have any division of ages.

Here in the States, because of the way we are organized and now the laws and all this, we are always in a continuous clash between our tradition, our way of doing the ministry, and the structures in the parish and the diocese. That has meant that for many of our young
people, they are not well received in their ministry; they are not understood. I have still to see one parish bulletin that talks about Pastoral Juvenil, even though there are parishes where there are 120 young adults meeting every week. It’s a ministry that has been completely under the radar, not understood. Finally, two days ago, I think we got our first official validation of this ministry by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, after twenty-something years of being in dialogue with them.

Setting this framework is very important, because this is the place where our young Latinos are, Pastoral Juvenil. They are not in the universities; they are not in Catholic schools. A Notre Dame study on Catholic schools revealed that only 5 percent of the students in Catholic schools are Hispanic. There is a plan to double that, to 10 percent, in ten years. But when the ten years come, we will be around 40 percent.

More into the topic of today: the challenges to going to universities and to socialize and to find the networks are very, very strong for our people, particularly for those that come from very poor families, poor neighborhoods, and where the social situation is not only the Latino or non-Latino culture; it’s really the social class and the economic possibilities. What happens is that many people, for example, go two years to the community college. When they arrive at the university, all the different friendships are already set. You don’t enter. So you tend to auto-marginalize.

The other big problem is the conversations. What the mainstream young adults talk about — vacations, the business they are going to enter, the type of profession they are going to have — these are prohibited for many of the Latino young people. Their dreams or their possibilities are in other places. Very, very quickly, they feel unprepared, and they tend to work among themselves and to dialogue among themselves. There is not a willingness to open friendships; it is extremely, extremely difficult from both sides. So this is something that happens in many of our campuses.

Also the advertising or the reaching-out to the Latinos in the inner-city high schools, where they go, in the rural areas where they go is not done by most of the Catholic universities. If you don’t have a tradition of a Catholic university, if you don’t belong to the middle-upper classes in Latin America, where you are accustomed to go to Catholic schools or to Catholic universities, you don’t look for them here. It’s just something completely off your radar. That’s something that is imperative if what we were hearing yesterday, that the Latinos are here to save the Church — we are not here to save the Church. We are Church, and we are struggling to be Church.
I remember one time when I was telling some people that we need to be reaching out, and the lady just said, “Carmen, leave that to the next generation. We have been just trying to enter into the Church, first to have a Mass in Spanish, then to move it from the basement into the church, then to move into having First Communion preparation in our language so that we can teach our own kids. So we have been all the time, for years and years and years, trying to be in the institution, in the Church. We are Church, but we are not allowed to be Church. Now you tell us that we have to go out? Tell the next generations. We are tired, trying to be in.”

Well, this is the story. This is the story that repeats one place and another and another. There are beautiful exceptions — beautiful exceptions. There are places in which our people have been extremely well treated. But it’s not a generality. So the effort for our young people to be in the Church is double and triple.

But what I can tell you is that they are not in the doors of the Church. They are saying, “We want to be here.” Because we have this gift of Pastoral Juvenil, in which they have the vocation, they know they are the missionary Church, and they know that they are doing the peer ministry, they are eager to do it. We have kind of the opposite situation than the mainstream. In the mainstream, you want to reach out to people who don’t want to be there. In our case, we want to be there and the parishes do not want us. It’s really an opposite situation in several locations. (Applause)

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: Thank you very much. David Campbell.

DAVID CAMPBELL: I greatly appreciate the opportunity to be here today. If I may, I just want to start with a quick story that might set the stage here. As was mentioned in the introduction, I teach at Notre Dame. There are a couple of things you should know about me. First, I’m actually not Catholic, and secondly, I’m actually not even an American. I’m a Canadian. With those two facts in mind, here’s the story.

A few years ago, I was invited to speak at a roundtable on campus there at Notre Dame on Catholics in American politics. So I began with exactly that description of myself: “I’m neither a Catholic nor am I an American, but if you’d like to hear what a non-Catholic, non-American has to say about Catholics in American politics, stick around.” That’s what passes for a joke in political science. At least I meant it as one. But one of the reporters from the campus newspaper was there and apparently she didn’t quite catch my message, because the headline story the next day in Notre Dame’s student paper was about the roundtable and it began like this: “Professor David Campbell, neither a Catholic nor an
American, said yesterday dot-dot-dot.” So here I am.

If I could, I would like to pick up on a theme from what Carmen was saying, but sort of on the opposite side of the increasingly diverse experience that American Catholics are having as Latinos become a larger and larger share of the American Catholic population. In our book *American Grace* Bob Putnam and I detail how the old line, which Martin Luther King and many others have repeated, that the most segregated hour in America is 11:00 on Sunday morning, remains true for most Americans, but is less and less true, actually, of American Catholics. While nobody wants to be overly utopian and painting a picture of everybody just getting along in parishes that are experiencing these changes as more Latinos come onto the Catholic scene and occupy a greater share of the seats — we heard yesterday about parishes that will split the Masses. Of course, we’re hearing about that here, too. In our book we actually detail some examples of those tensions that come from that.

But it is also the case — and this is sort of the glass half-full side of the story — that American Catholics are actually the group that is most likely to report worshiping in a diverse congregation. That is especially true for Catholics under the age of thirty. So for all of the talk — and we’ll have much of this talk today, and we certainly did last night — of young people leaving the Church or not connecting with the Church, those that are there are actually having an experience that is exposing them to what will be for all Americans the new reality in at least a generation or so, as we become a nation that is increasingly diverse along, especially, ethnic and linguistic grounds. I think that’s an important note to make about the twenty-somethings in today’s Church.

But I also want to talk about — you can think of that as the glass half-full side of the story — the glass half-empty side of the story and that is, of course, the fact that there is a tremendous decline in the Church among young people today. There was a lot of debate last night over whether or not people should be optimistic or pessimistic about the state of the Church and whether or not it’s connecting with young people and the potential for reconnecting young people with the Church. Even though I generally try to be an optimist, on that one I probably come down a little more on the pessimistic side.

The one aspect I want to focus on today that was mentioned last night, but wasn’t elaborated on — so I think it’s worth noting today — is the fact that of all the reasons that we find for people turning away from religion, one that has increasingly become the case, and is a surprise to at least some folks, is politics. Beginning in the late 1980s, early 1990s, there was a sudden acceleration in the percentage of Americans, especially young
Americans, who began to tell pollsters that they had no religion. In the United States of America, that is a startling change. The percentage of Americans who said they were “nones” — not n-u-n-s (I see some sisters in the front here, so I’ll be careful in how I say that), but rather the n-o-n-e-s kind of nones, those who say “none” when asked, “What’s your religion?” — they suddenly began to increase. They had been at a level of 3, 5, 6 percent for a long time, kind of as long as we had measurement, and then, bam, the late 1980s, early 1990s come, rapid acceleration. Why?

In American Grace, we describe that there’s a lot of evidence that what has been happening is that many young Americans and many young Catholics have turned away from organized religion because they are uncomfortable with the mingling of religion and politics. That’s an interesting development and something worth noting.

Let me just pause for a moment and remind us that simply saying, especially in an American context, that you have no religion doesn’t necessarily mean that you have completely abandoned all religious beliefs. Most of those nones, the nothing-in-particulars, actually do say they believe in God, they believe in heaven, they believe in hell. They are just uncomfortable with organized religion, and in the case of those who were raised Catholic, presumably that would mean they are uncomfortable with the Catholic Church specifically.

But here’s the irony. You might think, as I describe that development, that it just means that it’s a lot of liberals, political liberals, that are turned away from religion. And for the most part, there is some evidence of that, especially outside of, maybe, the Catholic population. But the story is actually far more complicated. When we talk about terms like “liberal” and “conservative,” we actually mean the policy positions that people take. That young group that is turning away from religion because, we argue, of their view that religion and politics, partisan politics in particular, are connected or intermingled — they are actually more prolife on abortion than are their parents’ generation. That’s especially true for Catholics. Now, to call them ardently prolife would not be quite accurate, because, in most cases, they are willing to grant abortions in some limited circumstances, but they are certainly far less in favor of abortion rights than are their parents’ generation. So that puts them more on the conservative side of the political spectrum.

On the other hand, they are also warm toward homosexuals, accepting of homosexual rights, and specifically willing to accept the idea of gay marriage. That puts them on the left side of the political spectrum. What does that mean? It suggests that the usual bundle of political positions, at least on those two big issues — and those are the issues, abortion
and homosexuality, that have divided us along religious lines politically — the standard way of putting those together, prolife on abortion, anti-same sex marriage on the other hand, doesn’t resonate with the Millennials. That’s now how they see the world. They actually don’t necessarily see those two issues as connected to one another.

In one sense, this is nothing new. Catholics have long had a unique blend of the way they see the world, and the issues that they emphasize and the positions that they take don’t necessarily line up with the way partisan politics is lined up. You, of course, have teachings that the death penalty is wrong but, at the same time, have an emphasis on some other things that might be considered more conservative politically.

So the message that I see from the data is not that the Church ought to move away from taking positions or that it ought not to be prophetic in the sense of trying to instruct the flock on what they believe the Word is. But what they ought to do is be very, very leery of anything that can be construed as partisan politics, because that seems to be what many Americans, especially young Americans and especially young Catholics, have responded to. Thank you. (Applause)

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: We encourage you to go ahead and start writing your questions, either on the index cards that have been provided or the yellow sheets. If you need a yellow sheet, raise your hand and one of our helpers will give you one. We’ll go to our respondents. Jen Sawyer?

JENNIFER SAWYER: I’m lucky enough to have the chance to speak from my own experience, because I am a twenty-something. I’m twenty-three. I graduated from Fordham in 2009. So to be able to share what I’m personally going through and the personal challenges that are impacting people of my age group is a real opportunity.

I think I embrace the title “twenty-something” because it accurately suggests in-betweeness, a sort of limbo period, beginning the day after you receive your diploma and consider, or panic about, those items on your life’s to-do list — find a job, move out, make a lot of money, meet my soul mate, get married, and have babies. When this is complete, I may feel fully like an adult. But until then, I’m in between. Throw in being Catholic and complicate things further.

It’s not that I’m resisting adulthood, as many critical of my age range may think, but more like the odds to achieve it are against me. For those of us in the work world, our first foray into the realm of employment presents a number of challenges. While we left college with
bright-eyed idealism from years of hearing that we could achieve absolutely anything we set our minds to, we’re soon hit with the realities of being on the bottom of the totem pole, maneuvering through entry-level jobs that leave us wondering if we’re actually using our degrees.

The economic challenges to Millennials continue to be overwhelming. My classmates and I had the well-timed fortune of graduating in 2009, as the economy crashed. Armed with tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debt, I began an entry-level job about a month after graduating, lived on friends’ couches for nearly two months before saving enough money to move into an apartment. To this day, I still have brilliant, talented peers who have yet to find a full-time job and are finding it increasingly difficult to remain optimistic.

Geographically, living and working in New York City has been my biggest blessing and curse. I have everything I could possibly want here, from the best restaurants and bars and theaters to museums, music, art, and so on. But socially it’s really difficult to keep balance in a city known for its cutthroat get-ahead mentality. I could easily find somebody to go to a bar with, to hook up with, to see a movie, but if I’m looking to develop a meaningful relationship or even spend time with a person who understands or shares my beliefs, it becomes overwhelmingly difficult.

Just last month, my roommate’s boss asked her where she was headed on her lunch break. Contemplating what to say, she decided to be honest, explained that it was a Catholic feast day, the Immaculate Conception, and that she was planning on going to Mass. “Oh,” her boss said, unsure of how to respond. “You mean you actually believe that?”

One friend even referred to herself as “a closeted Catholic,” for fear of being labeled as something other than the intelligent, open-minded professional she is. In my office, I’m something of the token Catholic. Some coworkers ask questions out of curiosity, which leaves me with the responsibility of being a representative of my faith and the discomfort of feeling the need to defend it.

Challenges in finding a religious community are substantial. I have been and continue to be somewhat of a church shopper, splitting my Sundays at a few different parishes. Though painfully aware that I cannot re-create my undergraduate on-campus Church experience, I continue to look for that similar richness, a welcoming, inclusive spiritual environment, a thriving, diverse community, inspirational and theologically sound preaching, and an emphasis on social concern.
This turned out to be far more difficult than anticipated, as I went from church to church, wondering why I seemed to be one of the only members of the congregation under thirty and asking, where is everybody else my age? More and more of my friends are starting to describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” a phrase so trendy, it has earned its own acronym, referring to those who believe in living a life of faith without organized religion. Those whom I know who have described themselves in this way have various experiences with Church: a gay colleague who has been deeply hurt by attitudes towards his sexual orientation just stopped going, a female friend discouraged by what she views as an inferior role of women, others who felt so overwhelmed by personal hardships or financial difficulties that they find it nearly impossible to find God. Others are unable to reconcile faith with political beliefs, as David elaborated on. Still others are just indifferent.

Ultimately, this just points to a lack of connectedness. People have difficulties trying to have a relationship with something that doesn’t seem to understand them, especially when everybody seems to be talking about us and not to us, which is so often the case. What I want to come across is that I am somebody who is in the midst of change - twenty-somethings are in the midst of change — and I want a religious community to recognize and embrace that, meet me where I am, and perhaps even change and grow with me. (Applause)

GREG EIRICH: As Jen did a great job of pointing out, the transition to adulthood for twenty-somethings is increasingly uncertain, uneven, incomplete, in general in flux. There is a question of what the Church can do about that. I want to pick up on the last thing that Jen was talking about, which is the religious challenges that are involved in it. I think it’s fitting in some ways that Jen is at the lower end of the twenty-year-olds and I’m off the charts, out of the twenty-year-olds. I’m a couple of years past it, so I’m an honorary twenty-year-old for today. But I can think back to it, I think.

From that perspective, when I’m thinking about something that is important that maybe we haven’t mentioned so far, I think about the strengths of the Church, some of its, maybe, core competencies. There is a possibility, I think, that the Church could build on its foundations of actually having amazing ceremonies and celebrations of transitions that adults go through in their twenties. I’m thinking here of weddings and of baptisms.

You might say, “Well, Greg, we hear nobody gets married in their twenties anymore, and nobody has kids in their twenties.” I’m actually a quantitative sociologist. I went and
looked at the data. It turns out, actually, that a third of people who identify as Catholic get married in their twenties, and the majority of them have kids. So that’s actually a substantial portion of the population.

From my perspective, that seems like low-hanging fruit that the Church ought to take advantage of. These are folks that, although they themselves may be fragile Catholics or lapsed Catholics, are surrounded by Catholics. They have Catholic moms and dads. They have Catholic grandmas and grandpas. They have Catholic sisters and brothers. They have potential spouses who may be more Catholic than they are, in the identification sense. So from that perspective, it seems like that’s something that they might be open to.

You know how they say that you only get one chance to make a first impression? I would say you also only get one chance to make a second impression. From that perspective, these are opportunities where the Church can really make a new impression upon folks who, for whatever reason, have fallen away from their Catholic faith.

Let me give you a little example of that. Here’s the Camille part of my life. My wife and I recently had a daughter, named Camille. We went and had her baptized a few months ago, when there was no snow and snow was a distant possibility. We were amazed at how well it went. It was wonderful. And I think it was wonderful for a couple of reasons.

One, it was wonderful because the baptism was actually integrated into the Mass. It was a family Mass. Everybody was there. It was lively. There were lots of kids there. From that perspective, it really opened it up to the community as a whole. It really highlighted the diversity of the community. If it had just been our twenty family and friends, it would have been much more closed in. The fact that it happened in that context was great. In addition, as the baptism happens, there is a moment when the priest brings the baby up to the altar, and it’s a Lion King moment — he holds her up and he goes, “Please welcome the newest member of the Christian community,” and everyone claps. Camille didn’t cry, which was great. So it worked out for everyone. It immediately highlights that community that we are all sort of searching for.

Secondly, after the Mass — a lot of our friends and family are in that category of lapsed Catholic or fragile — they came up to us and said, “Your priest was so welcoming, so generous in how he talked to us.” I think this isn’t by accident. I think the pastor can look out and see the six rows of people in suits and figure out that maybe something is a little bit different. He then sort of played, I think, to the strengths of the Church from that perspective. This goes to David’s point. What they seemed to highlight was the fact that
he focused on the common struggle to be a good person as a Catholic and to follow Jesus, and seemed to shy away from putting it in explicitly political or partisan terms. That’s what people seemed to respond to. So that was sort of an amazing experience. I think this priest has the right idea and, in some ways, is serving as an ambassador to those Catholics who come to these services with a second chance. I think the more the Church could do that and be open to even those limited experiences where people come in contact with it, it might go a very long way. (Applause)

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: This is the model panel. Everybody stayed precisely in their time. Thank you so much. We have now time to entertain some questions. We would like to start by letting the panelists, perhaps, make some comments.

Carmen, I was very struck, listening to the younger people, about the possibility or the potential connection that doesn’t seem to be there about the resources of approaching young people as Church that you described and what we are hearing looked for over here, but not always found. Did you want to make any comments on what you heard from the respondents or from David?

CARMEN CERVANTES: I agree with you. My children say exactly the same — “Mommy, we are the only ones here of this age bracket.” That doesn’t happen in the Latino community, because there are a lot of young people that go to Mass. But what happens is the possibility of creating in a small community, a small faith community with people of your own age — I think one of the biggest problems in our Church is the very institutional, very large, very impersonal part. When you have six friends with whom you reflect on the Scriptures and you can do it in your home, then the Mass on Sunday, even though it is exactly the same Mass, has a completely different meaning.

What Pastoral Juvenil does is something that a small faith community can do for you. You have problems with socializing, with this, with that, but if you create that intentional community and you invite particular people, even if you meet once a month — I remember when I was in the university and after university, when a small faith community met once a month. I think the United States has an illness of weekly meetings, and that really kills everything. You have to be there every week. That’s a lot. That doesn’t mean that your reflection and your bonding is stronger. If you are not there, it is considered that you are not committed. But if you have a larger span and you only meet once a month with your friends and you meet for half a day, and you have good reflection and then you go to Mass together and you go to a restaurant, and you participate in a small faith community, you will find that you can create that Church community that is missing for you. Eventually you can help other ones. So that’s my
reaction to what you said.

**JENNIFER SAWYER:** And I think that’s so important, taking that creative approach and reaching out to young people in a different way. I’m part of a young adult CLC, which is a Christian Life Community, and we do have, not weekly, bimonthly meetings in which we faith-share and talk about the challenges that we’re experiencing. It’s so nice to share that with somebody else. I think if there were more opportunities that my age group knew about and realized that could really help us in feeling more a part of the community, it would be really incredible.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE:** David, did you have any reflections back to what you have heard so far?

**DAVID CAMPBELL:** One thing that I would note — I was talking about the rise of the nones or the nothing-in-particulars. Of course, a large share of that group would be people who were raised Catholic, or at least they were raised nominally Catholic. Last night we heard some debate over whether or not we should view those people as potentials to come back to Church. Are they Catholics in name, and therefore still sort of connected to the Church in some sense? The other side was — Bob Putnam was making this point — it’s really hard to see how these people are Catholic in any way, shape, or form, when they never, ever attend Mass and in no other way seem to have any interaction with the institution.

I suppose I would square the circle and say that it’s important to note that these young folks who are not necessarily connected with organized religion, and the Catholic Church in particular, are not totally lost to religion. So maybe the way to think of them is not as former Catholics who just need to be brought back to the Church they might actually consider to be their home, but rather as people who are comfortable with at least some religion and need to be introduced to the Catholic Church. Maybe it’s just something that is so foreign to them that it would be a new introduction rather than a reintroduction.

That might be an important way to think about exactly how this group can be reached, which I think would lead to a different set of outreach programs and such than if you were trying to reach people who were already Catholic. Think of them as not Catholic, but still sort of fertile ground and potentially at home in the Church.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE:** Greg or Jennifer, any follow-up comments?
I appreciate, David, your comment. I notice, in listening to our two great respondents, that we have two people who are pretty engaged in being in the Catholic Church right now, which is different from a number of your peers. Maybe that would be a question for the respondents. Jen, you talked about it briefly in passing. But what is your take on the large number of your peers who are disaffected? Just a little further commentary on that and then we’ll go to audience questions.

**JENNIFER SAWYER:** I am part of an age range where there is a lot of uncertainty, a lot of ignorance, and a lot of just indifference. I think it’s difficult to be able to have colleagues and have the topic of faith come up, because it just feels like something that you don’t talk about. It’s still a very taboo subject. I think, even though I am very involved with it and I have friends who are very involved with it, it’s a little intimidating when you try to talk about it with somebody else.

David talked so much about the relationship of faith and politics. People think of the Catholic Church and they think, “Oh, they’re against homosexuals. They have this outlook towards women.” They put all of these things above the beauty of the faith and above the real idea of openness and love and solidarity. I feel like if I could get that across to a lot of my friends that would be really great.

**GREG EIRICH:** In preparation for this panel, I did poll as many lapsed Catholics as I know, which is a lot. I would sort of categorize their responses into two buckets. I’m not sure about the share of each of them. On the one hand, I think there are people who think of “The Church” and think of what the Pope says and what the media reports as “The Church.” Those are maybe the political messages that come across about official stances towards things. A number of people do feel so uncomfortable with the official stances of the Church — to some part of their core identity, that causes sort of a rupture, whether it’s along the lines of sexuality or whatever.

On the other hand, though, I think there are Catholics for whom it’s a micro-level process. It’s their experience when they go to church, not just for weddings and baptisms, but for funerals, Christmas — a lot of times they are coming every so often, almost like checking in: Has anything changed? Is this what I remember? From that perspective, they are so skittish and so on edge about it, because this is what they came to move away from, that if anything pops in the Mass that reminds them of negative experiences that they had in the past, it’s, like, okay, I’m going to go away for a while and wait it out again.

From that perspective, I think there is a sense that the response could either be official
changes at the Church level, at the hierarchy level, or changes at the local pastoral level. I think probably one of those is more movable than the other, and that would be an area where I think people would be responsive. They’re willing to give it a shot. It’s just that their expectations are very low, and so they need a chance to have those expectations exceeded.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE**: That sounds like liminality, David, which was discussed briefly last night, the people who are moving in and out, on the borders.

**DAVID CAMPBELL**: For those who don’t know the term, a liminal would be like Mr. Spock, half-human, half-Vulcan. In religious terms, it would be somebody who is sometimes a none and sometimes whatever — Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic. It depends on when you catch them, what they are thinking of, which means that they are sort of nominally of one faith and they are sort of nominally a none. They are kind of in between. That is different from saying they are ardent atheists.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE**: One of the students in our class at Fordham filled out an information sheet the first day of class: “Religious affiliation, if you want to tell us,” and they filled it out, “Semi-Catholic.” That sounds like liminality.

All right, we will address just a few of the really good questions that are coming up, but we would like to start by seeing if we could get a couple from the floor. Peter is going to venture out with the microphone. It’s sort of a David Letterman kind of thing. If you have a question that you would like to speak, very, very briefly, to the panel, could you raise your hand, and we’ll give it a try?

**PETER STEINFELS**: Brief questions are better than speeches.

**QUESTION**: I just have a comment about the way that Mass is said and presented to us. I think the Catholic Church also needs to examine the beliefs they preach, as well as how the material is presented. Mass is boring. We sit; we stand; we recite prayers like robots. There is no break to really understand what is being said. I think twenty-somethings are just not feeling anything when at Mass. When I’m at Mass, I don’t feel God. I want to feel God. It seems like being Catholic today has more to do with following Mass rules and protocol than having a reflective experience of feeling God. I’m finding that I feel God more in my yoga class than I do at Catholic Mass. Not being able to feel God has made me actually question my beliefs and wonder if what I’ve been taught all these years is actually true.
PETER STEINFELS: Thank you very much.

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: Should we get one more, perhaps?

PETER STEINFELS: Why don’t we? Let’s go back to the back.

QUESTION: I would like to direct this to Jennifer and Greg. Greg, you just gave a very nice talk about your daughter’s baptism and the reaction of your friends. Jennifer, you just spoke about church shopping, as you so nicely put it. Do you think, with the way demographics have changed, with the young adult population, that there is need for the Church to reevaluate who it considers a young adult in light of looking for jobs and later marriage and that kind of thing? It seems to me that the Church recognizes adults only when they’re married and they have children.

PETER STEINFELS: We’ll get one more. Please be brief.

QUESTION: The audience is obviously well over the twenties here. I just was sitting back listening to a few things last night and today about winning back twenties. Maybe we have to rethink how we envision them, and instead of trying to drag them back to being overly concerned for the Latin language or gluten hosts, we might look at the diaspora that might drag the Church out to the gentile world and make it a little more flexible and welcoming, so they can see a vision of God like that.

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: All right. Let’s hear some responses from our panel.

JENNIFER SAWYER: I would just like to respond to your first comment about not feeling God in Mass. I think there’s so much room for innovation within the liturgy that many people aren’t taking advantage of. I think about a Mass that I went to recently at Church of the Ascension on 107th between Broadway and Amsterdam. They have a jazz Mass. It’s wonderful. There is a bass, there are drums, and the music is just so beautiful that it draws such a great young, vibrant population. The preaching is phenomenal. It’s at 6:00 p.m. It’s really catered more towards a younger community. I think that’s just so fantastic. If more people were to recognize these little things, such as moving the Mass later in the day or trying something new with the music, it can really make such a huge difference.

It’s difficult to feel God in Church when you don’t feel that connectedness. It’s not to be
said that you can’t feel God in yoga. You can feel God anywhere. You can see God in anything. You can find God in anything. But if somebody is going to Mass and not feeling God, that’s a problem. That needs to be addressed.

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: I want to interject one question that came on the sheets that was directed to Carmen, because I think it fits into this general conversation. The question is, what can Anglo young adults learn from Latino young adults about grassroots organizing and involvement in the kind of efforts to be Church? How can we better integrate and share and learn from each other?

CARMEN CERVANTES: I think the first thing is to recognize that the way we live Catholicism is valid and it is fine, and even though it is different than in the United States, it is a valuable and a valued way of doing it. If you are not considered a good Catholic living the faith as you are living it, unless you are going to be sharing something with the other ones and saying, “And this is something that I want to give you. This is a gift” — I think the message that young adults receive in the parishes and the dioceses very, very frequently is, “You need to be integrated into the Anglo community. You are separating the Church. By being together, you are building a parallel Church. You have to come here.”

First of all, there is no equivalent in the Anglo community for the young adult Pastoral Juvenil that we have. So what they intend to do is to bring these young adult workers, usually in the lower socioeconomic strata, together with the youth and try to integrate them. It’s like mixing water and oil. You have workers who are doing their best to succeed here, and in addition, they are sending some money or paying their families, for their parents, for their brothers and sisters. Mixing them with adolescents who are there because poppy and mommy were able to pay for the retreat or for this or for that is impossible. So first you need to validate that and then it will be a dialogue among people that are bilingual that can do the exchange.

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: Helpful. Thank you.

GREG EIRICH: To the second question, which was asking about entering adulthood as defined by marriage and kids, I would add that I think that’s a very valid point. I think it opens up possibilities for how the Church might try to meet the needs of young single people, along the lines of networking and bringing people together who might be a good match romantically or bringing together people who might have some connections for career opportunities.
Obviously, one of the benefits, I think Jen and I would both say, of Fordham is that people love Fordham, and that’s a commonality. People trust you if you went to Fordham. It gives you something to build off of. The degree to which that could be fostered at the parish level, where people could be brought together in that way, almost explicitly for that purpose, that’s something that might make the Church serve the needs of people in a real overt way. I think there are technological and logistical issues about doing that, but you can imagine it.

I don’t know. Has there ever been speed dating at church? I don’t know. But it’s maybe something to consider. If you have to bring three friends to bulk it up, that might be something that is an out-of-the-box way to think about making it worth their while.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE**: Just switching gears a little bit, back to a topic that was raised earlier, here’s a question for David Campbell from the audience. Do you think the resistance to partisan dialogue in the Church is an indication that this generation is weary of all partisanship or that the divide between parties wrongly describes their experience? It’s sort of a broader question.

**DAVID CAMPBELL**: That’s a good question. I would probably, as a political scientist who watches these trends, say that it’s probably more that young people, young Catholics especially, are uncomfortable with the way the parties position themselves and the use of religion. It’s not just that politics is used by religious leaders; it’s that religion is used by political leaders. Both of those factors together, I think, are what young people are reacting to and what we mean when we say that they are reacting to the intermingling of religion and politics. It’s probably less that there is partisan dialogue per se and more that what they are hearing from politicians doesn’t match up with their own issue positions or their own perspective on politics.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE**: I’m going to take a potpourri here for our last few minutes.

This is something that came up last night. It’s interesting, because this topic is being brought, although it’s a topic of a later panel. But it shows the importance. This questioner says, “Your panel doesn’t have any representation from the twenty-somethings who are sexually active Church rejecters and who are more typical of this age group, who see Church-going as hypocritical. What do you say to them?”

I think it’s this issue of, “If I am living in this X, Y, or Z way, am I a hypocrite for even
being involved in something like the Catholic Church?” I think there may be cultural differences here, too. Comments from any of you?

**DAVID CAMPBELL:** I’ll talk about politics and race, but that’s way too controversial.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE:** Wait until the next panel, is that what you’re saying? Yes, wait until the next panel. But I think there’s a poignant point there. If one is being, so to speak, invited into a community that is very clearly known for standards or viewpoints that one has chosen differently about, does that really deter community, deter those people from being involved? Carmen?

**CARMEN CERVANTES:** I think that is true. I have always felt that the significant number of the Latino people that have gone into the evangelical churches is because of the situation of marriage. In the Catholic Church, you need to be married in order to fully participate. Many of our people are not married, and they may have two to three different families, one family back there and another one here. In that situation you are feeling guilty all the time and you are never in full participation. Other churches leave you the possibility to be there as you are, recognizing that there are many, many different situations.

So I think the coherence that we ask for people to be orthodox — orthodoxy and orthopraxis, both things together — also calls for a community that lives what they believe. Sometimes thinking about the statistics, the numbers, and thinking about our authenticity and passion and mission and doing what we believe is kind of contradictory. Do we want more of the watered-down or do we want less of the coherence?

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE:** That’s a very important point that was brought up last night, too. This is a debate. You say watered-down. There’s probably a technical sociological, religious term for that. But do we say, let’s simply drop our ways of traditionally saying a lot of this or approaching —

**CARMEN CERVANTES:** Or you end up saying, as the Latino saying is, *Soy un católico en manera,* “I am a Catholic in my own way.” That goes in a very, very long way. If you want to be kept as a Catholic, then you are a Catholic in your own way.

**CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE:** Very much so, and then tension between what is it that we are containing here, and we are helping to contain for people, and what about the real treasure? Where is the real treasure, both people and the Gospel, that we don’t want to
abuse or hurt or deny?

I think we have come to the end of our time. Thank you so much for starting us off so well. (Applause)

We now have a fifteen-minute break. One of the things we hope you will do is meet each other and speak with each other. There is a wealth of riches sitting in both rooms. And speak to the speakers. Don’t forget to put your comments in the red box or the gold box in the auditorium or give them to any helper.
Good morning, and welcome again. I would like to begin with what I consider a poignant quotation from St. Augustine: “Young people marvel at the mountaintops, at huge waves in the sea, endless sands on the shore, and at the circuits of the stars, yet themselves they pass by. Yet themselves they pass by.”

Developing perspective is a praiseworthy goal, yet a very difficult thing to maintain. Oftentimes we theorize and look far above and beyond ourselves, while also forgetting to look deep within. Perspective develops from a creative wrestling between the abstract and the concrete, not privileging one over the other, necessarily. To really see things clearly, we need to maintain a constant straddling between the vantage point and the cornerstone, the above-and-beyond amid the emergent within, for both help to paint a realistic portrait of these young adults in the world and with others. Otherwise, we enter into a cycle of abstraction, not for the helpful purpose of returning to the concrete self more clarified, as all good abstraction should do, but rather to perpetuate concepts not relevant in our experience.

Today many twenty-somethings consider themselves relegated to the back of the line, so
to speak, when it comes to the Church hearing, appreciating, and incorporating their sexual ways of understanding their experience within psychosocial, cultural, and theological frameworks. These young men and women sense a palpable contradictory request by the Church — that is, being encouraged to develop physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially, culturally, financially, imaginatively, spiritually, morally, and religiously, but not to allow, somehow, these areas to meaningful coexist with the fullness of who they are as sexual beings.

This morning’s session will continue to engage this contention in order to better understand the dissonance with critical insight and promise for these young adults and the Church as partners, not enemies. I invite you to do your part to make sure that neither party passes itself by in the process.

Our format will be to hear our first two panelists, Donna Freitas and Colleen Carroll Campbell. Each will speak for eight to ten minutes. Then our two respondents, Patrick Landry and Paul Schutz, will each offer five minutes of critical remarks to Colleen and Donna, for their brief responses. Then I will open the floor to audience questions. If we may ask, please, to have Donna speak first.

**DONNA FREITAS:** (Permission for publishing remarks not granted.)

**ROBERT PARMACH:** Colleen?

**COLLEEN CARROLL CAMPBELL:** I’ve been warned about the ten minutes, so I’m going to try to stick to a text. Donna did an admirable job of staying on time, and I’ll try to do the same.

I’m really glad to be here with you and to have an opportunity to discuss what I think is one of the most crucial issues facing the Church, and that is the challenge of helping young adults put Gospel values and Christian ethics to practice in one of the most intimate realms of their lives, which is, of course, their sexuality. This has never been an easy task for the Church. I think sometimes we forget that, but down through the ages, we know from the saints and the spiritual greats of our Catholic tradition, they have written frequently of their struggles to live the purity of heart, mind, and body that Jesus extols in the Gospels.

Of course, we also know that this challenge is particularly difficult today, and it’s compounded by a hypersexualized culture that long ago dismissed traditional Christian
sexual ethics as out of vogue and out of bounds, at least in the pop culture realm. We’re in a society where padded bras are peddled to second-graders, Web-surfing preteens are ensnared in our nation’s $13-billion-a-year pornography habit, high-school promiscuity is fetishized on so-called family TV programs, and freshman orientation programs, even, unfortunately, at some Catholic colleges, give college students the not-so-subtle impression that sex is little more than a contact sport, and one best played between strangers.

In this environment, it’s really no wonder that many Catholic twenty-somethings seek sexual intimacy in anonymous hookups and bouts of serial monogamy, choose cohabitation over marriage, and profess with complete candor that the only thing they have ever heard about chastity is the news they read online about Cher’s child.

Even in the midst of this cultural situation, though, we see countervailing trends. And they are curious, in many ways. There are the thousands of teenagers flocking to stadiums to recite public virginity pledges, albeit most of them evangelicals, the hundreds of thousands of mostly Catholic high-school and college students who gather each year on the National Mall to pray their rosaries while marching against abortion, and the millions of young Catholics who gather in cities around the world to celebrate their faith with popes who proclaim the Catholic Church’s most politically incorrect teachings with uncompromising boldness.

Even the hookup culture has its grassroots challengers — the growing numbers of students from across the Ivy League who are organizing campus clubs to promote chastity and staging counterprogramming during their school’s official Sex Week festivities, typically featuring pornographers; the twenty-something young professionals launching “Theology of the Body” study groups in parishes from Wyoming to Connecticut because they want to understand the reasons behind the rules; and the teens and young women from Miami to Seattle who are flocking to modesty fashion shows because they are fed up with a fashion industry that treats women as little more than the sum of their body parts in the name of feminism. These are young adults who are questioning the anything-goes sexual ethos of our culture.

There are polls, too, like the 2009 Gallup survey that found a significant rise in the percentage of young adults who believe that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances, from about one in seven in the early 1990s to one in four today, with eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds now ranked by Gallup as tied with seniors as the group most likely to favor the outlawing of abortion.
On the subject of marriage, there are surveys like the Child Trends Research Center study, recently released, that found that more than eight in ten unmarried adults ages twenty to twenty-four believe it is important or very important to be married today, and the 2010 Pew poll that found that young adults ages eighteen to twenty-nine ranked parenthood and marriage far above career and financial success on their lists of their priorities in life.

These, too, are signs of our times, reminders that the desires for lasting love, sexual integrity, and a life-transforming faith still exist among young adults today, even if they are unsure of how to satisfy those desires. If we want to learn how the Church can connect with twenty-somethings in the realm of their sexuality, it’s worth considering how and why the Church already has done so with the scores of young adults who are rejecting the anything-goes ethos of our pop culture and embracing Catholic teachings without exception. These young adults are a minority in their generation. Yet they constitute the majority of the young Catholics active in their faith communities and highly committed to the Church, the majority of those answering calls to the priesthood and religious life, and organizing their young marriages and families around the explicit goal of raising children more deeply versed and grounded in the Catholic faith than they were as children.

Ten years ago, my curiosity about this countercultural youth movement led me to embark on a yearlong journalistic study of it. With the help of a Phillips Foundation journalism fellowship, I traveled America and interviewed some 500 young Christians, most of them Catholics and evangelicals. I asked them about their conversion stories, their faith commitments, and how those commitments impacted the rest of their lives, including and especially their sexual choices. I published my findings in 2002 in my book *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, then continued to track this trend in the ensuing years as the burgeoning crop of Millennials began to flood into it — some of them — and monitored the progress of my original interviewees to see how they persevered as the years went on.

Given all the bad news about twenty-somethings turning their backs on the Church, I think it’s tempting to believe that those who are moving in the other direction are an anomaly whose experience is too unique to replicate or learn from. We tend to assume that the only young people wholeheartedly embracing Church teachings on sex and marriage are those who grew up reciting nightly rosaries in the company of their twelve homeschooled siblings under the watchful eyes of their Latin Mass-going, *Wanderer*-reading, EWTN-addicted parent.
As I discovered in researching *The New Faithful*, though, that’s not the case, not by a long shot. Most of the young Catholics I interviewed fought and fumbled their way toward full embrace of Catholic teaching on these difficult issues, often after years of detours, stumbles, and false starts. Those struggles often made them value Catholic sexual ethics all the more for having tried just about everything else and experiencing a lot less satisfaction along the way. Not only were many of the new faithful not living by Catholic teachings their entire lives; many, including most of the cradle Catholics I interviewed, told me they never even heard most of those teachings, or at least the reasons behind them, until decades after they had finished their careers in Catholic education. Once someone presented Catholic sexual ethics to them as a coherent whole, giving them not only the reasons behind the rules, but concrete advice on the spiritual and practical tools they needed to actually implement these teachings in their lives, many said they felt as if they were seeing the world and their faith, and indeed their sexuality, in a new light.

That’s not to say these new faithful do not struggle with temptation or with the challenges of hewing to the Church’s high standards for sexual purity and fidelity, especially during the often-lonely post-college years. Many interviewees told me that they struggled for years to come to grips with a particular teaching or, much more often, to actually put that teaching into practice in their lives. Most found that the turning point came when they said they combined a disciplined prayer and sacramental life with a supportive community of peers endeavoring to live the same way and to live the same values. Without that communal support, they told me, living chastity in our culture would indeed be impossible.

A Baby Boomer colleague asked me a few years ago why these new faithful seem to focus so much on, as he put it, issues below the belt. Why are these highly committed young Catholics so outspoken about their public commitment to, for example, chastity or so adamant in their opposition to legalized abortion? Why not focus more on issues where all Catholics can agree, such as the importance of serving the poor?

In fact, many of the new faithful I interviewed, including many young men and women who are flocking to some of the new religious orders, such as the New York-based Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and Sisters of Life, are indeed very concerned about reaching out to the poor and have dedicated themselves not only to such service for a season, but for life.

Still, these new faithful refuse to separate the issue of their sexuality from their spiritual practices and their social justice concerns, because they see the three as inextricably
bound. As one young graduate of a Jesuit school explained to me, he reached a point where he could no longer ignore that his lack of discipline in his sexual life was stifling both his spiritual growth and his effectiveness as an advocate for the poor and marginalized. As much as he wanted to compartmentalize his sexual choices from the rest of life, he had to admit that doing so really was no longer an option for him. He said if he believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ was true and the Church Jesus founded deserved his love and loyalty, then he had to put that belief into practice in every realm of his life, including his sex life.

Difficult as such realizations and acts of integration can be for the new faithful, many interviewees told me that it was the very countercultural nature of Catholic sexual ethics that actually appealed to them. In the midst of a culture that constantly tells them to do whatever feels good, the challenge of a Church that tells them to reach for a higher good appealed to them, when that challenge was issued in a compelling way, in a personal way, and came along with the promise of a supportive community. Indeed, we see that the parishes, campus ministry programs, and religious orders that refuse to soft-pedal the most challenging aspects of living as a young adult Catholic today often are the ones that attract the largest and most vibrant followings among young adults, provided that they also give young adults the community support and spiritual and practical resources they need to live up to these high ideals.

The new faithful, as I said, are a minority in their generation. But their experience suggests that their numbers could continue to multiply, if more young Catholics were given genuine opportunities to hear and study the reasons behind the rules of Catholic teaching, to see more living, breathing examples of fellow young Catholics experiencing those teachings in their own lives and living them with joy, as well as authenticity, and to experience for themselves how the wisdom of a 2,000-year-old Catholic tradition can speak to the longing that lies within each of them for a love that lasts. Thank you.

**ROBERT PARMACH:** Thank you very much, Donna and Colleen.

At this time I remind you to start your own questions. Please take your sheets of paper and start thinking about some inquiries you might have to address to us later on. I’ll make one brief comment and then we’ll move over to our respondents, Patrick and Paul.

I think it’s important at this point for all of us to take a moment to think about the vocabulary that’s used. Quite often I tell my students in class that before we can have any critical engagement, we need to know the issues. Otherwise, we are talking past one
another and getting annoyed with one another unnecessarily. So take a moment now to 
think about some of the vocabulary, some of which you might be aware of, some of which 
might be brand-new to you. Hopefully, once we understand the words and the 
definitions, we can understand one another a little better, too.

We have heard a lot of good comments thus far regarding things such as emotional 
detachment, hookup culture, the purity culture, and a refreshing view, I think, of the new 
faithful, being described as people that fight and fumble through their faith in meaningful 
ways. I think that’s a great message for us to take thus far. At this point I would like to 
welcome Patrick to offer his views.

**PATRICK LANDRY:** When I was first asked to respond to this topic, the first thing I 
did was talk to friends. The last two years, I was a volunteer teacher in inner-city Chicago 
and developed many relationships with other volunteers throughout the city, whether that 
be in health care, working with the poor, or in schools. Of all the people I talked to, I 
could generally break them up — obviously, with much diversity in each group — into 
three major groups.

Many of these people were Catholic. A small percentage was happy with their faith and 
actually believed that a smaller and stronger Church is a good thing. Another smaller 
group made a clean break with the Church and didn’t want anything to do with it. The 
final group, and the largest group, is the people who still call themselves Catholic, but 
have a lot of questions — the people that I ask, “Would you still consider yourself a 
Catholic?” and they struggle. They can’t say no, but they can’t forcefully say yes. These 
are people with questions, disappointments, and frustrations with the current state of the 
Church.

Many of these people come from a service background, serving the people in Chicago in 
particular. So there is not a lack of spirit there. Their issues generally deal with law. 
Many of their concerns relate to this topic of “Sex and the City of God,” and I hope to 
share just a few of those right now.

One issue that is a side note here but that every person that I talked to brought up is the 
sexual abuse scandal. The people I talked to recognize that we all are sinful and make bad 
decisions, but the response from the Church as an institution was damaging to their 
relationship with their own Church. Who knew? Why wasn’t anything done? Children 
are the most precious gift we have. Not only was this abuse happening, but other priests 
knew, bishops possibly. It’s confusing to many of us in our twenties. What could have
happened to this Church that we grew up with such a strong connection to? It shook our faith in the Church as an institution.

I got the sense from people that it was kind of like an organization that seeks to define how you should live and then you find out all these terrible things about what’s going on in their closets and in their houses. It just makes you question.

Another issue that almost everyone mentioned was homosexuality. But what was unique about this was a struggle with conscience about these issues. Our generation was taught that one form of revelation is through your conscience. Your conscience is a way for your spirit to work through you, and therefore you are encouraged to follow an informed conscience. This is one of the reasons that homosexuality was so complicated to so many people I talked with. More is known about homosexuality than ever before, and twenty-somethings have friends and family who are homosexual.

Many of the questions I heard were, how can the Church tell my brother, sister, best friend that we love you as a homosexual, but I’m sorry, you cannot act on this and we cannot have you marry in our Church because you cannot procreate? Our personal experiences with these people have informed our conscience otherwise. This was not right. How am I supposed to get married and participate in a Church that my sister cannot? Twenty-somethings are feeling this with many of these issues, including contraception, divorce, and abortion.

Even with these issues, many of the twenty-somethings see the Church playing an important role in this discussion. Even if we don’t agree, necessarily, that to have sex before marriage is a sin, twenty-somethings still recognize that it is important to recognize the beauty that is sexuality, that sexuality is a gift that needs to be protected and shared only with those whom you are truly in love with.

Because of this complication and this struggle with conscience, many youth are hesitant to just throw their hands in the air and say, “I’m done.” They are more likely to have been slowly grated down with issue after issue and with this struggle. All of that grating results in a disconnected feeling.

Probably most significant is that the people who are struggling with these issues also wonder, where’s the dialogue? Where is the willingness to be listened to? It’s almost like the Church has made up their mind, what’s the point? We need to be having these conversations, and we need to keep these conversations open. Having celibate men
talking together in Rome is not the image that twenty-somethings need to see on an issue like this. In fact, I think this alienates people even more.

When I was younger, my second-grade teacher taught us that the Church is not a building, the Church is not a staple, the Church is not a resting place; the Church is the people. I’ll never forget that. And I think we really and truly need to listen to the people and have everyone part of a grand conversation. Dismissing or ignoring these issues will only increase the feelings of disconnectedness. Thank you. (Applause)

ROBERT PARMACH: Thank you. Paul, please.

PAUL SCHUTZ: Thank you for having me with you today. Like Patrick, I have had a number of experiences, on a number of different levels, both in pastoral ministry and teaching in a low-income area, and also in my own personal life, in my own personal experience. To kind of illustrate some of the dynamics of this as I have witnessed them in those roles, but in particular in the role of a friend, I just want to share a brief illustration from my own experience.

When I was a senior in high school, my very, very close friend and his girlfriend had a baby unintentionally. I knew that he was sexually active. We had been in Catholic school together for a very long time. We had heard the don’ts to which Donna referred many, many times, and in our own lives, had made these different decisions. It was so difficult, as the best friend, as the pastoral minister in some sense, to be there alongside that whole situation as it unfolded. They decided to have the baby adopted, and so the baby was born and adopted.

Recently this same friend has had a second child outside of wedlock, in a one-night-stand sort of thing and again is now in the relationship. I say this as a friend, as a friend who loves my friend very, very deeply and has this relationship, with no judgment whatsoever. I think in this situation now, the relationship in which my friend and the person with whom he lives — the person with whom he has no desire to be in a relationship with and has entered into, but now feels this profound guilt as a result of these experiences, the guilt, the stress that we are seeing — he says, “I can’t get out of this. I’ve made this mistake once. Where am I going to go? Who am I going to turn to?”

Needless to say, in this situation, the faith element, the internalization of the Catholic morals, the Catholic ethic that we were taught as young people, is absent from his mind. It has been rejected very much outright as a result of this.
I think the thing that Patrick pointed to that this also points to is that question of dialogue, that question of the ability to enter into a meaningful discourse, and also the prospect of forgiveness that is present here. I think the culture of don’ts, to go with what Donna was saying, does preclude any possibility of authentic, genuine forgiveness in a situation. If you’re told, “Don’t do this, don’t do this, don’t do this,” your immediate gut reaction is, “Oh, I did it. I broke the rules. I am a hypocrite,” as someone mentioned in the previous session, “if I don’t go with this.” So where am I going to go? Who am I going to turn to?

It seems to me that the dialogue element is so absent in the face of these concrete don’ts that situations like this can arise very, very easily and I think have arisen to such a significant degree that it is a culture that has been created. This culture of hooking up that is so present throughout our country, throughout campuses, just everywhere, is so compelling and so worthy of reflection — not of rejection, I don’t think, but really of sincere reflection. We have to ask the question, why? I think that’s the central thing.

I love the points that were made about human dignity and the connection with the poor, these sorts of things. The why of it — are we asking that question as a Church? Not only what and what to do and what not to do, but why is this happening? Is it the result of this deeper longing?

On a theological level, there is an interesting comparison to be made. If the Church is always teaching and preaching this sincere, deep, positive, life-giving relationship with the God of Jesus Christ, in whom it lives and moves and has its being — to get a little liturgical for a minute — if that is the core message of what we are about as Catholics, how are we not seeing the analogous application of that to sexual ethics, to sexual practices in the Church, in that this life-giving, fulfilling, powerful relationship is the ideal, it is the thing toward which to strive, and not in a culture of don’ts, but in a culture of dos — do seek this relationship?

It seems clear from the research that that’s the general thing that people are seeking, and the fulfillment is not coming in these one-night, one-minute stands. So how do we talk about that as a Church? How do we engage with that as a Church in a way that is not judgmental, but is compelling, in a way that brings the people into the conversation?

I’m in no way arguing — we’ll see a video later on, and we heard this on the streets of New York quite a bit — the Church just isn’t caught up with the times. The Church isn’t down
with the times, as one person said. Yes, but does this mean that just because the culture is out there, the Church needs to change? Or is there a dialogue to be had to see where that goes? We’re not saying that everybody’s doing it, so we just need to say it’s okay. No way. But how do we promote that better ideal in a way that is forgiving and loving and encompassing and really, really touches on the central message of the relationship with Christ?

For me, just in response to what I’ve heard, that seems like a very possible ground for what could be. Thank you. (Applause)

ROBERT PARMACH: Thank you. One common theme that I seem to be hearing from our panelists and respondents is that we need to have a critical humility. They made me think about that for a few minutes. Many people would argue that in order to really become wise, you have to first be humble. It’s not by accident that prayer begins on your knees in adoration. You open yourself up to someone and to God and you listen for that transforming experience.

It seems to me that in all the comments made today there is this sense of humility in recognizing that it’s not all about me or us, and more importantly, to have this sort of critical edge. Many of the comments made by young adults today in the Church would say that the Magisterium is not making this experience relevant enough for their experience. In other words, somehow they are not looking at the reality of what’s going on, but, rather, looking at doctrinal issues as well.

I have a question here that I have to begin with. It says on the front, “Dean Parmach, please ask this question.” So I will begin. This question is posed to Donna or anyone. Our culture teaches that sex is nothing more than a physical act. This permeates the culture. Must Catholic, quote/unquote, sex be free, total, faithful, and fruitful to be legitimate and non-debasing?

DONNA FREITAS: (Permission for printing remarks not granted.)

ROBERT PARMACH: Thank you. I have a question for Donna regarding the evangelical Christians. What are evangelical Christians doing so differently that results in so many of their young people committing themselves to things like chastity and abstinence?

DONNA FREITAS: (Permission for printing remarks not granted.)
COLLEEN CARROLL CAMPBELL: They [Catholics] don’t have that [a culture of chastity]. I would agree with Donna that that is not as prevalent among Catholics, although groups like the Love and Fidelity Network, which is one of many examples — it’s interesting, though, because it was a network of these campus clubs promoting chastity. I think it began at Princeton. Now it’s at Harvard. The University of Notre Dame just had a new one pop up, the University of Virginia. The number of campuses is multiplying very quickly in maybe about three or four years. This is not something from on high. This is not a bishop telling these students to do this. In fact, in a couple of places, they have faced a lot of official resistance for doing these things.

That would be an example, I think, of something rising from the grassroots. I think these Theology of the Body study groups are another, which plug into a lot of what Paul was mentioning about connecting those human longings and that idea of our understanding of our relationship with Christ as a total surrender and a fruitful relationship and connecting that to what that has to do with our sexual relationships.

But one thing we haven’t discussed and that I certainly saw a lot in my research — I often found Catholics who would qualify as the new faithful now, but who had taken a long, circuitous route out of their Catholic faith in college to evangelical fellowships, where those were the only people they saw living any kind of serious alternative to the hookup culture. It was in that context that they first experienced what it would be like to live an integrated life in the sense of one where the faith that I profess on Sunday is the same one that I live out on Saturday night. And they got that peer support.

In the end, it was actually the hunger for authority and the hunger for some concrete truths and for the sense that the ground isn’t going to shift underneath you and that you want to be part of a 2,000-year-old tradition — all these things — that actually led them back to the Catholic Church. But that detour they took — I think that’s a group that sometimes we are forgetting. There are the highly committed cradle Catholics here, all the other disaffected Catholics there, and that’s the picture. But we’re forgetting about all of those Catholics who move out of the Church altogether to join the churches that they think are being a little bolder about proclaiming traditional Christian sexual ethics — the very ones that are supposedly repulsing young adults in large numbers. Of course, a lot of young adults have problems with these Christian sexual ethics that we have been discussing, but some of them are actually pretty attracted to it.

I think if tossing those out completely were the secret to attracting young adults — or at
least if the sense of stepping back from them and saying it’s more about being generally committed and we don’t need to be stuck on this marriage thing, or whatever — I think we would see something other than what we have seen in the studies of religious congregations in the last twenty years, where it’s the ones that demand the highest standards of personal and sexual morality — the strictest, I should say — that seem to be attracting people.

The Episcopalian Church has a real problem retaining young adults. They are not taking the approach, at least in the United States, of the Catholic Church, and it doesn’t seem to be working for them. So I think we need to be very careful about following that model and assuming that somehow that’s going to work out better for the Catholic Church than it has for the Episcopalian Church.

PATRICK LANDRY: One of the issues that I’m hearing and that I think is in many of these conversations is, on the one hand there has been a lot of talk of the chastity groups, and on the other hand the hookup culture, when most of us are in this murky middle. There is this middle group where the most twenty-year-olds are having these deep struggles with conscience. It’s definitely important, I think, to find out what’s going on here and here, but to acknowledge that there is this huge middle that’s really complicated and messy. That’s what I think we really need to focus on.

ROBERT PARMACH: Thank you. I have two questions directed to Paul and Patrick, the first of which is perhaps one you don’t want to answer right now: “Is either one of you single? We’ll talk at lunch.” (Laughter)

Question number two, again directed to Paul and Patrick: How can sex and sexuality be more openly and concretely addressed and discussed in the Catholic Church? In other words, this person is asking for some of your experience regarding concrete steps.

PAUL SCHUTZ: I think the first step is, talk about it, at all. Concrete steps. I guess the first question is, where is it being talked about? We have heard different groups. To kind of approach it from that direction, is it being talked about in your average parish youth group? Is it being talked about in groups like CLC, Christian Life Communities, places where these young people gather?

The first question, I think, is, is it being talked about? I don’t know, from my own experience, that it really was talked about very much, except in that very pejorative “don’t” kind of way. Whether it’s from the pulpit, whether it’s from these groups — for me at
least, in my own personal experience, the question is not, maybe, where can we talk about it, but where is it being talked about? I think there is so much fertile ground and so many possibilities that aren’t even being explored for this sort of dialogue. I would argue that we’re not even to that point yet, which we’re talking about dealing with the group — which, it sounds like, we are both a part of — that middle free-floating Mass that is the majority of young people in the Church. So I would say, is it? And if it’s not, where are the 9,000 places we can start talking about it tomorrow?

PATRICK LANDRY: I think this is a difficult one. The first image that came to mind is that at some point in high school, I had a teacher hold up a piece of paper and say, “This is your sexuality,” and then took a hole puncher and started punching and said, “This is what happens when you have sex. You’re damaging your sexual being.” That image has stuck. So that approach, for me, wasn’t effective.

On the other hand, there is this beautiful tradition in the Church, which I really think most twenty-year-olds believe to be true, that there is this beauty inside humanity that needs to be nurtured, loved, respected, and doing things to damage that is not good for you, on so many different levels. This approach was very much more of the reasoning — not the warnings, not the don’ts, but you are a beautiful human being, made in the image of God, and you are given this awesome gift to be able to procreate, to be able to enrich your relationship by doing this. In doing so, you need to take that responsibility very seriously. That was a much more effective strategy for me.

I’m a teacher in a middle school. I also think that it’s a very sad situation for many of our, particularly, inner-city children that are not hearing this “you’re a beautiful child in God’s image.” They are not hearing this. They think that they are just flesh and bones, that they are not special or unique. I think, when it comes to high school, there are a lot of situations with sexuality that cause them to make some decisions that they later regret.

DONNA FREITAS: (Permission for printing remarks not granted.)

PAUL SCHUTZ: Just to real quickly piggyback on what Patrick said, in this culture in which we live, I do think, as we have heard many times, instant gratification and “if it feels good, do it,” and such things are prominent. Sex sells. Sex is all around us. All these sorts of things are around us — the more you have, the happier you’ll be, these sorts of things.

When we’re speaking about this real relationship, I think if we are talking concrete, a
question that would be very interesting to ask might be, what is it that you really want — really want? If somebody asked me that, I would not say, “A Mercedes.” I would not answer, “Oh, I want a beautiful wife,” or whatever. What is it that you really want — to penetrate beyond that kind of thing and try to strike at the heart of what it means to be a human person, created in that image and likeness.

COLLEEN CARROLL CAMPBELL: If I could just add something to what Paul is saying, I think that’s a powerful question. One thing I found in my interviews that was something that was just life-transforming, over and over, for young adults of all backgrounds was actually seeing the model of a happily married couple. I think we have to remember that divorce has devastated this generation. We like to, as adults, assume that all of our choices will sort of work out fine for the kids, but the fact is the research shows that it hasn’t worked out so well. So there is a lot of fear. It’s a desire for lasting love and a terror that their own families and marriages are going to be split up the way their parents’ were.

So when they see someone living authentic Catholic values in their marriage and in their family life, and then they see joy on top of it, and love and equal partnership and a sense that this is something to aspire to, it’s not simply that they see the ideal and think it’s beautiful; it’s that they find out that it’s even possible. So many young adults today don’t even believe that lasting love is possible. And when you have that level of despair, then, frankly, the hookup culture does make some sort of sense to them. I think we need to look for those ideals and be those models.

ROBERT PARMACH: If I might leave you with these three very, very brief points. Perhaps it’s a good prescription for us today: Number one, to make sure that we teach fairly and faithfully the Church’s teachings on all issues of sexuality. Likewise, that we teach fairly and faithfully other strands of wisdom, progressive theologians and other ideologies as well. Third, more importantly, to really help to facilitate this creative tension, this very dialectic that all our speakers and respondents were trying to engage today. I think it’s a way in which we can make significant progress of hope and promise.

I would like you to please join me in thanking all our speakers this afternoon. (Applause)

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE: We have been enjoying rich fare this morning, but we do need to feed our bodies as well. We will be reconvening in exactly one hour. (Administrative announcements) We encourage you to fill up our boxes with the yellow sheets so that we can continue this beyond just today. Thank you very much. Don’t forget
the books.