

# GENERATIONS OF FAITH

## An Interreligious and Intergenerational Gathering

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs



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### **Forming Future Leaders of the Interreligious Movement:**

In 2010 and 2012 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs organized two weekend events which brought together religious leaders and active young adults from within their communities in an across-tradition dialogue on religion in a pluralistic society.

The objective of both of these events was to bring up-and-coming leaders of religious communities into an interreligious forum with seasoned experts in the field, granting them an interreligious experience in a spirit of mutual dialogue seeking understanding, respect, and collaboration. The purpose of such an experience is to create a new generation of leaders across all religious traditions in the United States who see their interreligious counterpart as friend and neighbor rather than adversary or foe.

### **The Dynamic**

Generations of Faith (GoF) aims to create a small, close environment between youth leaders and religious leaders in which an engaging exchange of ideas and conversation can take place. Therefore GoF tries to maintain a 1:5 ratio between religious leaders and youth, maintaining the total size of the group between 20-35 people. The programming consists of a series of conferences given by either experts or young adult leaders on specific topics relevant to the interreligious facet of our modern culture, time for large and small

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group reflection on the given topics, personal testimonies, cultural or religious presentations by the different traditions present, and times for shared meals and social interaction. GoF is highly participatory, and the religious leaders and young adults come to the table on an even playing field, seeking to explore topics and engage in dialogue together with members of other religious communities. So far the USCCB has attempted GoF between one to two full days in length.

### The Fruits

The fruits of GoF are increased bonds of collaboration, friendship, and respect among religious communities within a given area, and an emboldened commitment among both their leaders and their young people to work collaboratively and respectfully with people from other religious traditions toward the common good of society as a whole.

### How does a diocese launch a Generations of Faith event?

1. The most important way to begin if a diocese or community would like to launch a Generations of Faith program is by **accessing the network of interreligious relationship already established: the interreligious office of a particular diocese or parish, and the religious communities with which this office already has relationships.** It is important to access religious organizations the diocese/parish is already on regular and good terms with. The dynamic of Generations of Faith works when young people experience first-hand the richness and strength of the interreligious relationship the Church already has in place. Bringing organizations to the table for the first time at a GoF event is not a good idea, as one does not know how the relationship will evolve throughout the day, how open the religious leaders will be toward one another, and possibility of troubleshooting any difficulties is greatly diminished. The pedagogical effect for the youth ought to be an experience of unity, fraternal charity, and genuine warmth, respect and friendship even among communities with great differences. Bringing to the table unknown actors runs the high risk of jeopardizing this experience for the youth.



2. Once the diocesan interreligious office has targeted those organizations they believe would be most productive to invite to this type of event, that office can **reach out to the leaders of those communities** to present to them the idea, bring them onboard, and set on a realistic date for all. Given the small size of the event (20-25 people) a parish hall, Knights of Columbus hall, or diocesan center make easy venues for GoF.
3. **Each religious leader, once committed personally and with his community to the event, invites a delegation of young adults to represent their community.** For the sake of engaging conversation, the age range of young adults is suggested to be anywhere from university or graduate students to young professionals into their early twenties. It could be emphasize the youth who are active leaders in the community, have strong formation in their own faith background and identity, and/or have some interreligious experience can be targeted as excellent candidates for the delegation. Furthermore, young adults with university studies in topics relevant to themes to be addressed make excellent candidates for the presenters throughout the day. Ask each religious leader to confirm the names of their community delegation at least four months in advance of the proposed date. Ask them to submit the names with a brief bio and information on their educational background and community involvement. This will aid in later selecting from among the young adults appropriate presenters on specific themes.
4. **Among the religious leaders, a proposed overarching theme for the event should be explored.** It should be a topic that both unites the communities in interest, explores topics of their diversity, and is relevant to the youth culture of today. Once an overarching theme has been decided upon, the interreligious officer can break the theme down into a series of topics that would make excellent sessions for presentation, discussion, or testimony, and gather suggested reference and reading materials for potential lecturers. Samples of the GoF agendas used in the past are annexed to this document.



5. **Four months before the event, religious leaders and young adults should be invited to consider giving a presentation or personal testimony at the event.** Topics can be assigned to the individuals who seem most prepared and experienced to speak on a given theme. The sessions should not only be given to the religious leaders, but a cross-section of leaders and young adults should be given an opportunity to speak. It is important every religious community is included in the agenda of presentations. Similarly, each religious leader invites one or two members of their delegation to prepare the cultural presentation on liturgy, prayer, or religious identity which will be presented during the day.
  
6. **Venue, use of spaces, materials, and catering should be foreseen and secured in a timely manner.** It is recommended that each participant receive a folder upon arrival that includes a notebook, agenda, list and bio of other participants, small group assignments, nametag, and name plate so others can recognize who they are from across the room when speaking. A roundtable or U shaped forum or conference room is recommended to facilitate dialogue, and break out spaces should be set aside for small group discussion. Small groups can be predetermined seeking a plurality of traditions and ages in each group. It is recommended that the group shares at least two meals together with plenty of time for social interaction and conversation. If more meals or moments for social exchange can be worked into the schedule it is an important part of the friendship-building dynamic.
  
7. **An introductory session and/or keynote address by a diocesan leaders or prominent Catholic figure is recommended** to introduce the tone of the event and to recapitulate the main take-away ideas, themes and lessons. If a bishop is able to be present it grants the event a high level of stature in the eyes of the youth and other religious communities. The keynote address can be open to the public, preceded or followed by a social hour, and is an opportunity to invite previous participants of GoF to meet the newest participants and stay involved.



### Follow-up

1. It is recommended a diocese or parish that wants to launch Generations of Faith consider integrating it into their annual programming to give continuity to the relationships built between the communities. It is also recommended to limit the attendance of young adults to only one GoF event, so as to assure the greatest number of youth possible have the opportunity to have the experience.
2. To offer the young adults a continued forum in which to maintain and develop the interreligious friendships made, social media is recommended as an excellent tool to keep the group connected. By launching a Generations of Faith Facebook page, the young adults can stay in-touch. It is also recommended to name a young adult member of the group to try to organize social events during the year to bring the young people together in a different setting.
3. GoF is an excellent opportunity to highlight the interreligious work of a diocese. Local diocesan media can be contacted to cover the event and/or interview young adults or religious leaders. The religious diversity of the group makes for excellent photo opportunities that can be added to diocesan websites or papers.
4. If GoF is going to be pursued annually, it is recommended to get it on the calendar of all of the participating religious organizations a year in advance, as calendaring an event among such diverse communities can be very challenging.

*More information and photos of the 2012 Generations of Faith II hosted by the USCCB can be found on the USCCB/ Ecumenical and Interreligious website.*

Attachments:                      Generations of Faith 2012 Flyer  
    Generations of Faith 2012 Agenda