



Article by Abba Sebhatleab Ayele, a youth specialist from Eritrea, on Sabbatical Leave from Uganda.

ECGRNA took this opportunity very sincerely: currently facilitating for Abba to meet with Young Catholics in North America

We ask all Parents and Community leaders to Join in this cause, assisting young Catholics to attend this upcoming conferences.

Upcoming Event

- ◆ November 2011, Youth Conference In ATLANTA GA
- ◆ Related circular to follow soon!!!

Youth Ministry In North America A Slogan or A Challenge?!

By Abba Sebhat Leab Ayele

INTRODUCTION

“Youth ministry” in the Catholic Church signifies “*pastoral care*” to the growing members of the Church so that their faith is educated or led (as the original Greek terminology implies) to maturity, responsibility and action. The youth ministry targets all age groups: children, adolescents, young and young adults.

Traditionally and historically, the Catholic Church took care of the ministry and education of the growing members through the mediation of three institutions: Family, School and Parish.

1. HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

a) Family

In the history of the Church, for centuries, education and care of the children and youth was left in the hands of parents. It was the responsibility of the parents to prepare their off springs for the sacraments of initiation: baptism, 1st communion and confirmation. Moreover it was the responsibility of the parents to inject in their children Christian values such as; charity, faith, solidarity, responsibility, good manners, etc. It has to be underlined that many parents did not have formal

education to carry out their duty. But for centuries they were successful educators because of their “witness” of life and God-centered vision of life.

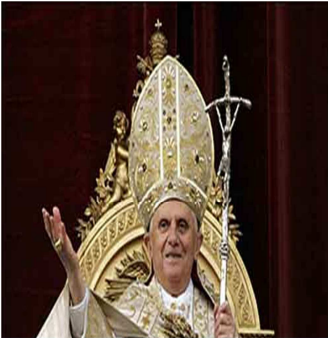
b) School

From the 17th century, in countries with dominant catholic population education of children and youth was carried out in both public and Catholic private schools. Religion became part of the curriculum and the State prepared “teachers of religion” with the help of the Church. This was and still is a powerful means in many countries, especially in Europe and USA. In some counties Religion in Schools is becoming more difficult due to political and social movements. It is also a sign that the Western Culture is becoming more secular, and faith is no more at the center of daily life. Practice of religion is increasingly being conceived as a “private affair”.

c) Parish

Pastoral Care of the youth within the framework of the parish is a recent phenomenon in the Catholic Church that does not precede the 18th century. It was in the beginning from the 18th century that pastoral care of the youth became the concern of the parishes.

Continued Youth Ministry



“While the lay faithful share in the "common priesthood," they are not ordained ministers of Christ and His Church.

“The truth is that the greater the faithful's awareness of their own responsibilities within the Church, the clearer becomes the specific identity and inimitable role of the priest as pastor of the entire community, witness to the authenticity of the faith, and dispenser of the mysteries of salvation in the name of Christ the Head,”

Pope Benedict.”

It was promoted by some Educators of the youth, especially to orphans and abandoned children. At the beginning of the 19th century, famous educators like St. John Don Bosco (an Italian who founded the Salesians) and St. John Baptist de la Salle (a French who founded the Christian Brothers) organized the youth in groups and made them “*play and pray*” within the premises of the parishes called “oratorio” or “youth clubs”. The practice spread fast all over; and up to now parish youth ministry in the Catholic Church is, more or less, fashioned under their model.

Before I conclude this historical part, I want to underline that the Catholic Church still believes that education of faith “**in the family**” is the most effective, without excluding the others.

Like any other aspect of life, what one gets during the first 5 years of life is what defines and shapes ones faith, personality, character...etc. During the subsequent years the environment can influence us, but basically we live on what we get during the first 5 years of childhood. Hence I throw the first challenge to the Eritrean Catholic parents in North America: nobody is going to substitute the seed of faith that you sow into the heart of your child during its infancy. Healthy children become healthy adults. A child trusts the person it loves most: and whatever the parents say, good or bad, the child swallows in its entirety.

2. TRASMITTING TO THE NEXT GENERATION

“Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh. You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart. You shall tell them to your children, and keep on telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are standing up” (Deut. 6:4-7)

“**ሰማዕ እስራኤል**” (Listen Israel) is the Creed of the Jewish religion. As we know the Creed is the kernel of any religion though which it identifies and defines itself. The author of the book of Deuteronomy wants that the Creed is handed over from generation to generation: “*You shall tell them to your children, and keep on telling them*”. It is amazing when he gives directives on the timing and frequency: “*when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are standing up*. Practically it means that it should be told to the children *anytime and anywhere*. The Jewish and the Christian tradition still adhere to this central piece of our faith because it was preserved and transmitted for thousands of generations.

Continued Youth Ministry

Societies, ethnic groups or institutions always try to transmit their patrimony to the next generation. Many social groups and political organizations have youth branches-wings-movements, etc. It goes without saying that any society, organization, or institutions that fail to transmit its heritage to the new generation invariably faces extinction. World history has recorded many of these illustrations and ruins.

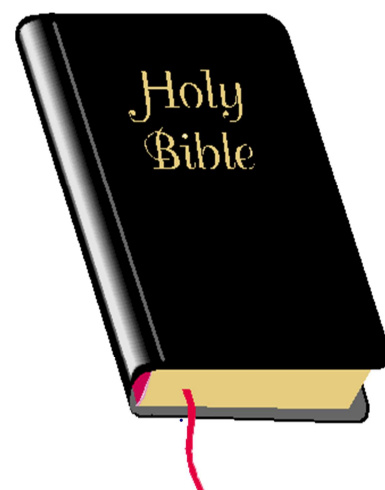
This is also true for the Catholic Church and all that concerns faith and spiritual heritage. The **Catholic Church** has the highest number of faithful of all the other Christian denominations. And it continues to grow both qualitatively and quantitatively thanks to her commendable strategy and faithfulness for transmitting the Creed and other spiritual patrimony for thousands of generations. It is true that the Church goes on by the power of God. But it is also true that God uses human being to fulfill his cause, despite their limits and fragility.

At Universal level the Church has already made its tradition to celebrate World Youth Day every 2 years, since 1984. The last celebration took place last August in Madrid, Spain, whereby it attracted 2 million youth from 173 countries, 800 bishops and 14 thousand priests. The theme of the congress was: *“Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith”* (cf. Col 2:7). Pope Not only did the Catholic Church manage to pass over

its faith, it also managed to preserve the rich heritage expressed in various rites, traditions, liturgies, spiritualities and testimonies, all over the world. And we are one of them! The Catholic Geez Rite has long history that was proudly preserved by our ancestors and transmitted to our generation faithfully for centuries. What do we do with it now? Pass it to the next generation or let it go?

3. CHALLENGES OF THE ERITREAN GEEZ COMMUNITY IN NORTH AMERICA

The above analysis logically poses a serious question to the members of Geez Rite community, outside the motherland. Due to the long political upheaval in our country several members are settled for decades outside Eritrea. The first generation of diaspora is aging and the new generation is already steering the boat. What are we transmitting to the new generation? As we saw in the Book of Deuteronomy, we have to pass to our children all what we inherited from our history, tradition, and religious culture, because both our collective and individual identity emanate from those sources. It is not only about the Geez Ziema and the liturgical chants: that would be reductive that impoverishes the whole richness. It is about the religious, spiritual and social values that that we have embodied: **faith, fear of God, God-centeredness, charity, neighborhood, family, solidarity, community-centered society, Christianized culture, sense of justice and equity, hardworking..., etc.**



Continued Youth Ministry

ECGRNA

9pm Mondays
Teleconference @
712-432-0900 CODE
722866#

Phone: NY
(551) 497-3312
Agazit Seyoum

Phone: TX
(214) 876-3644
Tesfamariam Fisseha
E-mail:

ECGRNAVOICE@GMAIL.COM

We're on the Web!
ECGRNA.org
Zacharias Gebre
Web/ Editor

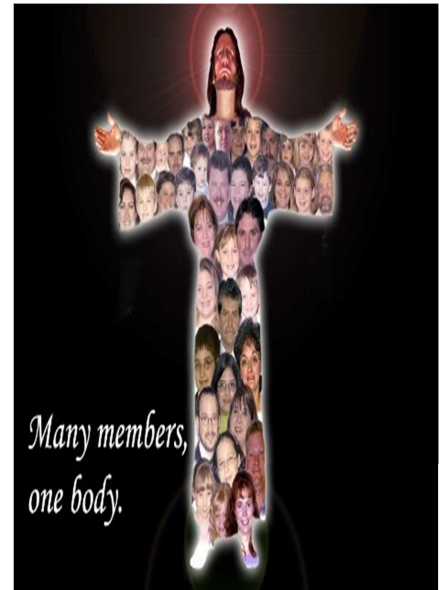
These and many other values make our Christian and social identity. And these are exactly what we want to transmit to the new generation, so that they can interact in their environment with a conscious identity and sense of belonging in this multi-cultural and globalized world.

I am not talking only about the new generation born in diaspora, but also about the youth who recently immigrated to the West, who still need to be consolidated and reinforced in regard to their identity and sense of belonging. I believe the responsibility that we have to transmit our richness and religious patrimony is not an option. As it was stated above any group that fails to pass over its patrimony faces not only alienation but also loss of important values and rich deposit that mold its specific and unique identity.

CONCLUSION

ECGRNA has opened the door and I believe that is the responsibility of all to collaborate with whatever we can so that we can achieve the purpose. All of us: Catholic Community Leaders, parents, priests, nuns and youth leaders should join hands and unveil to the young our rich patrimony.

Our Unity in diversity is the soul of our
identity
Catholic



I believe that we should take this as a priority and leave other issues aside so that we concentrate on the pastoral care of our youth as it is done back home.

I presume that we all believe about the importance of youth ministry and transmitting our religious values, yet belief and good wish alone without deed, risks to render it like a slogan, as those that we hear in political environs.

I believe it is more than a slogan, indeed it is a challenge and a very urgent challenge!

Bless our Youth
Abba Sebhat Ayele