

Briana Santiago Synod witness



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October 4th

Holy Father, and all here present, my name is Briana Santiago, I am 27 years old, and I am from San Antonio, Texas. I have just begun my fifth year of formation with the community of consecrated women called “The Apostles of the Interior Life,” and my fourth year of philosophical and theological studies at the Pontifical University of St. John Lateran, here in Rome.

We young people of today are searching: searching for the meaning of life, searching for a job, searching for our path or our vocation, searching for our identity. “Young people dream of safety, stability and fulfillment...to find a place where the young person can feel that he or she belongs.”[i] Wounded by solitude, fragile family situations, and existential anxiety, we ask that the Church accompany us, not as “models of faith to imitate, but instead [as] living testimonies to witness. [People who] evangelize by their life.”[ii] We recognize the usefulness of “the exchange of information, ideals, values and common interests...” which is possible via Internet, but also how technology used in an inhumane way can create “a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity.”[iii]

The majority of what I have just listed above is fruit of our reflection during the Pre-Synodal Meeting this past March. I contributed by welcoming the English-speaking young people who desired to participate via Social Media, and I was physically present among the three hundred delegates while they gathered together to reflect. I would like to share that I was surprised by how many desires we all have in common, regardless of country and culture. There was so much joy in that room...the joy to know and be known, that could be heard in the laughter, the songs, and the chatter during breaks. We young people desire dialogue, authenticity, participation...and there, we found ourselves greeted by adults who were willing and desirous to know what we carry in our hearts. It was a fraternal experience amongst very different people – some of other creeds or nonbelievers – who lived seven days of communion and mutual sharing.

We realize that there are many needs in the world – many topics that require reflection and dialogue – and so we are even more grateful that the Church, at this very moment in History, is turning Her attention towards young people and our concerns. This is an honor, and for us, also a great responsibility to be transparent and aware of our fragility in order to help not only ourselves, but also the generations that will come after us.

At a more personal level, I would like to share that the Lord led me to Rome to seriously discern the Consecrated life not just because the members of my family are practicing Catholics, but also thanks to every person who was Providence for me on my journey. My pastor in San Antonio was *one of us*, and in his proximity, I saw a Church who embraces and has at heart even the smallest of its members, and I melted in the presence of this kind of love. My catechists did not only speak of rules to follow, but also of their personal relationships with Christ, which changed my vision of God from judge to Father. In college, I met a Consecrated woman who took me seriously and who walked alongside me, helping me to pray and grow in my interior life. As it was for me, I believe that all young people need first to be listened to, and then guided towards an increase of self-knowledge. “In short, we [would like to] be met where we are – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, socially and physically.”[iv]

I unite myself to all of you in the hopes that the Spirit will come down upon each of us and illuminate that which will bring us ever closer to Joy – to the encounter with Christ in the fullness of life and love.

[i] “*Young People, The Faith And Vocational Discernment*”, Pre-Synodal Meeting Final Document, 2018.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] Ibid.