

## **Pope Francis to the Rescue – You Are My Beloved Child**

By: Eugenia Kowalczyk, PhD  
Principal, Catholic Identity

Our Catholic youth are challenged each and every day with the hustle and bustle of peer pressure, schoolwork, social media, and acceptance. Indeed to be a young person growing up in such a dynamic, fast paced, ever changing social milieu can leave even the most grounded, spinning. If only life would slow down we often catch ourselves thinking. There is so much to do and so little time; every day reads like a litany of to do's. Our youth are experiencing change at a staggering speed and in its grasp a potential lose of identity.

To be a Catholic youth is indeed complex. As many of us know, it takes a lifetime to discover who you are and what you stand for. One might say, "a work in progress." Today's youth is inundated with fads, fashion, and cultural ambiguity while simultaneously sensing an erosion of tradition, values, virtues, and God. Being caught in this whirlwind requires a "shut down, restore, and update" of priorities and expectations. Pope Francis to the rescue!

Pope Francis has made communicating with the youth a priority. Throughout the past year, Pope Francis has sent direct messages to our young people of encouragement, hope, and renewal. During World Youth Day in January, 150,000 young people from 155 countries gathered in Panama. The Pope's message of hope, love, and resilience resonated in his address stating, "There is a strength in young people, a strength that all of you possess. It is a strength that can change the world." His advice continued with the words, "Dear young people, take courage, enter within yourselves and say to God: 'What do you want from me?' Allow God to answer you. Then you will see how your life is transformed and filled with joy." Helping our young people understand that they are unconditionally loved and that God has great things prepared for each of them is an antidote for modern day anxieties, fears, and feelings of inadequacy. God holds each child tenderly in His loving hand and knows each by name. How reassured our children would be if they took this message to heart.

Most recently, Pope Francis in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* states, "Young people are not meant to be discouraged; they are meant to dream great things, to seek vast horizons, to aim higher, to take on the world, to accept challenges, and to offer the best of themselves to the building of something better." Such encouraging words are reaffirmed with the acknowledgement of how important our youth are to the faith. Pope Francis boldly reminds our young people that, "they are the 'now' of God." Although times are changing, and many challenges lie ahead, we must constantly remind our young people that God loves them. Pope Francis states unequivocally, "Never doubt this, whatever may happen to you in life, at every moment, you are infinitely loved." Indeed a beautiful message of hope and reassurance for every person, at any age, in any circumstance.