Columns
Horizons
Ministry



Dominican Sr. Ana Gonzalez with one of her nephews (Courtesy of Ana Gonzalez)



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September 28, 2023

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In my life, I have held a nice collection of jobs and titles: sister, Sister, tour guide and counselor. Of all, my favorite title is "*Tia*." I love being an aunt. I get such delight and pleasure from my nephews. They are spunky and creative. Being with them gives me so much joy … until they throw a tantrum.

Not to brag, but my nephews are simply awesome. One is a dance enthusiast who wants to be a scientist, while the other loves power tools, landscaping and everything mariachi-related. As I witness their enthusiasm, energy and quirkiness, my world is a better place. When I think of them, I wonder what their futures might look like. I also wonder what world they will inherit.

The facts are alarming and sobering. About 25% of students ages 12-18 nationwide experience bullying, while more children are being killed by guns, gang participation is on the rise, and don't let me get started on climate change. I worry about the future my nephews and their peers will face. Amid all the challenges, how will my nephews encounter God? Who will tell them that they are loved beyond all measures? I trust their parents will share the good message, but who listens to their parents, especially in their teen years? (My sweet nephews are not even listening to their sassy Sister Tia.)

One thing that gives me hope is that my nephews, like many young people in our nation, can be empowered by their valued education and their encounters with sisters. Since the 1700s, Catholic sisters have been at the forefront of empowering young people — through education, sharing the message of God’s love and being present. Catholic sisters opened schools and empowered marginalized communities with the education that helped young people succeed. Many other sisters have been on the front line of religious education.



Dominican Srs. Janice Thome and Roserita Weber recently celebrated their 20th anniversary of participation in the annual Arcoíris (Rainbow) retreat at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Garden City, Kansas. Latino parishioners and local Latino parents help coordinate a gathering of close to 50 Catholic youth. (Courtesy of Ana Gonzalez)

I love it when I meet adults who share the witness of being taught by sisters. I find it touching when I am out with one of our sisters and a former student approaches her. The smiles, hugs and joyful interaction offer a glimpse into countless shared experiences.

Most recently, I was able to witness the difference sisters make in the lives of young people when I visited with my Dominican Sisters of Peace in Garden City, Kansas, and Tucson, Arizona. During my visit, I was inspired by the sisters' diverse ministries and by their commitment and love for the communities they serve.

Dominican Srs. Janice Thome and Roserita Weber minister to a culturally diverse group composed primarily of immigrants in Garden City, Kansas. On this occasion,

the sisters invited me to join them as they celebrated their 20th anniversary of participation in the annual Arcoíris (rainbow) retreat. The retreat is organized by the dynamic Latino parishioners of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Garden City with the help of local Latino parents, who help coordinate a gathering of close to 50 faith-filled Catholic youth.

I was moved by the commitment of the parents, the organizers and the sisters as they created a welcoming ambiance for the Latino Catholic youth. I was blown away by the thought that my two sisters had been involved in the program for 20 years, providing a special kind of presence. Through work like this, our sisters showcase an obvious preferential option for the youth of the church.

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Similarly, in Tucson, Arizona, Dominican Sr. Rachel Sena meets on Saturday mornings with more than a dozen youths preparing for the sacrament of confirmation. She is an intentional presence of God's love during these meetings, sharing God's love through her accompaniment.

Although in different locations, Sisters Rachel, Roserita and Janice share a similar focus on the church's youth. They don't just coordinate programming — they create a welcoming space for children, teens and young adults to experience God's Love. They are present to empower these young people as they navigate changes in culture, COVID realities, domestic violence, trauma, addiction and more.

In the 1979 Puebla Document, Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of the youth of the church: "How close we shepherds need to be to them so that Christ and the Church … may enter deeply into their hearts!" (The Vatican's English translation is here.)

Inspired by the ministry of these sisters, I am encouraged that our preferential option for the youth must continue. My nephews and our young kids must be aware that they are loved. While the world can be chaotic and messy, God’s love is constant. Our youth needs to hear this message.

As we embrace Catholic social teaching, let's provide an outlet for our children to learn the power of our values and of their Catholic education. As we advocate for creation and our environment, let's also remember to encourage our youth to join

our efforts to care for creation. When we minister to those in the margins, let's bring our kids and teens along! Our youth is our present and our future. It is up to us to empower them with God's love.