



Communicate ... If necessary use words: Connecting with the Next Generation

St. Francis of Assisi is often quoted as having said, “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.”

When it comes to the state of our society today – and perhaps particularly, connecting with ‘the Next Generation,’ is it applicable?

This and more is what those in attendance at the April 9th BELIEVES session on “Communicate ... if necessary use words: Connecting with the Next Generation” had the chance to ponder and discuss with panelists Carissa Caricato, Founder of Hoola for Happiness; Shalondan Hollingshed, President of Urban League of Greater Atlanta Young Professionals; and Bill Garrett, President of Cristo Rey Atlanta.



Before diving into the focus on communicating with the Next Generation, however, everyone present took a moment to experience communicating without words – doing the Hoola Hoop Challenge as a group.



With hearts beating more, and smiles in abundance following everyone having had the chance to ‘be a kid,’ the panelists began the conversation by sharing a bit about how prayer exists for them personally during the work day.

“Relationship with God has helped me to get to where I am at,” said Hollingshed, who was born in Atlanta, but grew up in Florida before later returning to Georgia to go to college and run track at the University of Georgia.

“Prayer is a conversation with God – a lot of times it’s just internal. Even if outcome isn’t what is expected, my perspective is different.”

In her role as President of the Urban League of Atlanta Young Professionals, Hollingshed shared they’re constantly focused on mobilizing 100’s of youth throughout the city each week through various mentorship, sponsorship, and other engagement opportunities with their members. Even with all this activity though, she and the leaders of ULGA-Young Professionals are intentional about having an opportunity for prayer and fellowship.

“Within ULGA-Young Professionals, we have small groups.”

Caricato, a CTK parishioner, stated transparently, “In fulltime ministry, we talk a lot about God, but we have to have a personal relationship with Him to fuel it.”

For her, making time for the relationship with God includes doing the Magnificat regularly, committing to an hour of holy adoration each week, and attending Mass a few times each week.

This includes when she has been invited as the Founder of Hoola for Happiness to travel to over 20 countries, like India and Brazil, to use Hoola Hoops to share the gospel with thousands of people and lead therapeutic dance programs with trafficking and sex abuse survivors (8,000+ hoops have been taken by volunteers to 80 countries since 2009).

“The handmade travel Hoola Hoops have five colors to tell the gospel story and personal testimonies, but we also use the five colors to share about the process of life transformation using the butterfly as an analogy for working with survivors,” she said.

In most countries, Caricato, stated she’s been invited by Christian groups, but India has proven to be the most challenging.

“In India, proselytizing is against the law, and we work with Hindu and Muslim groups,” Caricato mentioned. “We get permission for our curriculum first.”

The connection to India remains in her work locally as Hoola for Happiness does a lot of work with Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity, especially partnering with them to work with the people of Clarkston.

Garrett then spoke of his regular routine for prayer amidst leading Cristo Rey and the 500+ students they serve each year.

“Morning and evening prayer is a requirement as a deacon, which I am,” he said. “At Cristo Rey, we also do Mass five times each week.”

When he’s not leading Cristo Rey Atlanta – where 100% of all the students have been accepted into college, and 94% of the first graduating class is still matriculating, or now also serving as Interim President of Cristo Rey Tampa Bay, Garrett told everyone present that he’s done lots of travel, including some with some unique communication challenges.

“A lot of my travel has been with Habitat and in Jordan,” he added. “We took lots of games. They knew a few words, but not what they meant.”

Having begun to transition the discussion to communicating with others after first speaking a bit about personal prayer, the panelists were asked if there is something foundationally unique about connecting with “the next Generation” that’s different than connecting with any individual person we may encounter.

“For me, Cristo Rey students are ‘the Next Generation,’” responded Garrett. “They truly don’t listen because they’re always on devices. What they do, do is pay attention to what we do.”

In a similar vein, Hollingshed commented, “I’m a millennial. As the president, we have Gen Z members and millennial members. We’re in an information age. We don’t ask questions about information anymore. We just get it online – often visually or with personal authentic experiences. Conveying relevance to each person’s current world is key.”



To do that, Hollingshed stated that for every one of the ULGA-Young Professionals events, they create videos.

“How I communicate with them (ULGA-Young Professionals) is different than how I communicate with my boss.”

Caricato then shared her thoughts.

“It’s important for me to build trust – especially since I’m trying to teach God’s principles.”

She added it is hard to see a generation growing up with a culture that’s not following God.

“You have to have a heart for being consistent. With youth and teens, you don’t get light bulb moments all the time, so showing up and sharing heart is key. Listening without judgment is also key – I have no poker face.”

CTK Parishioner Tim Doyle chose to jump into the conversation following Caricato’s comments, sharing two of his kids are millennials and two are Gen Z’ers.

“I tell them, ‘We’re educating you so you can see different perspectives, not just mine,’ commented Doyle. “Meeting millennials where they are at, and treating them like fellow humans is key.”



CTK Parishioner Tim Porter’s comments that followed complimented Doyle’s.

“As a parent, I’ve learned that the less I speak, the greater the impact,” he said. “I have to be patient. In the end, it’s way better to be interested, than interesting.”

Returning back to Hollingshed’s remark about communicating differently with ULGA-Young Professionals and her boss, all the panelists were asked how they bridge the gap between bosses and millennials/Gen Z’ers when needed.

“Bridging the gap between seasoned professionals and young professionals is significant,” replied Hollingshed. “The focus with the young professionals is on meeting them where they’re at, and letting them know how they can be the bridge. It’s also important to have a champion in each group.”

Garrett, though not dealing with communications between young professionals and season professionals as much, had this to say from his engagement with students and their parents.

“Often, I first try to assess the parent-student perspective. Then sometimes we insert prayer to diffuse. Kids will often admit they did something wrong before the parents do.”

Having shared a lot of reflections and thoughts about how they communicate in professional or organization settings, the conversation shifted to a more personal nature when asked what the most memorable non-verbal communication was that they could ever recall receiving.

“For me it was a picture – a picture of my grandfather,” recalled Hollingshed. “My grandmother sent it to me. As soon as I saw the picture, it brought back all the nuggets from time with my grandfather.”

Caricato spoke next.

“Mine goes to dance,” she stated. “Dance is like a love language with God for me. In many countries, we’re engaging with kids that don’t speak English. When we do the ‘mirror dance’ activity, girls that have been trafficked – once they feel safe, they’ll start moving where you can see there’s hope and freedom in them. Then all the girls behind them do the same. Twenty girls moving in unison is beautiful.”

Garrett followed, ““The second time I was in the Middle East, there was a replica of a boat on the Sea of Galilee. When I do weddings, I use it in a homily. For me sometimes it’s tough to see Christ in my life and in others.”

Staying focused on the continual theme of using fewer words, the panelists were asked one final question – “If you were only able to verbally communicate three phrases throughout your life, what would they be?”

Hollingshed’s first phrase – Be love.

“Friends are always saying ‘you always talk about love.’ I say, ‘Yes, I like love.’ We never know what people are going through.”

Her second phrase – Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.

And her final phrase?

“My middle school teacher said the following and it’s always stuck with me – If you’re not growing you’re dying. Always be growing.”

Caricato again spoke after Hollingshed, and shared her two phrases would be:

- 1 Corinthians 1:27 (“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”)
- “Remember to dance through the journey – even through difficult times, keep dancing through the journey. Joy often comes through difficulty.”

Then she added, “Joy is a verb and a choice.”

Finally, Garrett closed out the remarks with his three phrases:

- “I love you.” (“Something I don’t say enough,” he reflected.)
- “Don’t eternalize the moment.” (“If things are bad, don’t think it’ll be forever,” he added.)
- “Go and do likewise.”

And with that, the session came to an end – but not before everyone had one more chance to be a kid and communicate without words.

