Jaclyn Doherty: “leading with listening and authenticity is really important to young people”

One of the topics explored in depth during the latest Lasallian Research Seminar on Catechesis and its Challenges in the Current Context was the **religious and spiritual experience of young people and adolescents in the United States**, based on the results of research by the Springtide Research Institute, presented by Dr Jaclyn Doherty.

In conversation with LaSalleOrg Interviews, Dr Jaclyn remarks that, for those aged 13 to 17 ‘**one of the most trusted institutions was the school, so in its educational settings they are finding more trust in those institutions than they are in political structures, or the political systems in our country**’. She also points out that ‘educators and teachers have a unique opportunity to talk about civic life, to talk about history,’ and this also helps them to ‘shape their own values and beliefs.’

However, the American researcher also warns that ‘**a lot of times young people and students don’t feel that they are heard, that their experiences or their values or their opinions are heard,** so also I think that in educational settings making a space that is safer than to have those conversations whether or not there is agreement or disagreement.’

Catholic Identity and Religious Diversity

Referring specifically to the religious practices of the young Lasallians who participated in the research, Dr Jaclyn maintains that ‘**in the United States at least about half of the students attending Lasallian schools identify as Catholic themselves’**. However, ‘while most of the students do identify as Catholic and they may have a background in Catholicism and in religion more generally, there is more diversity as well.’

At this point, she explains that ‘there is a lot of other types of traditions that are represented in Lasallian schools, including those who identify as more secular, non-religious. And I think that in those settings it is important to talk about

religion, to talk about God, to talk about the Bible,' while underlining that it is important 'listening and being present in young people's experiences so they don't feel necessarily that you are imposing on them as to in doctrine, but instead hearing the experiences they are having and providing opportunities for them to enter into religious spaces, or to enter into the Bible, or into faith discussion in ways that are more inviting I suppose and more welcoming of their experiences.'

Consequently, pedagogy takes on particular relevance. 'We like in this context to listen to the folks that are working with the young people (…), this would change a lot depending on the context even within the United States, it is a large space with a lot of different communities and contexts where young people are coming into Lasallian education and inter-religion.'

Therefore, for the researcher, the key is 'leading with listening, leading with authenticity is really important to young people.'

See below for an interview with Dr Jaclyn Doherty, researcher at Springtide Research Institute.