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Annie Nieto Bailey, a young adult leader from the Archdiocese of Seattle, leads a plenary session at the 2024 LaRED annual meeting at Marian University in Indianapolis. (Luis Donaldo González)



by Luis Donaldo González

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Members of [LaRED](#), or the National Catholic Network de Pastoral Juvenil Hispana, highlighted the importance of ministering to Hispanic young adults and promoting their leadership in the Catholic Church during their annual meeting at Marian University in Indianapolis Oct 24-26.

"As the Hispanic Catholic Church in the United States becomes increasingly multicultural and multilingual, *pastoral juvenil* must continue engaging in innovative, intercultural practices of theology and ministry," Armando Guerrero Estrada, director of the [PASOS Network](#) at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois, told NCR.

Founded in 1997, LaRED (National Catholic Network of Hispanic Youth Adult Ministry) connects more than 45 pastoral institutes, national organizations and diocesan offices working with Hispanic Catholics ages 18-35 across the country.

"Our goal is to convene and work with organizations that work with young adults so that together we can make a greater impact on Hispanic youth," said LaRED President [Adriana Visoso](#), who has more than 30 years' experience working with young adults.

Some 45% of Catholics in the United States [self-identify as Hispanic](#), representing a wide variety of social and cultural contexts in the country.

'Hispanic young people are not a monolith; therefore, there are no clear-cut solutions to ministering with this demographic.'

—Armando Guerrero Estrada

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"The realities of Hispanic Catholic young adults in the United States are very diverse," said [Yazmin Maní Malone](#), a Hispanic youth ministry associate in the Diocese of Austin, Texas. "Among Hispanic young adults there are migrants arriving from Latin America, those who have grown up here and those who were born in this country."

Guerrero Estrada said these groups reflect the diverse landscape of today's Hispanic young adults who thrive in parishes, colleges and universities, health care and the business sector, among other places.

"Thank God more and more migrants are arriving," Maní Malone said. "We must find the best way to serve each young individual in his or her own context."

Serving Hispanic young adults requires a holistic accompaniment that goes beyond language to include the social, cultural and religious context, Visoso said. "*Pastoral juvenil* or Hispanic young adult ministry is done completely differently than English-speaking youth ministry."

In addition, Visoso pointed out that the reality of Hispanic youth in the United States makes *pastoral juvenil Hispana* programs different from those applied in Latin America. "We used to apply resources used in other countries; however, the cultural and social difference has shown us that we must create programs that truly adapt to what is lived in this country," she said.



Emilce Cuda, secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, speaks during her Oct. 26 keynote speech on “Advancing the Leading Role of Young People in the Church,” at Marian University in Indianapolis. (Luis Donaldo González)

The processes of approaching and ministering to Hispanic young people are not uniform. "Hispanic young people are not a monolith; therefore, there are no clear-cut solutions to ministering with this demographic," Guerrero Estrada said.

"If we want to create safe spaces for young people [in the church], we have to learn to ask the right questions," said [Oscar Castellanos](#), director of the Initiative for Parish Renewal and theology faculty member at Marian University. "Hispanic youth in the United States have 'in-between' experiences and lives. They have an undeniable and important cultural richness."

During his talk "Creating and maintaining spaces for the accompaniment of *pastoral juvenil*," Castellanos said that listening to the diversity of Hispanic youth and young adults renews the life of the U.S. Catholic Church.

Listening and dialoguing with Hispanic young adults open the possibility for their participation and leadership in the church's structures. "With more diversity among young people, there are more opportunities for leadership," said Juan Escarfuller, the [Instituto Fe y Vida](#) executive director.

"When young people have a leadership role, they develop their talents," added Missionary Catechist of the Poor [Sr. Ana Luisa Díaz Vázquez](#), associate director of Hispanic Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas. "In the leadership of young people, we discover the value of their contributions. They grow as Christians and transform their environments."

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"As bilingual and bicultural youth, we want to put ourselves at the service of the church," said [Edith Torres Monzón](#), associate director of outreach and diversity in the Office of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministries at the Diocese of Dallas. She was one of a dozen young adult leaders under 35 who attended the 2024 LaRED annual meeting. "We are able to serve in different ways and share the cultural

richness we inherited from our *padres y abuelos* — parents and grandparents," she said.

The event's keynote speaker, [Emilce Cuda](#), secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, told NCR the church is very interested in promoting the leadership and activism of its young people. "Pope Francis affirms that young people are the present, not the future of the church," she said.

"Today, young people are needed more than ever in the church to be able to read the new [reality, that is,] what God is saying to us today in the newness of change," she added.



Catholic young adult leaders attending the 2024 LaRED annual meeting included, from left, Andrew Mercado from Dominican University; Adriana Guadarrama from the Diocese of Beaumont; Armando Guerrero Estrada from PASOS Network at Dominican University; Sarahi Unzueta from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers; Edith Torres Monzon from the Diocese of Dallas; Krysthell Castillo and Ana Castillo from the Diocese of Birmingham; and Gabriela Escalante from the Southeast

Pastoral Institute. (Luis Donaldo González)

Visoso similarly said that more work needs to be done within the U.S. Catholic Church to listen to, dialogue with and minister to Hispanic young adult Catholics. "It's not enough for only one individual or organization to undertake this work. It is a task for the whole church," she said

Castellanos said that national meetings — like LaRED — can encourage introspection to ensure the message of the Gospel remains attractive to young people and young adults across all contexts. "We need to examine the language we use in the church and how we present Jesus," he said. "Sometimes, our choice of words can create a barrier for young adults. We must go out into everyday life and present the joyful and dynamic Jesus of the Gospel."

"We need to step out of the everyday and ordinary to present the Jesus of the Gospel, who is joyful and dynamic," he added.

Torres Monzón stressed that it is "necessary for youth leaders to be more creative. The sustainability of *pastoral juvenil Hispana* will depend a lot on our ability to rethink a model of pastoral juvenil that responds to the needs of the youth of 2024 and the next decade."

"As Hispanic young adults, we recognize the responsibility that comes with having a leadership role within church structures, but we are ready to navigate different waters," she added.

"We are ready to spread the Gospel and be protagonists in today's church."