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Young people flock to hear Dalai Lama speak in Connecticut

Tom Gallagher | Oct. 23, 2012 NCR Today

My colleague John Allen continues to update us [1] on the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization taking place in Rome this month on the heels of the just-released Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life that shows millions of people, including millions of Catholics, are walking away from organized religion. My colleague Tom Roberts has written well [2] on this topic.

Meanwhile, a 77-year-old diminutive Tibet Buddhist monk, the Dalai Lama, has been on a speaking tour at colleges in the Northeast. On Thursday, he spoke at Western Connecticut State University.

A number of things stand out in the reporting on his visits. They are sold-out events with enthusiastic young people.

According to my local newspaper [3], *The Greenwich Time*:

> The 77-year-old Dalai Lama's talk was entitled "The Art of Compassion." Throughout it, he stressed the need for finding inner peace and happiness, which would then manifest themselves in the world through kindness and decency.

"Others' happiness is my happiness," he said.

Here are quotes by those in attendance:

> Kris Larsen, who says she had seen the Dalai Lama speak about a dozen times, including once in Scotland, made sure to arrive early to avoid a long wait. "I've seen his Holiness many times, so I know it can get crazy," the New Britain resident said.
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> Kimberly Stein, of Brookfield, sat in the upper levels of the arena, paging through a book.
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> When asked why she had come to hear him speak, Stein said simply, "I think the world needs a lot of peace."
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> "He was awesome," said Sharon Lavatori, of Ridgefield. "The moment he started talking, I could feel the warmth rising in my body. He spoke of the things I wanted to hear."
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> Brian Thomas, of Branford, said he came to hear talk the Dalai Lama's words about the need to build compassion from within.

"I found out I can" he said. "I was surprised in was intrinsic, rather than extrinsic."

> Ed Muszala, of Bridgewater, just laughed when asked what he thought of what he had just witnessed,

"He's the Dalai Lama," Muszala said. "He's amazing. I wouldn't have missed this for the world."

Perhaps the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization ought to study the Dalai Lama's words and actions. What we are used to hearing and seeing in the U.S. from bishops are condemnations, harsh treatment of those who don't have the same views as the bishops, and investigations.

The Dalai Lama is a powerful counter to these bishops because he speaks of peace, gentleness and compassion and offers up plenty of laughter. Perhaps the Dalai Lama's sensibility, message and approach should be the model of the so-called new evangelization that will begin to stanch the massive hemorrhaging of Catholics leaving the church. The church's current model isn't working.

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