

Session 1 Keynote: With Every Breath

I want to start today with a simple question:

When was the last time you actually stopped and noticed your breathing?

Not your praying.

Not your serving.

Not your planning.

Just... breathing.

Most of us never think about it. We inhale and exhale thousands of times a day without noticing. Breath is constant. Quiet. Necessary. It sustains everything, even when we are unaware of it.

And that's what makes the theme With Every Breath so powerful.

Because breath is one of the primary ways Scripture describes the presence and movement of God.

In Genesis, God breathes life into Adam.

In Ezekiel, dry bones come alive when breath enters them.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus breathes on the apostles and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The breath of God is what brings things to life.

The very breath of God is connected to life, mission, renewal, and transformation.

And I think that matters because ministry was never meant to be something we do merely through effort, talent, or personality.

Ministry only becomes truly alive when the Holy Spirit is involved.

You can have schedules, programs, games, talks, retreats, worship nights, and small groups, but without the Holy Spirit, it becomes activity instead of transformation.

The Spirit is what changes hearts.

The Spirit is what gives courage.

The Spirit is what allows ordinary people to become witnesses of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is not reserved for priests, speakers, or "super holy" people.

The Spirit is active in you.

In your conversations.

In your prayers.

In your listening.

In your encouragement.

In your faithfulness.

In your willingness to simply show up.

Today I want us to reflect on what it means to live and serve with every breath dependent on the Holy Spirit.

Not just occasionally aware of God.

But living every part of ministry connected to His presence.

The Holy Spirit Is the Source of Ministry

One of the easiest traps in ministry is thinking that effectiveness depends mostly on us.

If I prepare enough.

If I say the right thing.

If I lead perfectly.

If I know enough theology.

If I can connect with every teen.

But Christianity did not spread because the apostles were naturally impressive people.

Think about who Jesus chose.

Fishermen.

Tax collectors.

Ordinary people.

And yet those same people changed the world.

Why?

Because they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 says: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses."

Not: "You will receive power when you become charismatic enough."

Not: "When you have enough experience."

Not: "When you feel fully qualified."

The power comes from the Holy Spirit.

And I think volunteers need to hear that.

Because sometimes you walk into ministry wondering:

"Am I enough?"

"Do I know enough?"

"Can God really use me?"

And the answer is:

On your own, probably not.

But the Holy Spirit absolutely can.

God has always loved working through ordinary people who are open to Him.

The Spirit gives wisdom in conversations you didn't plan for.

The Spirit gives patience when a teen is difficult.
The Spirit gives courage to speak truth with love.
The Spirit gives peace when ministry feels uncertain.
And sometimes the Spirit works most powerfully in moments that feel completely small.
A simple conversation after a Life Night.
A kind welcome at the door.
A moment of praying with a teen.
Remembering someone's name.
Listening without judgment.
Those moments may seem ordinary to you.
But the Holy Spirit loves working through ordinary faithfulness.

The Holy Spirit Brings Life

One of my favorite images in Scripture is from Ezekiel 37.
God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath, and suddenly dead bones begin to live again.
It's this incredible image of restoration and resurrection.

And honestly, isn't that what youth ministry is?
We get to watch God bring life where there was hopelessness.
We watch teenagers discover prayer for the first time.
We watch students encounter Jesus in the Eucharist.
We watch kids who felt isolated suddenly experience community.
We watch hearts soften.
We watch people return to confession.
We watch teens begin asking deeper questions.
That transformation is not something we manufacture.
It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we can feel pressure in ministry to create emotional moments or engineer spiritual experiences.
But encounter is not something we force.
Our role is to create space.
The Holy Spirit is the one who moves.
And what's incredible is that the Spirit does not only work through big conference moments or worship nights.
The Spirit works slowly and consistently.
Like breath.
Quietly. Constantly. Faithfully.

Sometimes the Spirit is moving in ways we cannot immediately see.
A teenager may look disengaged for months and suddenly open up.
A conversation you barely remember might deeply impact someone years later.
A teen may not remember your entire talk, but they will remember how well you listened.
The Spirit works beneath the surface long before we see visible fruit.

And that should give us tremendous hope.
Because ministry is not ultimately dependent on our ability to produce results.
It is about our willingness to remain available to the Spirit.

Living With Every Breath Aware of God

I think one of the greatest invitations for us as volunteers is learning to recognize God not only in “church moments,” but in everyday life.

Sometimes we compartmentalize the Holy Spirit.

We expect Him at adoration.

At retreats.

At Mass.

But the Spirit wants to move in every part of our lives.

At work.

In our homes.

In conversations with family.

Driving to Life Nights or Edge Nights.

Setting up chairs.

Praying quietly before teens arrive.

The Spirit wants relationship, not occasional attention.

And that changes ministry.

Because ministry stops becoming simply something we do and starts becoming an overflow of a life lived with God.

Teenagers notice that difference.

They can tell when someone genuinely knows Jesus.

Not perfectly, not flawlessly, but authentically.

One of the greatest gifts you can give teenagers is a Spirit-filled life.

A life that prays.

A life that trusts God.

A life that listens.

A life that seeks holiness.

A life that reflects joy.

And the beautiful thing is that the Holy Spirit doesn't just work through your strengths.

Sometimes He works through your humility.

Your honesty.

Your willingness to admit you don't have all the answers.

The Spirit works through our openness.

That's why the saints were powerful, not because they were naturally extraordinary, but because they were radically available to God.

So today, every breath is an invitation.

An invitation to remember that God is near.

An invitation to rely on the Holy Spirit.

An invitation to let your ministry flow not just from effort, but from communion with God.

The Holy Spirit is alive.
Still moving. Still renewing hearts. Still transforming lives.
And incredibly, He chooses to work through people like us.
Ordinary people.
Volunteers.
People who are willing to say yes.

So may we become men and women who live with every breath aware of God's presence.
And may the Holy Spirit continue to breathe life into our ministry, our parishes, our families, and
the teens entrusted to us.

Close in prayer.