

Letter of the Youth

Santiago, 12 September 2018

Dear Schoenstatt Movement Family in Chile:

After an intense and very deep process of reflection, the Girls' and Boys' Youth of Santiago arrived at the following letter that seeks to raise some issues that, as a Movement, we feel require our reflection, challenge, and dialogue.

We do not hold the absolute truth on any of these issues; they represent our assessment based on our experiences throughout the years we have been part of this family we love so dearly. We want to say it up front: these are reflections from Santiago that we underscored with our specific experiences, and therefore are not necessarily valid or identical for all those who belong to the youth in Chile. At the same time, we invite each Shrine, Branch and apostolate to engage in their own dialogue, proposals, and solutions so as to set out new structures and ideas that may be able to respond to the times we are living in as a country.

Our aim, with these words, is to "take a page from the book of the adults" in the movement, as Pope Francis encouraged us during his visit in January. During that same address in Maipú he urged us to speak out and be the renewal that the Church needs. We took up the challenge; its consequences and we also take responsibility for what we express here - good and bad - we take responsibility for what we say in these pages.

We caution that the letter has several footnotes that complement or add to the text, help to better understand what we are referring to, and for this reason, we invite that you read them with the same interest as the paragraphs.

1. Schoenstatt, its renewal and the voices of the world.

a. Distance between ideals and reality.

A situation that affects us, as youth is the **distance between the ideals that guide us and their application to real life, to our daily lives**. Our understanding of ideal is all formulations (phrases, mottos, quotations) that invite and encourage a specific attitude or lifestyle, which Fr. Kentenich described as the "pedagogy of ideals".

These ideals are not bad in themselves –they encourage us to reach for the highest goals, great deeds, daring and holiness –, but sadly, as a result of our faults and that of others, we have not been able to bring them down to a practical reality and even worse, we have distanced ourselves from this reality.

It is our fault because, as we said, we have not brought them to life; brought down the beautiful words to specific actions.^[1] The problem also lies beyond us because there have been times when our ideals have been, to a certain extent, formulated from supernatural, philosophical or metaphysical abstractions^[2], those are good and holy in the abstract, but are not suited to the pedagogical processes or the originality of each Branch or Youth.^[3]

Furthermore, it has often happened that we confuse a particular ideal with its social projection. For example, when the Boys' Youth speak about being "new kingly, free, and apostolic men," they are often thinking about a specific personality, he is a sociable guy with leadership qualities, is joyful, reflective, deep, a good friend and plays the guitar. The ideal has a name and surname! The same happens in the Girls' Youth. Clearly, the problem is not in the formulation, but –once again– in its practical application.

By the same token, there are those who have felt excluded because they do not represent the type of woman or man that they supposedly should be, or have experienced internal or external pressure to fit a mold that does not characterize their unique originality. This is, clearly, wrong: **Within this vision, the ideal, rather than being an invitation to unleash the full capacity of each person, it becomes a sifter.**

We believe that what is most important in an ideal is the ability to embrace diversity, originality and the miracle that the Holy Spirit awakens in each person who participates in our movement.^[4] From this perspective, we can say that each person "reinterprets the ideal" because it deepens the understanding of one, opens up new ways of expressing it and increasingly becomes a discovery of the life that God wants to give us.

Based on the above, it is our understanding that everyone should feel that they are a part of Schoenstatt, opening the doors and allowing the greatest diversity of personalities and ideas, different political, social, sexual, and cultural positions to enter our Family, which was one of Fr. Kentenich's dreams through the Apostolic World Confederation.

Finally we would like to highlight an issue that concerns us as youth, and that up until now we have not been able to respond fully: how do we align the ideals of our Youth with the sexual realities of our time? For example, how to relate being strong with being gay?^[5], or how to relate the ideal of purity with losing one's virginity before marriage?^[6] These are complex issues that demand a solution. We ask for the help of the entire Family, especially our spiritual advisors, to respond by means of deep reflection and conversation.

b. "In the clouds" Catholicism and reactionary Catholicism.

Sadly, this is a problem that we are experiencing as the Church in Chile and which we, as a Movement that belongs to it, share. It cuts across various charisms, faith-sharing groups, parishes, chapels; consecrated persons, lay people, youth and adults. It is not the same in every place, but it is an attitude that appears more strongly in some places and people than in others. We believe that in certain groups of the Family Branches and Institutes this has happened with an intensity that we cannot ignore.

These two distortions are related to the dialogue between our faith and reality. Thus a Catholicism that lives "in the clouds" simply ignores reality, because it exclusively clings to itself, to "immutable truths" and therefore does not accept the possibility of change or being confronted with new and diverse voices.

In contrast, reactionary Catholicism sees the world as an enemy abandoned to heresy and against which it must fight to restore the values of a "golden age". This vision results in, for example, very intense responses when discussing laws concerning value-based issues (and so it should be), but very few people are able to sit down and talk or find solutions to the painful situations that lie behind the rules - exclusion, loneliness, lack of meaning, abandonment, marginalization - and which cry out desperately for a welcoming and positive response from the Church.

Both forms are distortions of a true Christian and Schoenstatt spirit ^[7]. In fact, Pope Francis has spoken out strongly against them, instead calling us to be a Church "of open doors," "merciful", "welcoming". In other words, a Church –in our case a Movement of renewal– that does not condemn the world, but welcomes it, baptizes it and saves it just like Christ did in his time.

Therefore, above all we, as a Family and especially us as the youth, must work to cultivate a healthy Catholicism that enters into dialogue with the concerns of the world^[8], and that, in the light of the Gospel, seeks to respond to them. In this we follow the example of our Father and Founder, who did not go out in search of an ideal kingdom, but rather one that already existed, with all of its upheaval, ideas, and transformations of his time, and from which he outlined many of the Family's questions ^[9].

2. Authority in Schoenstatt.

a. The role of spiritual advisers in the Youth.

I. Sexual abuse, abuse of conscience and power.

A sensitive issue at this time when we have been so deeply affected by the scandals of sexual abuse, the abuse of conscience and power, which we have also had the pain of experiencing in our Movement, is the role of authority within the Church, especially in the guidance of children and young people. ^[10]Hard as it is, and even if some steps have been taken to heal the wounds, this continues to be a taboo subject for us: we do not speak openly about consecrated people who have been sentenced or we speak about it "in secret," the investigations underway at the moment circulate as rumors but are not discussed openly, several shrines and Family Branches avoid talking about abuse in the Church (so as not to open more wounds).

As young people, this hurts us in a special way. We call on the entire Family to be more clear, emphatic, and transparent about the investigations and rulings that affect our Movement today. Talk about it openly, so that the information does not become rumor. We should draw up protocols in our respective Branches, Federations and Institutes ^[11] in a community-minded way; if this has affected our groups, why do we feel excluded from these processes? We call for courage and honesty, even if it hurts.

ii. An incorrect understanding of being a spiritual director

We believe that the above is partly a consequence of a poor profile or interpretation of the role of the spiritual director to the youth— be it a Lady of Schoenstatt, Sister or Priest – in recent times, giving rise to an incorrect understanding of what it means to work with our groups, apostolic and social organizations: **Directors who have placed themselves or their ideas at the center, instead of the life that Christ awakens in each of us. They have reversed the roles: The Branch adapts itself to the spiritual director rather than the spiritual director placing him or herself at the service of the Branch.**

This has, on several occasions, resulted in pastoral and spiritual decisions that are centered on the person of the spiritual director and not on those in his or her care ^[12], which created debatable or clearly bad measures ^[13] that were, in some cases, only corrected with the arrival of the next spiritual director. In the case of the younger groups— from 7 to 18 years— this is even more complicated, because when the relationship with the consecrated person in charge is affected, the permanence of the group is threatened, because they do not know whom to turn to.

Therefore, we all need to work to heal these situations that bring us pain today, and affect not only Schoenstatt but the whole Church as well. First and foremost, we adopt the agency that Fr. Kentenich and the Holy Father called us to as lay people, not allowing everything to be resolved by the consecrated, but to take an active, mature, and positive role. Secondly, we also urge the spiritual directors working with couples –in the League, Federation and Institute—^[14], to complement and help in the leadership of our communities. In this way, with the involvement of more adults with diverse viewpoints and charisms, we can achieve a healthy balance that avoids unilateral decisions that may later be regretted. ^[14]

Ultimately, the commitment must be increasingly create healthy and protected environments that best awakens the originality and freedom of each person.

b. A family with walls.

This point harkens back to what we said in the introduction: experiences are very different at various shrines, we are writing based on experiences at the shrines in Santiago and things that also apply to our city and are possible irrelevant in other places. Nonetheless, echo the call that each location and area can reflect on this for himself or herself.

What we point out here is closely linked with the fact that Schoenstatt is a Federation Movement, which has led to— in our view— the current experience that we are a "family with walls". **That is, to avoid problems, tensions and complicated situations, we raise walls or create separate spaces ^[15], so as not to interfere (this includes not speaking out) with the issues of another group.**

We do not agree with this vision, in fact, we believe that we have sinned greatly by not speaking, not denouncing, or not daring to confront what we felt was wrong in relation to our Covenant brothers and sisters. We have to recognize it: we lacked the courage, which is so necessary today. If we are truly a Family, we must have the ability to speak our thoughts openly, whether it is good or not, but with the confidence that always comes from love. Correcting one another, because our love for Schoenstatt urges us to act. Of course, we must always respect the legitimate actions and decisions within each group, but we cannot succumb to fear, cowardice or indifference on issues that affect us all. ^[16]

Particularly delicate here is the issue of consecrated Institutes where tensions, conflicts and unresolved problems have dragged on for many years and are hurting us as a Family. We highlight especially the situation between the Ladies of Schoenstatt, the Sisters and the Girls' Youth where some girls are excluded from the activities of the others, producing conflicts and problems which often do not start with the girls, leaving some of them unable to enjoy wholesome and fruitful spiritual direction. ^[17] We invite them to set aside half-solutions and engage in effective, sincere, healing and committed dialogue.

This is why we believe that we still need to grow so that we can truly be a Family, whose paths might still often be crossed with tensions and include heated discussions, but whose objective is always to work with an openness of heart, welcome, dialogue, listening and understanding. We are Family! It would be strange if we never disagreed or experienced friction like any natural family.

c. Our relationship with Fr. Kentenich.

All of the above is also deeply rooted in our vision of Fr. Kentenich. Sadly, for reasons we do not know how to explain, some parts of the Family have had a somewhat infantile relationship with him: an excessive idealization of his person, at times to the point of turning him to someone practically perfect, or quote his words –originally spoken in specific contexts and moments –as a truth that solves all of our daily problems. ^[18]

It is not our intention to doubt our Founder, his message or the foundations of the Movement, not at all! We are thankful that we can live in a Covenant charism, the Shrine, the Blessed Mother, our federative Movement, practical faith in Divine Providence and apostolic living. No, we cannot renounce him, because that would be to renounce our charism! It is because of his heroic example that we are called to imitate him, we do not want to conform to things as they are, and we want to be able to respond to the problems and needs today's world. **This is why, rather than being in constant adoration of Fr. Kentenich, his person and history, we should each day increasingly become "Father Kentenichs" in the world whereby we, who know it intimately, are able to incarnate his way of living and acting.** ^[19]

What we have just said above has several consequences that urge us to take various actions: (a) know Fr. Kentenich more deeply, and not only as a static idealization, but as a person, in his thinking— social, cultural, spiritual, psychological, educational, religious –so as to be able to respond to today's problems as he did in his time; (b) abandon an infantile attitude to Father in order to grow and have a more mature relationship with him; (c) be able to respond freely and responsibly to certain things that Fr. Kentenich was not able to foresee or did not map out for our Movement, reinterpreting his thinking according to the realities of today's world^[20]; (d) reflect on how we are transmitting the person and teachings of Fr. Kentenich today.

3. Our relationship with the Church

a. Schoenstatt is Church.

It is sometimes said that there is a distinction between Schoenstatt and the Church as two separate worlds ^[21], referring firstly to is happening in the Movement and the secondly in the diocesan Church and other charisms. This mental separation is causing us much harm, makes us run from the world and forget the true Church. **Schoenstatt is the Church, what happens in the Church happens in Schoenstatt and vice versa.** ^[22]

Is the current crisis not the best example of this? For this reason, it is urgent to renew our understanding and our role within the Church. The key question is: does the work of the Movement in its internal organizations wear out (Branches, Federations and Institutes)? ^[23]

It seems to us that today, especially, we have to go out to care for and renew our damaged Church, we know that the balance between the inside and the outside is difficult to achieve, but the way we have entrenched and closed ourselves off is stifling our creative, active and apostolic ability.

b. Schoenstatt is not an exclusive movement.

We have often heard that Schoenstatt is a Movement that educates leaders. It is true, and we are proud of our leadership schools, membership, and formation groups, that from our shrines, people are forged who place themselves at the service of the Movement and the Church. **But under no circumstance should this give us the right to be an elite or elitist movement, an exclusive movement.** ^[24]

We are called to give an answer to the world and society and this means— to a large extent— to go beyond our walls, get off the sofa, and open the doors of our formation houses to share this wonderful charism. The Holy Father was not wrong during the Audience in the Paul VI Hall in 2014, when he said that we cannot be a movement that "combs sheep" or consists of "spiritual hairdressers". Today, despite the efforts of many, the concept of a *Schoenstatt that goes out* is more a declaration of principles than it is a lived reality. ^[25]

The best way to measure this reality is the number of pilgrims that participate in our Movement. As a result of historic and cultural circumstances, Schoenstatt in Chile has focused more on the formation and the spiritual depth of great leaders than on popular piety and pastoral work for pilgrims. We do not judge this situation. But if this leadership— including ourselves— does not offer a response for society, light up new paths for many who need it, then what is it all for? ^[26] Fr. Kentenich understood our shrines as "places of grace where thousands of pilgrims could come to share with Christ and our Blessed Mother." Can we say that our shrines are doing this today? ^[27] It is necessary to deeply reflect on and personally confront this issue.

c. "A poor church and for the poor"

We cannot deny that Schoenstatt has a social vocation. Many projects, actions, and missions have arisen and continue to be born from our shrines help the poor, marginalized and excluded. We have to be proud of them. Despite this, we have not generally been "watchful" on this issue, we lack the urgency to go out to help and walk with those who suffer. We help, yes, but often without committing ourselves greatly, comfortably, and in our own time. Do we truly see Christ in those who suffer? We believe that we have not truly been a "Church for the poor" as Fr. Kentenich urged us.

Nor have we known how to be a "poor Church". Over the last few years, in some parts of our Movement in Chile there have been expenditures and building projects that are sometimes disproportionate and have caused scandal for some of our covenant brothers and sisters²⁹. We are not against the expenditure in itself; we understand that every Family or Institute should have a welcoming and dignified space of their own to hold their meetings. However we reject the spirit of comfort that is closed off, lacks solidarity, and often hides the division that lies behind these situations.

A spirit of comfort and being closed off are only two sides of the same coin: by not going out, by not finding ways to solve the world's problems, by not "burning" ourselves with social and spiritual concerns, we become "spiritual hairdressers" whose sole objective is to have a peaceful and calm life, a narrow life.

The lack of solidarity is an expression of a divisive spirit: we think that we are fiefdoms, islands that are isolated from one another, when in reality we are intimately connected to one another. What happens in Maipú affects those in Campanario, and the same is the case for Valle de Maria and Nuevo Belén. We are in this together. For this reason, we cannot remain in the semblance of tranquility because our material concerns have been satisfied, within a self-focused perspective that is isolated from reality. No, we are responsible for one another, and at the same time, we should look out for everyone else, not only spiritually, but also materially.

We believe that this is what we have to become, in some places, a Movement that is simpler, has more solidarity and goes out: that spends more on needs than on luxuries, that takes not only its own concerns into consideration, but also those of other members of the Family and uses its goods generously to go out and give life.

Concluding words

Finally, over and above the conclusions to this letter, what is most relevant is the process of reflection. **We urge the whole Movement in Chile, as well as those who do not belong to it but dream of a new Church, to rethink our structures, our pastoral methods, our forms and practices in order to offer a true answer to the challenging times we are living today.** We hope that this process can begin with the Regional Retreats for each district and can end with the National Leaders Retreat that will take place in May 2019 where we can bring all of these reflections together. We hope that everyone is able to speak out, to speak openly and with love to work through issues and hurts that sometimes have taken years to find a solution.

We trust that the Blessed Mother will always intercede for us to the Holy Spirit from her shrine, that this can be a time of fraternity, courage, and commitment.

We remain faithful.

This letter has been signed as a Branch, where the majority supports its content. We also offered the possibility for some to sign individually, either because their respective branches did not support the letter or wanted to show their support in a more concrete way.

Girls' Youth Bellavista
Girls' Youth Providencia
Girls' Youth Ermita de Maipú
Girls' Youth Monte Schoenstatt
Boys' Youth Bellavista
Boys' Youth Nuevo Belén
Boys' Youth Providencia
Boys' Youth Campanario
Carolina Brito (Campanario)
Macarena Hernández (Bellavista)
Francisca Cortés Novoa (Campanario)
María Jesús Garnham (Campanario)
Pilar Riadi (Campanario)
Christian Calderón (Nuevo Belén)
Jose Cordova Fredes (Nuevo Belén) Guillermo Rodríguez (Nuevo Belén)
Sofía Perú (Campanario)
Elisa Grez (Campanario)
Isidora Marambio (Campanario)
Francisca Villagra (Campanario)
Catalina Arriagada Ramos (Bellavista y
Tierra Escogida)
Víctor Pérez Mac Clure (Campanario)
Diego Irarrázaval (Campanario)
Sofía Valenzuela (Campanario)
Santiago Arze (Campanario)
Matías Rodríguez (Campanario)
Juan Miguel de la Fuente (Campanario)
Nicolás Garnham Opazo (Campanario)
Maximiliano Garnham (Campanario)
Sofía Cuevas (Campanario)
Sofía Joanne (Valle Hermoso del Niño
Jesús)
Teresita Jouanne (Valle Hermoso del Niño
Jesús)
Julio Fuentes (Nuevo Belén)
Rodrigo Leiva (Nuevo Belén)
Javiera Villalon (Bustos)
Elisa de la Fuente (Campanario)
Natalia Casassas (Valle Hermoso del Niño
Jesús)
María Paz Valdivia (Monte Schoenstatt)
Magdalena Latorre (Campanario)
Javiera Lorca (Bellavista)
Paula Castro (Bellavista)
Paloma Valdés (Bellavista)
Antonia Barahona (Bellavista)
Sabina Orellana (Bellavista)
Isidora Figueroa (Bellavista)
Nicolás Parra Carrasco (Campanario) Tomás Prieto Castelblanco (Valle Hermoso del Niño Jesús)
Manuel Lorca (Campanario)
Benjamín Rodríguez Doren (Campanario)
Lucas Apparcel (Campanario)
María Jesús Tocornal (Providencia)
Vicente Jaramillo Errázuriz (Campanario)
Blanca de la Fuente (Campanario)
Catalina Saavedra (Bellavista)
Felipe Flores (Nuevo Belén)

Forty-three people had been signed the draft of this letter, known to many due to an unwanted leak.

If there are any questions, issues or dialogue, please email:

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[1] Or similar to our Schoenstatt heroes, like Mario Hiriart, who with his lived heroic faith became a "living chalice for the Church".

[2] Who, unfortunately, sometimes not even deepen the personal experience that each one has with Jesus Christ, much less moral values, attitudes of life, etc. Therefore, "we built on the sand".

[3] A very relevant example is the Girls' Youth ideals on purity, which often can be confused or reduced solely to "remaining a virgin until marriage," an issue that in several places does not match reality or the social expectations of the girls. Of course, we are not saying the ideal should be abandoned, but to live it to the full extent that it means to be "pure" and not reduce it only to sexuality.

We emphasize and celebrate that for several months, the Girls' Youth together with their spiritual directors have started to work through these topics at a national level, and we hope that this process can continue to grow deep and more complementary.

[4] We have to say that is a particular experience of the Movement in Chile and does not apply to what is central to Schoenstatt, where charisms as diverse as Max Brunner and Joseph Engling, for example, embodied the spirit of the first generation according to their own personality.

[5] Just by way of example, in a survey carried by the Family Federation among their own children, 40% of the respondents said they were "very much in agreement" with the statement that a homosexual marriage is just as valid as a heterosexual one.

[6] In the same survey, only 25% said that they were "very much in agreement" with the statement that virginity before marriage was a value.

[7] Especially if we consider that Fr. Kentenich spoke about the "voices of the world" as one of the three ways in which God reveals himself to us and challenges us.

[8] For example, feminism, homosexuality, trans-sexuality, divorce, euthanasia, grounds for abortion, violence, migration, demographic exclusion, are among the issues, which we face and confront on a daily basis.

[9] We only need to remember that Fr. Kentenich took elements of Nazism and communism for the creation of the symbols of the movement, as well as some of the theories of Freud, an atheist materialist as the psychological foundations for the movement.

[10] For example, in the aforementioned survey by the Family Federation, only 25% of the young people said that they spoke about difficult or current topics with teachers, priests or religious persons. ¹¹In the current situation and in light of the Pope's message, every place should generate protocols to counter abuse regardless of whether or not there have been cases of abuse. We are uncertain whether this has in fact happened within the whole Family.

[11] It is worrying that, for example, sometimes the Boys' Youth is seen as an extension of the Institute of the Schoenstatt Fathers and the Girls' Youth are seen as an extension of the Institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters or the Ladies of Schoenstatt. In this regard, we need to recognize the thematic and spiritual autonomy and independence that befits the youth.

[12] In order to avoid particularism, we will not refer to specific cases, but recognize that there are cases where spiritual directors have denied young people from belonging to a Branch, forcibly impose their topics during retreats, reject the ideals or formulations that the young people developed, among others.

[13] For this, enthusiasm is not enough; it also requires preparation by these couples to provide a healthy and constructive accompaniment.

[14] This means an openness on the part of the Sisters, Ladies, and Priests, so that their Branches can be co-assisted and directed by other Institutes, and not hold them as their "own fiefdoms". Finally, the most important should be that which assists in the best direction and development of their youth in their care.

[15] Or shrines, city zones or places according to social class.

[16] There are also examples in this regard, such as complaints sent to the General Secretariat of the Movement who responded that nothing could be done about it or silence/omission by the family with regard to conflicts within certain sectors of Schoenstatt.

[17] Once again, without going into specific examples, there are cases of young people were unable to hold their meetings at a particular shrine because "the other youth group is coming," were denied full membership to a Branch after asking for help from another Institute or were not allowed to have a spiritual director from a different Institute, among other things.

[18] As an example of the first, there are criticisms leveled at Fr. Kentenich's attitude in the Dachau concentration camp or the Epistola Perlonga, which they prefer to ignore. In the second, apostolic projects and lay initiatives have been rejected because of interpretations given to Father's words.

[19] This not our idea, but is one of the recommendations that the Society of Jesus gave to Schoenstatt on the occasion of the centenary in 2014, where they told us that among our experiences in the next 100 years is the increased distance between those who knew the Founder personally, and the need to renew and embody his message by making it relevant to a new generation.

[20] By means of examples, we can refer to issues relating to life and mobility in large cities, economic migration, homosexuality, political feminism, technological abuse, globalization, climate change, the relationship between indigenous peoples and culture, the search for the Latin American identity, etc. (can increase)

[21] For example, this is not something that comes from the essence of the Movement, but is a social and cultural situation that has developed in our country. It is enough to quote Fr. Kentenich who believed in "Everything for Schoenstatt and Schoenstatt for the Church".

[22] We give special emphasis to the fact that we very often forget about the third goal of Schoenstatt: the Apostolic World Confederation, which according to Fr. Kentenich, promotes the union and coordination of all apostolic forces –at diocesan, national and international level – in all areas of daily life.

[23] In this, we give as an example, the following experience from Maipú and Nuevo Belén, where the attachment to a parish or the National Shrine decisively contributes to diversity, openness, and the revitalization of the youth in these places.

[24] Related to this is the act of sometimes being a movement of "social classes" where importance is given on merit of their age, or where the shrines become fiefdoms divided by economic and cultural income.

[25] We are aware of the many apostolic works carried out by people belonging to the Movement, but in part, due to the understanding of the Church and Schoenstatt as separate worlds, we do not bring their own charism into them, which are then kept for the "institutional" apostolates.

[26] A good example is Fr. Hernán Alessandri, who from Schoenstatt was able to see the great needs of his time, and with a popular and apostolic spirit, created many of the organizations that we today associate with those who are excluded.

[27] To provide a few examples: there are shrines that do not even have posters outside saying that it is a place of prayer, shrines that are simply known in the surrounding area as "the park", shrines where you can only enter by first collecting the keys from the house of the person responsible for the place.

²⁹ This can include, for example, the construction of houses with very expensive materials and the best teams, the lack of savings at our Shrines, etc.

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