

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

“YOUNG PEOPLE, THE FAITH AND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT”

# PRE-SYNODAL MEETING



DOCUMENT

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## Introduction

The young person of today is met with a host of external and internal challenges and opportunities, many of which are specific to their individual contexts and some of which are shared across continents. In light of this, it is necessary for the Church to examine the way in which it thinks about and engages with young people in order to be an effective, relevant and life-giving guide throughout their lives.

This document is a synthesized platform to express some of our thoughts and experiences. It is important to note that these are the reflections of young people of the 21st century from various religious and cultural backgrounds. With this in mind, the Church should view these reflections not as an empirical analysis of any other time in the past, but rather as an expression of where we are now, where we are headed and as an indicator of what she needs to do moving forward.

It is important at the outset to clarify the parameters of this document. It is neither to compose a theological treatise, nor is it to establish new Church teaching. Rather, it is a statement reflecting the specific realities, personalities, beliefs and experiences of the young people of the world. This document is destined for the Synodal Fathers. This is to give the Bishops a compass, pointing towards a clearer understanding of young people: a navigational aid for the upcoming Bishops' Synod on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment" in October 2018. It is important that these experiences be viewed and understood according to the various contexts in which young people are situated.

These reflections were borne out of the meeting of more than 300 young representatives from around the world, convened in Rome March 19-24, 2018 at the inaugural Pre-Synodal Meeting of Young People and the participation of 15,000 young people engaged online through the Facebook groups.

The document is understood as a summary of all of our participants' input based on the work of 20 language groups and 6 from social media. This will be one source, among others, that will contribute to the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops 2018. It is our hope that the Church and other institutions can learn from the process of this Pre-Synodal Meeting and listen to the voices of young people.

Understanding this, we can therefore move forward to explore with openness and faith where the young person is situated today, where the young person sees his or herself in relation to others, and how we as the Church can best accompany young people towards a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

## Part One

# The Challenges and Opportunities of Young People in the World Today

### 1. *The Formation of Personality*

Young people look for a sense of self by seeking communities that are supportive, uplifting, authentic and accessible: communities that empower them. We recognize places that are helpful for the development of their personality, namely family, which occupies a privileged position. In many parts of the world, the role of elders and reverence for one's ancestors are contributing factors to the formation of their identities. However, this is not shared universally, as traditional family models in other places are in decline. This leads to young people suffering as well. Some young people move away from their family traditions, hoping to be more original than what they see as "stuck in the past" and "old fashioned." On the other hand, in some parts of the world, young people seek identity by remaining rooted within their family traditions and striving to stay true to the way they were raised.

The Church therefore needs to better support families and their formation. This is especially relevant in some countries without freedom of expression where young people – particularly minors – are prevented from attending church and as such, must be formed in the faith at home by their parents.

A sense of belonging is a significant factor to the shaping of one's identity. Social exclusion is a contributing factor to the loss of self-worth and identity experienced by many. In the Middle East, many young people feel obliged to convert to other religions in order to be accepted by their peers and the surrounding dominant culture. This is also acutely felt by immigrant communities in Europe, who also feel the pressures of social exclusion and the pressure to shed their cultural identity and assimilate to the dominant culture. This is an area where the Church needs to model, and provide space for, healing for our families, responding to these issues by showing that there is room for everyone.

It is worth noting that the young person's identity is also shaped by our external interaction and membership within specific groups, associations and movements which are also active outside of the Church. Sometimes, parishes are no longer places of connection. We also recognize the role of educators and friends, such as leaders of youth groups who can become good examples. We need to find attractive, coherent and authentic models. We need rational and critical explanations to complex issues – simplistic answers do not suffice.

For some, religion is now considered a private matter. Sometimes, we feel that the sacred appears to be something separated from our daily lives. The Church oftentimes appears as too severe and is often associated with excessive moralism. Sometimes, in the Church, it is hard to overcome the logic of "it has always been done this way". We need a Church that is welcoming and merciful, which appreciates its roots and patrimony and which loves everyone, even those who are not following the

perceived standards. Many of those who look for a peaceful life end up dedicating themselves to alternative philosophies or experiences.

Other key places of belonging are groups such as, social networks, friends and classmates as well as our social and natural environments. These are places where many of us spend most of our time. Often, our schools do not teach us to develop our critical thinking.

Crucial moments for the development of our identity include: deciding our course of study, choosing our profession, deciding our beliefs, discovering our sexuality and making life-changing commitments.

Other things that can both shape and affect the formation of our identities and personalities is our experiences with the Church. Young people are deeply vested in and concerned about topics such as sexuality, addiction, failed marriages, broken families as well as larger-scale social issues such as organized crime, human trafficking, violence, corruption, exploitation, femicide, all forms of persecution and the degradation of our natural environment. These are of grave concern in vulnerable communities around the world. We are afraid because in many of our countries there is social, political and economic instability.

As we grapple with these challenges, we need inclusion, welcome, mercy and tenderness from the Church – both as an institution and as a community of faith.

## **2. *Relationship with Other People***

Young people are trying to make sense of a very complicated and diverse world. We have access to new possibilities to overcome differences and divisions in the world, but this is being realized in different realities and to varying degrees. Many young people are used to seeing diversity as a richness and find opportunity in the pluralistic world. Multiculturalism has the potential to facilitate an environment for dialogue and tolerance. We value the diversity of ideas in our globalized world, the respect for other's thoughts and freedom of expression. Still, we want to preserve our cultural identity and avoid uniformity and a throwaway culture. We should not fear our diversity but celebrate our differences and what makes each one of us unique. Sometimes, we feel excluded for being Christians in a social environment that is adverse to religion. We are aware that we need to encounter ourselves and others to build up profound bonds.

In some countries, the Christian faith is a minority while another religion is dominant. Countries with Christian roots have a tendency today to gradually reject the Church and religion. Some young people are trying to make sense of faith in an increasingly secular society, where freedom of conscience and religion are under attack. Racism at different levels affects young people in different parts of the world. There is still an opportunity for the Church to propose another “way” for young people to live their lives, but this needs to be done so within often-complicated social frameworks.

In this way it is often hard for young people to even hear the message of the Gospel. This is accentuated in places where tensions between peoples might become very common, despite a general appreciation for diversity. Particular attention needs to be drawn to our Christian brothers and sisters

who are persecuted around the world. We remember our Christian roots in the blood of the martyrs and while we pray for the end of all persecution, we are grateful for their witness of faith to the world. Moreover, there is still no binding consensus on the question of welcoming migrants and refugees, or on the issues which cause the phenomenon in the first place. This is despite the acknowledgement of the universal call to care for the dignity of every human person.

In a globalized and inter-religious world, the Church needs to not only model but also to elaborate on already existing theological guidelines for peaceful, constructive dialogue with people of other faiths and traditions.

### **3. *Young People and the Future***

Young people dream of safety, stability and fulfilment. Many hope for a better life for their families. In many places of the world, this means looking for physical safety; for others this relates more specifically to finding a good job or a specific lifestyle. A common dream across continents and oceans is the desire to find a place where the young person can feel that he or she belongs.

We envision greater opportunities, of a society which is coherent and trusts us. We seek to be listened to and to not merely be spectators in society but active participants. We seek a Church that helps us find our vocation, in all of its senses. Furthermore, sadly not all of us believe sainthood is something achievable and that it is a path to happiness. We need to revitalize the sense of community that leads us to a sense of belonging.

Some practical concerns make our lives difficult. Many young people have experienced great traumas in a variety of ways. Many still suffer under the weight of mental illness and physical disabilities. The Church needs to better support us and provide avenues to assist us in our healing. In some parts of the world, the only way to attain a secure future is to receive higher education or work excessively. While this is a commonly held standard, it is not always possible due to a variety of circumstances young people find themselves in. This idea is a prevalent notion and has consequently affected our understanding of work. Despite this reality, young people wish to affirm the inherent dignity of work. Sometimes, we end up discarding our dreams. We are too afraid, and some of us have stopped dreaming. This is seen in the many socio-economic pressures that can severely drain the sense of hope among young people. At times, we have not even had the opportunities to keep dreaming.

For this reason, young people seek to engage with and address the social justice issues of our time. We seek the opportunity to work towards building a better world. In this regard, Catholic Social Teaching is a particularly informative tool for young Catholics who also want to pursue this vocation. We want a world of peace, one that harmonizes integral ecology with a sustainable global economy. For young people living in unstable and vulnerable regions of the world, there is a hope and expectation for concrete actions from governments and from society: the end of war and corruption, addressing climate change, social inequalities and security. What is important to note is that regardless of context, everyone shares the same innate desire for the higher ideals: peace, love, trust, equity, freedom and justice.

Young people dream of a better life, yet many are forced to emigrate in order to find a better economic and environmental situation. They hope for peace and are especially attracted to the “Western myth”, as depicted through media. Young Africans dream of a self-reliant local church, one that does not require aid that feeds into dependency, but one that is a life-giving contributor to its communities. Despite the many wars and intermittent outbreaks of violence, young people remain hopeful. In many Western countries, their dreams are centred on personal development and self-realization.

In many places there is a wide gap between the desires of young people and their capacity to make long-term decisions.

#### **4. *Relationship with Technology***

When referring to technology, one must understand the duality of its application. While modern advancements in technology have greatly improved our lives, one must be prudent with its usage. As with all things, reckless application can have negative consequences. While technology has, for some, augmented our relationships, for many others it has taken the form of an addiction, becoming a replacement for human relationship and even God. Regardless, technology is now a permanent part of the life of young people and must be understood as such. Paradoxically, in some countries technology and particularly internet is accessible while the most basic needs and services are still lacking.

The impact of social media in the lives of young people cannot be understated. Social media is a significant part of young people’s identity and way of life. Digital environments have a great potential to unite people across geographical distances like never before. The exchange of information, ideals, values and common interests is now more possible. Access to online learning tools has opened up educational opportunities for young people in remote areas and has brought the world’s knowledge to one’s finger tips.

The duplicity of technology however, becomes evident when it leads to the development of certain vices. This danger is manifested through isolation, laziness, desolation and boredom. It is evident that young people around the world are obsessively consuming media products. Despite living in a hyper-connected world, communication among young people remains limited to those who are similar to them. There is a lack of spaces and opportunities to encounter difference. Mass media culture still exercises a lot of influence over young people’s lives and ideals. With the advent of social media, this has led to new challenges over the extent to which new media companies have power over the lives of young people.

Often, young people tend to separate their behavior into online and offline environments. It is necessary to offer formation to young people on how to live their digital lives. Online relationships can become inhuman. Digital spaces blind us to the vulnerability of another human being and prevent us from our own self-reflection. Problems like pornography distort a young person’s perception of human sexuality. Technology used this way creates a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity.

Other risks include: the loss of identity linked to a misrepresentation of the person, a virtual construction of personality and the loss of grounded social presence. Furthermore, long-term risks include: the loss of memory, culture, and creativity before the immediacy of access to information and a loss of concentration linked to fragmentation. In addition, there exists a culture and dictatorship of appearances.

The conversation on technology is not limited to the internet. In the field of bioethics, technology poses new challenges and risks with regards to the safety of human life at all stages. The advent of artificial intelligence and new technologies such as robotics and automation poses risks to employment opportunities for working-class communities. Technology can be detrimental to human dignity if not used with conscience and caution and if human dignity is not at the center of its usage.

We offer two concrete proposals regarding technology. First, by engaging in a dialogue with young people, the Church should deepen her understanding of technology so as to assist us in discerning its usage. Moreover, the Church should view technology – particularly the internet – as a fertile place for the New Evangelization. The outcomes of these reflections should be formalized through an official Church document. Second, the Church should address the widespread crisis of pornography, including online child abuse, as well as cyber-bullying and the toll these take on our humanity.

## **5. *Search for Meaning in Life***

Many young people, when asked the question “What is the meaning of your life?” do not know how to answer. They do not always make the connection between life and transcendence. Lots of young people, having lost trust in institutions, have become disaffiliated with organized religion and would not see themselves as “religious.” However, young people are open to the spiritual.

Many also lament how infrequently young people seek the answers to life’s meaning in the context of faith and church. In many places around the world, young people attach meaning to their lives through their job and personal success. The difficulty of finding stability in these areas produces insecurity and anxiety. Many have to migrate in order to find a good place to work. Others, due to economic instability, abandon family and culture.

Finally, others noted that while young people can ask questions about the meaning of life, this does not always mean that they are ready to commit themselves decisively to Jesus or to the Church. Today, religion is no longer seen as the main stream through which a young person searches for meaning, as they often turn to other modern currents and ideologies. Scandals attributed to the Church – both real and perceived – affect the confidence of young people in the Church and in the traditional institutions for which she stands.

The Church can play a vital role in ensuring that these young people are not marginalized but feel accepted. This can happen when we seek to promote the dignity of women, both in the Church and in wider society. Today, there is a general problem in society in that women are still not given an equal place. This is also true in the Church. There are great examples of women serving in consecrated religious communities and in lay leadership roles. However, for some young women,

these examples are not always visible. One key question arises from these reflections; what are the places where women can flourish within the Church and society? The Church can approach these problems with real discussion and open-mindedness to different ideas and experiences.

There is often great disagreement among young people, both within the Church and in the wider world, about some of her teachings which are especially controversial today. Examples of these include: contraception, abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation, marriage, and how the priesthood is perceived in different realities in the Church. What is important to note is that irrespective of their level of understanding of Church teaching, there is still disagreement and ongoing discussion among young people on these polemical issues. As a result, they may want the Church to change her teaching or at least to have access to a better explanation and to more formation on these questions. Even though there is internal debate, young Catholics whose convictions are in conflict with official teaching still desire to be part of the Church. Many young Catholics accept these teachings and find in them a source of joy. They desire the Church to not only hold fast to them amid unpopularity but to also proclaim them with greater depth of teaching.

Throughout the world, the relationship to the sacred is complicated. Christianity is often seen as something which belonged to the past and its value or relevance to our lives is no longer understood. Meanwhile, in certain communities, priority is given to the sacred since daily life is structured around religion. In some Asian contexts, the meaning of life can be associated with Eastern philosophies.

Ultimately, many of us strongly want to know Jesus, yet often struggle to realize that He alone is the source of true self-discovery, for it is in a relationship with Him that the human person ultimately comes to discover him or herself. Thus, we have found that young people want authentic witnesses – men and women who vibrantly express their faith and relationship with Jesus while encouraging others to approach, meet, and fall in love with Jesus themselves.

## Part Two

### Faith and Vocation, Discernment and Accompaniment

It is both a joy and a sacred responsibility to accompany young people on their journey of faith and discernment. Young people are more receptive to a “literature of life” than an abstract theological discourse; are conscious and receptive and are also committed to being actively engaged in the world and in the Church. To that end, it is important to understand how young people perceive faith and vocation, and the challenges facing their discernment.

#### **6. Young People and Jesus**

The relationship of young people with Jesus is as varied as the number of young people on this earth. There are many young people who know and have a relationship with Jesus as their Savior and the Son of God. In addition, young people often find closeness to Jesus through His Mother, Mary. Others may not have such a relationship with Jesus but see Him as a moral leader and a good man. Many young people perceive Jesus as a historical figure, one of a certain time and culture, who is not relevant to their lives. Still others perceive Him as distant from the human experience, which for them is a distance perpetuated by the Church. False images of Jesus that some young people possess often lead them to be unattracted to Him. Erroneous ideals of model Christians feel out of reach to the average person and thus so do the rules set by the Church. Therefore, for some, Christianity is perceived as an unreachable standard.

One way to reconcile the confusions that young people have regarding who Jesus is involves a return to Scripture to understand more deeply the person of Christ, His life, and His humanity. Young people need to encounter the mission of Christ, not what they may perceive as an impossible moral expectation. However, they feel uncertain about how to do so. This encounter needs to be fostered in young people, which needs to be addressed by the Church.

#### **7. Faith and the Church**

For many young people, faith has become private rather than communal, and the negative experiences that some young people have had with the Church have contributed to this. There are many young people who relate to God solely on a personal level, who are “spiritual but not religious”, or focused only on a relationship with Jesus Christ. For some young people, the Church has developed a culture which focuses heavily on members engaging with the institutional aspect of herself, not the person of Christ. Other young people view religious leaders as disconnected and more focused on administration than community-building, and still others see the Church as irrelevant. It can seem that the Church forgets that the *people* are the Church, not the building. For

other young people, they experience the Church as very close to them, in places such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as in different global movements; even some young people who do not live the Gospel feel connected to the Church. This sense of belonging and family sustains these young people on their journey. Without this anchor of community support and belonging, young people can feel isolated in the face of challenges. There are many young people who do not feel the need to be part of the Church community and who find meaning to their life outside of the Church.

Unfortunately, there is a phenomenon in some areas of the world where young people are leaving the Church in large quantities. Understanding why is crucial in moving forward. Young people who are disconnected from or who leave the Church do so after experiencing indifference, judgment and rejection. One could attend, participate in, and leave Mass without experiencing a sense of community or family as the Body of Christ. Christians profess a living God, but some attend Masses or belong to communities which seem dead. Young people are attracted to the joy which should be a hallmark of our faith. Young people express a desire to see a Church that is a living testimony to what it teaches and witnesses to authenticity on the path to holiness, which includes acknowledging mistakes and asking for forgiveness. Young people expect leaders of the Church – ordained, religious, and lay – to be the strongest example of this. Knowing that models of faith are authentic and vulnerable allows young people to freely be authentic and vulnerable themselves. It is not to destroy the sacredness of their ministry, but so that young people might be inspired by them on the path to holiness.

On many occasions, young people have difficulty finding a space in the Church where they can actively participate and lead. Young people interpret their experience of the Church as one where they are considered too young and inexperienced to lead or make decisions as they would only make mistakes. There is a need for trust in young people to lead and to be protagonists of their own spiritual journey. This is not just to imitate their elders, but to really take ownership of their mission and responsibility, lived out well. Movements and new communities in the Church have developed fruitful ways to not only evangelize young people, but also to empower them to be the primary ambassadors of the faith to their peers.

Another common perception that many young people have is an unclear role of women in the Church. If it is difficult for young people to feel a sense of belonging and leadership in the Church, it is much more so for young women. To that end, it would be helpful for young people if the Church not only clearly stated the role of women, but also helped young people to explore and understand it more clearly.

## **8. *The Vocational Sense of Life***

There is a need for a simple and clear understanding of vocation to highlight the sense of call and mission, desire and aspiration, which makes it a concept more relatable to young people at this stage of their lives. “Vocation” has sometimes been presented as an abstract concept, perceived as too far out of the reach of the minds of many. Young people understand the general sense of bringing meaning to life and being alive for a purpose, but many do not know how to connect that to vocation as a gift and call from God.

The term “vocation” has become synonymous with the priesthood and religious life in the culture of the Church. While these are sacred calls that should be celebrated, it is important for young people to know that their vocation is by virtue of their life, and that each person has a responsibility to discern what it is that God calls them to be and to do. There is a fullness to each vocation which must be highlighted in order to open the hearts of young people to their possibilities.

Young people of various beliefs see vocation as inclusive of life, love, aspiration, place in and contribution to the world, and way to make an impact. The term vocation is not very clear to many young people; hence there is need for greater understanding of the Christian vocation (the priesthood and religious life, lay ministry, marriage and family, role in society, etc.) and the universal call to holiness.

## **9. Vocational Discernment**

Discerning one’s vocation can be a challenge, especially in light of misconceptions about the term. However, young people will rise to the challenge. Discerning one’s vocation can be an adventure along the journey of life. That being said, many young people do not know how to intentionally go about the process of discernment; this is an opportunity for the Church to accompany them.

Many factors influence the ability of young people to discern their vocations, such as: the Church, cultural differences, demands of work, digital media, family expectations, mental health and state of mind, noise, peer pressures, political scenarios, society, technology, etc. Spending time in silence, introspection and prayer, as well as reading the Scriptures and deepening self-knowledge are opportunities very few young people exercise. There is a need for a better introduction to these areas. Engaging with faith-based groups, movements, and like-minded communities can also assist young people in their discernment.

We recognize in particular the unique challenges faced by young women as they discern their vocation and place in the Church. Just as Mary’s “yes” to God’s call is fundamental to the Christian experience, young women today need space to give their own “yes” to their vocation. We encourage the Church to deepen its understanding of the role of women and to empower young women, both lay and consecrated, in the spirit of the Church’s love for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

## **10. Young People and Accompaniment**

Young people are looking for companions on the journey, to be embraced by faithful men and women who express the truth and allow young people to articulate their understanding of faith and their vocation. Such people do not need to be models of faith to imitate, but instead living testimonies to witness. Such a person should evangelize by their life. Whether they are familiar faces in the comfort of home, colleagues in the local community, or martyrs testifying to their faith with their very lives, there are many who could meet this expectation.

Qualities of such a mentor include: a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; is a confidant without judgement; actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; is deeply loving and self-aware; acknowledges their limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey.

An especially important quality in a mentor is acknowledgement of their humanity – that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, the devastation may impact young people’s abilities to continue to engage with the Church.

Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person’s process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well. A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a young person’s ability to participate in the life of the Church. A mentor should nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation.

## Part Three

### **The Church's Formative and Pastoral Activity**

#### **11. *The manner of the Church***

Today's young people are longing for an authentic Church. We want to say, especially to the hierarchy of the Church, that they should be a transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community.

A credible Church is one which is not afraid to allow itself be seen as vulnerable. The Church should be sincere in admitting its past and present wrongs, that it is a Church made up of persons who are capable of error and misunderstanding. The Church should condemn actions such as sexual abuse and the mismanagement of power and wealth. The Church should continue to enforce her no-tolerance stance on sexual abuse within her institutions and her humility will undoubtedly raise its credibility among the world's young people. If the Church acts in this way, then it will differentiate itself from other institutions and authorities which young people, for the most part, already mistrust.

All the more, the Church draws the attention of young people by being rooted in Jesus Christ. Christ is the Truth which makes the Church different from any other worldly group with which we may identify. Therefore, we ask that the Church continue to proclaim the joy of the Gospel with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We desire that the Church spread this message through modern means of communication and expression. The young have many questions about the faith, but desire answers which are not watered-down, or which utilize pre-fabricated formulations. We, the young Church, ask that our leaders speak in practical terms about controversial subjects such as homosexuality and gender issues, about which young people are already freely discussing without taboo. Some perceive the Church to be "anti-science" so its dialogue with the scientific community is also important, as science can illuminate the beauty of creation. In this context, the Church should also care for environmental issues, especially pollution. We also desire to see a Church that is empathetic and reaches out to those struggling on the margins, the persecuted and the poor. An attractive Church is a relational Church.

#### **12. *Young Leaders***

The Church must involve young people in its decision-making processes and offer them more leadership roles. These positions need to be on a parish, diocesan, national and international level, even on a commission to the Vatican. We strongly feel that we are ready to be leaders, who can grow and be taught by the older members of the Church, by religious and lay women and men. We need young leadership programs for the formation and continued development of young leaders. Some

young women feel that there is a lack of leading female role models within the Church and they too wish to give their intellectual and professional gifts to the Church. We also believe that seminarians and religious should have an even greater ability to accompany young leaders.

Beyond institutional decision-making, we want to be a joyful, enthusiastic and missionary presence within the Church. We also strongly express a wish for a prominent creative voice. This creativity often finds itself in music, liturgy and the arts but, at the moment, this is an untapped potential, with the creative side of the Church often dominated by the older Church members.

There is also a desire for strong communities in which young people share their struggles and testimonies with each other. In many places, this is already happening in lay initiatives, movements and associations, but they wish to be more supported, officially and financially.

The young Church also looks outward; young people have a passion for political, civil and humanitarian activities. They want to act as Catholics in the public sphere for the betterment of society as a whole. In all these aspects of Church life, young people wish to be accompanied and to be taken seriously as fully responsible members of the Church.

### **13. Preferred places**

We would like the Church to meet us in the various places in which she currently has little or no presence. Above all, the place in which we wish to be met by the Church is the streets, where all people are found. The Church should try to find creative new ways to encounter people where they are comfortable and where they naturally socialize: bars, coffee shops, parks, gyms, stadiums and any other popular cultural centers. Consideration should also be given to less accessible spaces, like in the military, the workplace and rural areas. As well as these environments, we also need the light of faith in more difficult places such as orphanages, hospitals, marginal neighborhoods, war-torn regions, prisons, rehabilitation centers and red-light districts.

While the Church already meets many of us in schools and universities throughout the world, we want to see her presence in these places in a stronger and more effective way. Resources are not wasted when they are put into these areas as these are the places in which many young people spend most of their time and often engage with people of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of us are already faithful members of parish communities or members of the various institutions, associations and organizations within the Church. It is imperative that those who are already engaged are supported in the Church community so that they can be strengthened and inspired to evangelize the outside world.

As well as the many physical places in which we can be encountered, the digital world is one that must be taken into account by the Church. We would like to see a Church that is accessible through social media as well as other digital spaces, to more easily and effectively offer information about the Church and its teachings, and to further the formation of the young person. In short, we should be met where we are – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, socially and physically.

#### **14. *The Initiatives to be Reinforced***

We long for experiences that can deepen our relationship with Jesus in the real world. Initiatives that are successful offer us an experience of God. Therefore, we respond to initiatives that offer us an understanding of the Sacraments, prayer and the liturgy, in order to properly share and defend our faith in the secular world. The Sacraments are of great value to us who desire to develop a deeper sense of what they mean in our lives. This is true of marriage preparation, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, preparation for baptism of children and so forth. Because of the lack of clear and attractive presentation as to what the Sacraments truly offer, some of us go through the process of receiving but undervaluing them.

Some fruitful initiatives are: events such as World Youth Day; courses and programs that provide answers and formation, especially for those new to the faith; outreach ministries; youth catechisms; weekend retreats and spiritual exercises; Charismatic events, choirs and worship groups; pilgrimages; Christian sports leagues; parish or diocesan youth groups; Bible study groups; university Christian groups; different faith apps, and the immense variety of movements and associations within the Church.

We respond to well-organized, larger-scale events, but also hold that not all events need to be of this scale. Small, local groups where we can express questions and share in Christian fellowship are also paramount to maintaining the faith. These smaller events in social spaces can bridge the gap between larger Church events and the parish. Gathering in these ways is especially important to those in countries less accepting of Christians.

The social and the spiritual aspects of Church initiatives can be complimentary to each other. There is also a desire for social outreach and evangelization to people struggling with illnesses and addictions, while also engaging in dialogue with people of varied religious, cultural and socioeconomic contexts. The Church should reinforce initiatives that fight against human trafficking and forced migration, as well as narco-trafficking which is especially important in Latin America.

#### **15. *Instruments to be used***

The Church must adopt a language which engages the customs and cultures of the young so that all people have the opportunity to hear the message of the Gospel. However, we are passionate about the different expressions of the Church. Some of us have a passion for “the fire” of contemporary and charismatic movements that focus on the Holy Spirit; others are drawn towards silence, meditation and reverential traditional liturgies. All of these things are good as they help us to pray in different ways. Outside of the Church, many young people live a contented spirituality, but the Church could engage them with the right instruments.

- **Multimedia** – The internet offers the Church an unprecedented evangelical opportunity, especially with social media and online video content. As young people, we are digital natives who could lead the way. It is also a great place to encounter and engage people of other faiths and none. Pope Francis’ regular video series is a good example of the use of the internet’s evangelical potential.

- **Gap Year Experiences** – Years of service within movements and charities give young people an experience of mission and a space to discern. It also creates the opportunity for the Church to encounter non-believers and people of other faiths in the world.
- **The Arts and Beauty** – Beauty is universally acknowledged and the Church has a history of engaging and evangelizing through the arts, such as music, visual art, architecture, design etc. Young people especially respond to and enjoy being creative and expressive.
- **Adoration, Meditation and Contemplation** – We also appreciate the contrast of silence offered by the Church’s tradition of Eucharistic Adoration and contemplative prayer. It provides a space away from the constant noise of modern communication and it is here that we encounter Jesus. Silence is where we can hear the voice of God and discern His will for us. Many outside of the Church also appreciate meditation, and the Church’s rich culture of this could be a bridge to these secular but spiritual people. It can be counter-cultural, but effective.
- **Testimony** – The personal stories of the Church are effective ways of evangelizing as true personal experiences that cannot be debated. Modern Christian witnesses and the witness of the persecuted Middle Eastern Christians are particularly strong testimonies to the fullness of life found in the Church. The stories of the Saints are still relevant to us as paths to holiness and fulfilment.
- **The Synodal Process** – We have been thrilled to be taken seriously by the hierarchy of the Church and we feel that this dialogue between the young and the old Church is a vital and fruitful listening process. It would be a shame if this dialogue were not given the opportunity to continue and grow! This culture of openness is extremely healthy for us.

At the beginning of this Pre-Synodal Meeting and in the spirit of this dialogue, Pope Francis brought to the conversation this verse from the Bible: “And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (Joel 3:1).

*The cover image is a cloud of words chosen by each participant to describe their experience at the Pre-Synodal Meeting*