

Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment 2018



Part 1: "He walked with them"

Listening in the Church

The Church does not lack initiatives and solid programmes that can allow young people to feel accepted and listened to, and to make their voice heard. Yet the Synod acknowledges that the ecclesial community does not always manage to convey the approach taken by Jesus with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, when he asked them, before enlightening them by his word, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" (Lk 24:17). All too often, there is a tendency to provide pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing young people's real questions to emerge and to face the challenges they pose.

Listening makes possible an exchange of gifts in a context of empathy. It allows young people to make their own contribution to the community, helping it to appreciate new sensitivities and to consider new questions. At the same time listening sets the conditions for a preaching of the Gospel that can touch the heart, truly, decisively and fruitfully. (8)

Part 1: "He walked with them"

Young people in the Church

Young Catholics are not merely on the receiving end of pastoral activity: they are living members of the one ecclesial body, baptised persons in whom the Spirit of the Lord is alive and active. They help to enrich what the Church is and not only what she does. They are her present and not only her future. The young are actively involved in many Church activities in which they offer their services generously, particularly through leading catechesis and liturgy, caring for the weak, voluntary work with the poor. Movements, associations and religious congregations also offer young people opportunities for commitment and co-responsibility. Sometimes the availability of the young meets with a certain authoritarianism and mistrust from older people and pastors, who do not sufficiently recognize their creativity and who struggle to share responsibility. (54)



Desire for a more authentic and fraternal ecclesial community

The young ask the Church to offer a shining example of authenticity, exemplariness, competence, co-responsibility and cultural solidity. At times this request can seem like a criticism, but often it assumes the positive form of personal commitment to a fraternal, welcoming, joyful and committed community, prophetically combatting social injustice. Among the expectations of the young, one that stands out particularly is the desire for the Church to adopt a less paternalistic and more candid style of dialogue. (57)

Part 2: “Their eyes were opened”

The Spirit rejuvenates the Church

Youth is an original and stimulating stage in life, which Jesus himself experienced, thereby sanctifying it. The Message to Young People of the Second Vatican Council (7 December 1965) presented the Church as the “real youth of the world”, which possesses “the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew oneself and to set out again for new conquests”. With their freshness and their faith, young people help to show this face of the Church, in which we see a reflection of “the great Living One, the Christ who is eternally young”. It is not about creating a new Church for the young, but rather rediscovering with them the youthfulness of the Church, opening ourselves to the grace of a new Pentecost. (60)



Breaking bread together

As the account of the Emmaus disciples shows us, accompanying requires availability to walk a stretch of road together, establishing a significant relationship. The origin of the term “accompany” points to bread broken and shared (cum pane), with all the symbolic human and sacramental richness to which it refers. It is therefore the community as a whole that is the prime subject of accompaniment, precisely because in its heart it develops that drama of relationships that can support the person on his journey and furnish him with points of reference and orientation. Accompaniment in human and Christian growth towards adult life is one of the ways in which the community demonstrates that it is capable of renewal and of renewing the world.

The Eucharist is the living memorial of the paschal event, a privileged place of evangelization and transmission of the faith for the sake of mission. In the assembly gathered for the Eucharistic celebration, the experience of being personally touched, instructed and healed by Jesus accompanies each person on his or her journey of personal growth. (92)

Part 2: “Their eyes were opened”

Environments and roles

As well as family members, those called to exercise a role of accompaniment include all the significant persons in the various spheres of young people’s lives, such as teachers, animators, trainers, and other figures of reference, including professional ones. Priests, men and women religious, while they do not have a monopoly of accompaniment, have a specific task which arises from their vocation and which they must rediscover, as they were asked to do by the young people present in the Synodal Assembly, in the name of so many others. The experience of some Churches exalts the role of catechists as companions of the Christian communities and of their members. (93)



The profile of the accompanier

A good accompanier is a person who is balanced, a listener, a person of faith and prayer, who has the measure of his own weaknesses and frailties. Hence he knows how to be accepting of the young people he accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgence. When necessary he also knows how to offer a word of fraternal correction.

The awareness that accompanying is a mission that requires a profound spiritual rootedness will help him to remain free in his dealings with the young people he accompanies: he will respect the outcome of their journey, supporting them with prayer and rejoicing in the fruits that the Spirit produces in those who open their hearts to him, without seeking to impose his own will and his own preferences. Equally he will be capable of placing himself at their service, not taking centre stage or adopting possessive and manipulative attitudes that create dependence rather than freedom in others. This profound respect will also be the best guarantee against any risk of domination or abuse of any kind. (102)

Part 2: “Their eyes were opened”

The importance of formation

In order to perform this service, the accompanier will need to cultivate his own spiritual life, nourishing the relationship that links him to the One who assigned this mission to him. At the same time he needs to feel the support of the ecclesial community to which he belongs. It is important that he receive a specific formation for this particular ministry and that he can benefit in his turn from accompaniment and supervision.

It is worth noting, finally, that among the characteristics of our “being Church” that the young particularly appreciate are a readiness and a capacity for working collaboratively: in this way the formation of the young can be more significant, effective and incisive. The skill required for working collaboratively involves cultivating specific relational virtues: the discipline of listening and the capacity to give the other person space, readiness to forgive and willingness to “put oneself on the line”, according to a genuine spirituality of communion. (103)



Part 3: “They set off without delay”

The young ask us to walk together

The Church as a whole, when choosing through this Synod to concern herself with the young, took a very definite option: she considers this mission a pastoral priority of epoch-making significance, in which to invest time, energy and resources. From the start of the journey of preparation, young people have expressed the desire to be involved and appreciated and to feel themselves as having a key role in the life and mission of the Church. In this Synod we have experienced how co-responsibility lived with young Christians is a source of profound joy for bishops too. We recognize in this experience a fruit of the Spirit which continually renews the Church and calls her to practise synodality as a way of being and acting, promoting the participation of all the baptized and of people of good will, each according to his age, state of life and vocation. In this Synod, we have experienced how the collegiality that unites the bishops cum Petro et sub Petro in care for the people of God is called to express itself and enrich itself through the practice of synodality at all levels. (119)



The Synodal process continues

The conclusion of the Synodal Assembly and the document which gathers together its fruits do not close the synodal process, but constitute a stage within it. Since the concrete circumstances, the real possibilities and the urgent needs of the young are very different in different countries and continents, even within the commonality of the one faith, we invite the Episcopal Conferences and particular Churches to continue this journey, committing themselves to processes of communal discernment, including in discussions some who are not bishops, as this Synod has done. The style of these ecclesial processes should include fraternal listening and intergenerational dialogue, with a view to drawing up pastoral programmes that are particularly attentive to marginalized young people and those who have few or no contacts with ecclesial communities. Let us hope that families, religious institutes, associations, movements and young people themselves will take part in these processes, so that the “flame” of what we have experienced in these days may spread. (120)

Part 3: “They set off without delay”

A participatory and co-responsible Church

A characteristic feature of this style of Church is the valuing of the charisms that the Spirit gives according to the vocation and role of each of her members, through a dynamic of co-responsibility. In order to initiate it, conversion of the heart becomes necessary, as well as a readiness for mutual listening, which builds an effective common mind. Motivated by this spirit, we can proceed towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, capable of valuing the wealth of the variety of which it is composed, gratefully receiving the contributions of the lay faithful too, including young people and women, female and male consecrated persons as well as groups, associations and movements. No one should be put aside or put themselves aside. This is the way to avoid both clericalism, which excludes many from decision-making processes, and the clericalization of the laity, which imprisons them instead of launching them towards missionary commitment in the world.

The Synod asks that the active participation of the young become effective and ordinary in places of co-responsibility in the particular Churches and in the organs of the Episcopal Conferences and the universal Church. It also asks that the activity of the Office for the Young in the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life be strengthened, not least through the constitution of an organ to represent the young at an international level. (123)



Conclusion

Called to become saints

165. All the different vocations come together in the one universal call to holiness, which can only be the fulfilment of the appeal to the joy of love that resounds in the heart of every young person. Only on the basis of the one call to holiness can the different forms of life be articulated, knowing that God “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence” (Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 1). Holiness finds its inexhaustible source in the Father, who through his Spirit sends us Jesus, “the holy one of God” (Mk 1:24), who came among us to make us holy through friendship with him, who brings joy and peace into our lives. To recover in all the ordinary pastoral work of the Church living contact with the happy existence of Jesus is the fundamental condition for all renewal.

Reawakening the world with holiness

166. We must be saints so that we can invite the young to be saints. The young are crying out for an authentic, radiant, transparent, joyful Church: only a Church of saints can measure up to such requests! Many of the young have left the Church because they have not found in it holiness, but rather mediocrity, presumption, division and corruption. Unfortunately the world is outraged by the abuses of some people in the Church rather than being invigorated by the holiness of her members: hence the Church in her entirety must embrace a decisive, immediate and radical change of perspective! The young need saints who can form other saints, thus showing that “holiness is the most attractive face of the Church” (Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 9). There is a language that all men and women of every age, place and culture can understand, because it is immediate and radiant: it is the language of holiness.

Carried away by the holiness of the young

167. It has been clear from the beginning of the synodal journey that the young form an essential part of the Church. So too, therefore, does their holiness, which in recent decades has flourished in many different ways all over the world: contemplating and meditating during the Synod upon the courage of so many young people who sacrificed their lives for remaining faithful to the Gospel has been deeply moving for us; listening to the testimonies of the young people present at the Synod, who amid persecutions chose to share the passion of the Lord Jesus, has been life-giving. Through the holiness of the young, the Church can renew her spiritual ardour and her apostolic vigour. The balsam of holiness generated by the good lives of so many young people can heal the wounds of the Church and of the world, bringing us back to that fullness of love to which we have always been called: the young saints inspire us to return to our first love (cf. Rev 2:4).