

Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment

GUIDE FOR ADOLESCENT FOCUS GROUPS TO DISCUSS UPCOMING SYNOD

What is a Synod?

In October 2018 hundreds of bishops will gather for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

For Catholic Bishops the synod is one of the most important meetings in which they may participate. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the only official gatherings of Catholic Bishops were ecumenical councils such as the Council of Trent or Vatican II. The current synod structure arose after Vatican II. These meetings are advisory bodies for the pope, and the participants are elected by bishops from around the world. The Holy Father determines the agenda and purpose and appoints additional members to the synod. Usually, synods are called together to address a particular theme or issue facing the church or society.

The theme of this particular synod is “Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.”

What is a Focus Group?

The Vatican has released a Preparatory Document for the Synod, which is intended to begin “the Synod’s phase of consultation of the entire People of God.” This document discusses the theme of the Synod and closes with some questions to initiate this consultation. The focus groups are an opportunity to **Gather, Reflect, Pray, and Respond** to the questions posed by the Preparatory Document.

Parishes and Schools are encouraged to:

- **Gather**- Though open invitation gather young people (16-29) into one or multiple focus groups around age and life experience (i.e. a focus group of adolescents, a focus group of college-aged young adults, a focus group of young professionals).
- **Pray/Reflect**- Using this guide, have a facilitator lead the group through some prayer, reflection, and discussion around key elements of the Preparatory Document for the Synod.
- **Respond**- As individuals or as a group respond to the questions from the end of the Preparatory Document. Your responses can be submitted to the Diocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry via US Mail or online at: www.cdeducation.org/synod2018 You are also encouraged to share the responses within your parish and consider how these responses may guide your parish ministries and efforts with young people.

Gather

A sample invitation letter:

Dear Young People:

Pope Francis has announced that the theme for the Synod of Bishops in October 2018 will be *“Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.”* The Holy Father has asked that the voices of young people be heard and seriously considered in the Synod; “The Church also wishes to listen to your voice, your sensitivities, and your faith; even your doubts and criticism.” (Pope Francis) Church leaders all around the world have been charged with the responsibility to hear and capture YOUR words, as young people, and share the response with the Bishops at the Synod.

Here at _____[Name of Parish]_____and throughout the Diocese of Columbus we would like to participate in collecting the voices of young people to be heard at the Synod of Bishops. We are asking for your help and participation in this process.

We are asking you to attend a special gathering on _____[Date]_____ at _____[Location]_____to participate in a focus group that will discuss the theme of this synod and the questions from the Vatican posed to young people around the world. We will then share your responses to these questions with the Diocese of Columbus, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, and the Vatican, who will collect the responses from around the world to help guide the discussion of the bishops attending the synod in October 2018.

If you are willing and able to participate in this focus group discussion, please contact _____[Name and contact information for Youth Ministry Leader or designated parish staff/volunteer]_____.

Sincerely,

A sample bulletin announcement:

“Special Invitation to Youth in Our Parish”

Pope Francis has announced that the theme for the Synod of Bishops in October 2018 will be *“Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.”* The Holy Father has asked that the voices of young people be heard and seriously considered in the Synod, so Bishop Campbell has asked us to gather the young people in our parish to respond to the synod questions. If you are a high school student, ages 16-18, we invite you to join us for a special gathering on _____[Date]_____ at _____[Location]_____to participate in a focus group that will discuss the theme of this synod and the questions from the Vatican posed to young people around the world. If you are willing and able to participate in this focus group discussion, please contact _____[Name and contact information for Youth Ministry Leader or designated parish staff/volunteer]_____.

Focus Group Instructions

An ideal Focus Group has 5-8 participants (no more than 10) with a facilitator that poses the questions for discussion and keeps the group on task. The facilitator may be the recorder of responses or may have someone else do the recording. If a large number of people show up then split into groups of 5-8 with each group having a facilitator.

The facilitator is encouraged (if possible) to read the Preparatory Document in full prior to the focus group discussions. The document can be read online at:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20170113_documento-preparatorio-xv_en.html#PASTORAL_ACTIVITY or a print version can be purchased at:

<https://store.usccb.org/Young-People-the-Faith-and-Vocational-Discernment-p/7-557.htm>

The facilitator stays as neutral as possible and only interrupts if...

- Conversation goes off topic,
- Someone tries to dominate the conversation,
- It is time to move to the next question,
- The discussion becomes a debate or heated argument,
- Some clarification of the question is needed,
- Order in the groups needs to be restored.

The length of the focus group shouldn't exceed 120 minutes, taking breaks when necessary and allotting the majority of that time for discussion. A suggested schedule for meeting is provided below. The setting should be comfortable, free of distractions, and arranged in a manner that everyone can see and hear each other. The facilitator can provide notes or a blank outline with title headings to the participants to help them take notes and contribute to the conversation.

The facilitator should offer some ground rules, such as...

- Only one person speaks at a time;
- No side conversation;
- All opinions/thoughts/ideas are welcome as long as respectfully presented;
- No judging or blaming others in the group for their comments or ideas;
- Everyone gets an opportunity to speak;
- While all the comments will be recorded for the survey, all comments will be recorded as anonymous;
- The goal of the focus group is not to solve the Church's or society's problems but merely to learn what you are thinking, feeling, and experiencing on these topics we will be discussing.

Suggested Schedule for Meeting *(2 hours total)*

WELCOME, ICEBREAKER, AND OVERVIEW *(10 minutes)*

OPENING PRAYER *(5 minutes)*

LETTER FROM POPE FRANCIS *(15 minutes)*

Read letter, then brief discussion

INTRODUCTION TO THE PREPARATORY DOCUMENT *(5 minutes)*

BREAK *(5 minutes)*

I. YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY *(20 minutes)*

Review document, then discussion around response questions

BREAK *(10 minutes)*

II. FAITH, DISCERNMENT, VOCATION *(20 minutes)*

Review document, then discussion around response questions

BREAK *(5 minutes)*

III. PASTORAL ACTIVITY *(20 minutes)*

Review document, then discussion around response questions

CLOSING PRAYER *(5 minutes)*

Prayer

Opening Prayer

Reading: *Genesis 12:1-2*

“The LORD said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

Reflection: From Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* 46

“A Church which “goes forth” is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way. At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it.”

Petitions:

Our response will be “Lord, hear our prayer”

For the Church and her leaders, that she may be open to the voices of her young people throughout the world, especially during this Synod process, and go forth to respond their needs. We pray to the Lord...

For world leaders, that they may always be mindful of the particular situations of young people and work toward political solutions that would provide the peace and freedom necessary for young people to grow and live out their faith. We pray to the Lord...

For young people experiencing poverty, marginalization, or exclusion, that the entire Christian community recognize its call to be attentive to them and lead them to become involved in life. We pray to the Lord...

For young people who are sick, suffering, or who have died...(pause briefly)...May they come to find peace and freedom from all suffering in Jesus Christ. We pray to the Lord...

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, help us to slow down from the business of our own lives and to be present in this moment, that we might see and listen to one another. Guide our discussion, that it might be pleasing to you, and bear fruit towards the work of your Church with young people today. Help us to be like the beloved disciple John, who was so near and dear to your own heart, and who, through a gradual process of inner discernment and growth, came to discover the fullness of the joy of life and love, and joyfully went out to proclaim the Good News.

We ask this in your name, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Prayer

Reading: *Luke 1:26-38*

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

Reflection:

In his letter announcing the theme of this synod, Pope Francis closed saying "I entrust you to Mary of Nazareth, a young person like yourselves, whom God beheld lovingly, so she might take your hand and guide you to the joy of fully and generously responding to God's call with the words: "Here I am" (cf. Lk 1:38)."

Prayer:

And so, we pray: Blessed Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, we call upon you for your intercession on behalf of the work being done in preparation for this Synod and for the Synod itself. We also ask for your intercession on our own behalf, that we young people may look to your youthful yes as an example and model for discernment and dedication in our own lives; seeking to recognize God's call for us and respond joyously and without fear as you did: "may it be done to me according to your word." We entrust this Synodal process to you as we pray together:

Hail Mary...

Reflection/Discussion

Welcome

Thank everyone for being present and willing to share from their personal experience.

Icebreaker

If there are young people in your focus group that do not know each other well yet, begin the process with Icebreaker Option 1 at the end of this resource. If everyone in the group has met before, begin the process with Icebreaker Option 2 at the end of this resource.

Overview

Explain the process with your Focus Group. You can go over the schedule or simply explain that you will be looking at excerpts from the Preparatory Document as a group, then discussing some of the questions from the end of the document. Encourage everyone to share honestly. Go over some ground rules for discussion. Ask participants to refrain from judging, criticizing, or arguing with someone else who is sharing from their own personal experiences. Let participants know that you will be doing your best as the facilitator of the discussion to make sure everyone has the chance to share. This means that if someone does not wish to respond to a particular question they are not obligated, but you do want to make sure everyone has a chance, so participants may be asked to keep responses to some questions brief or be asked to wrap up their sharing in order to allow others to share as well. What is shared in the group should be kept confidential by the group, so long as it does not involve risk of someone harming themselves or someone else, but let them know that their responses to the given question will be shared anonymously with the Diocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry and Bishop Campbell as a basis for helping draft a working document for the Synod.

Letter from Pope Francis

Begin by distributing and reading the letter from Pope Francis to young people on the occasion of presenting the Preparatory Document.

After reading the letter, ask the group if there is anything in particular that stuck out to them from Pope Francis' letter.

LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION OF
THE PREPARATORY DOCUMENT
OF THE 15TH ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

My Dear Young People,

I am pleased to announce that in October 2018 a Synod of Bishops will take place to treat the topic: “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.” I wanted you to be the centre of attention, because you are in my heart. Today, the Preparatory Document is being presented, a document which I am also entrusting to you as your “compass” on this synodal journey.

I am reminded of the words which God spoke to Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.” (Gen 12.1). These words are now also addressed to you. They are words of a Father who invites you to “go”, to set out towards a future which is unknown but one which will surely lead to fulfilment, a future towards which He Himself accompanies you. I invite you to hear God's voice resounding in your heart through the breath of the Holy Spirit.

When God said to Abram, “Go!”, what did he want to say? He certainly did not say to distance himself from his family or withdraw from the world. Abram received a compelling invitation, a challenge, to leave everything and go to a new land. What is this “new land” for us today, if not a more just and friendly society which you, young people, deeply desire and wish to build to the very ends of the earth?

But unfortunately, today, “Go!” also has a different meaning, namely, that of abuse of power, injustice and war. Many among you are subjected to the real threat of violence and forced to flee their native land. Their cry goes up to God, like that of Israel, when the people were enslaved and oppressed by Pharaoh (cf. Ex 2:23).

I would also remind you of the words that Jesus once said to the disciples who asked him: “Teacher [...] where are you staying?” He replied, “Come and see” (Jn 1:38). Jesus looks at you and invites you to go with him. Dear young people, have you noticed this look towards you? Have you heard this voice? Have you felt this urge to undertake this journey? I am sure that, despite the noise and confusion seemingly prevalent in the world, this call continues to resonate in the depths of your heart so as to open it to joy in its fullness. This will be possible to the extent that, even with professional guides, you will learn how to undertake a journey of discernment to discover God's plan in your life. Even when the journey is uncertain and you fall, God, rich in mercy, will extend his hand to pick you up.

In Krakow, at the opening of the last World Youth Day, I asked you several times: “Can we change things?” And you shouted: “yes!”. That shout came from your young and youthful hearts, which do not tolerate injustice and cannot bow to a “throw-away culture” nor give in to the globalization of indifference. Listen to the cry arising from your inner selves! Even when you feel, like the prophet Jeremiah, the inexperience of youth, God encourages you to go where He sends you: “Do not be afraid, [...], because I am with you to deliver you” (Jer 1:8).

A better world can be built also as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity. Do not be afraid to listen to the Spirit who proposes bold choices; do not delay when

your conscience asks you to take risks in following the Master. The Church also wishes to listen to your voice, your sensitivities and your faith; even your doubts and your criticism. Make your voice heard, let it resonate in communities and let it be heard by your shepherds of souls. St. Benedict urged the abbots to consult, even the young, before any important decision, because “the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best.” (Rule of St. Benedict, III, 3).

Such is the case, even in the journey of this Synod. My brother bishops and I want even more to “work with you for your joy” (2 Cor 1:24). I entrust you to Mary of Nazareth, a young person like yourselves, whom God beheld lovingly, so she might take your hand and guide you to the joy of fully and generously responding to God’s call with the words: “Here I am” (cf. Lk 1:38).

With paternal affection,

FRANCIS

Given at the Vatican, 13 January 2017

Introduction to the Preparatory Document

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full’ (Jn 15:11). This is God’s plan for all men and women in every age, including all the young men and women of the Third Millennium, without exception.” (Pg 4)

This joy that Jesus talks of is a main focus of Pope Francis’ two letters *Evangelii Gaudium* [The Joy of the Gospel] and *Amoris Laetitia* [The Joy of Love], which were each written following a gathering of the Synod of Bishops.

For Catholic Bishops the synod is one of the most important meetings in which they may participate. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the only official gatherings of Catholic Bishops were ecumenical councils such as the Council of Trent or Vatican II. The current synod structure arose after Vatican II. These meetings are advisory bodies for the pope, and the participants are elected by bishops from around the world. The Holy Father determines the agenda and purpose and appoints additional members to the synod. Usually, synods are called together to address a particular theme or issue facing the church or society.

In October 2018 there will be another Synod with the theme: “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.”

“The Church has decided to examine herself on how she can lead young people to recognize and accept the call to the fullness of life and love, and to ask young people to help her in identifying the most effective ways to announce the Good News today. By listening to young people, the Church will once again hear the Lord speaking in today’s world.” (Pg 4)

The word vocation comes from the Latin word *vocatio*, meaning a call or summons, and discernment comes from the Latin *discernere*, meaning to separate out. We often hear these words in reference to discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, but every person has a vocation to holiness and to love which takes concrete form in everyday life through a series of choices. These choices can include “states of life (marriage, ordained ministry, consecrated life, etc.), professions, forms of social and civil commitment, lifestyle, the management of time and money.” With all of these choices, we have a responsibility to discern, to separate out, where and how we are to live out God’s call to be holy and to love others. “The purpose of vocational discernment is to find out how to transform [these choices], in the light of faith, into steps towards the fullness of joy to which everyone is called.” (Pg 5)

With this in mind, we will be discussing the Preparatory Document, which “begins the Synod’s phase of consultation of the entire People or God.” (Pg 5) Our discussion and your responses to the questions from the document will contribute to the basis of drafting a “work-document” which will be a reference point in the discussion of the synod fathers.

I. Young People Today

1. A Rapidly-Changing World

The world is seeing rapid changes and transformations, and the speed of these changes is a defining characteristic of modern society. These rapid changes include globalization, which can economically benefit some while leaving many in difficult situations, and rapid growth in science and technology, which has many promises, but also within which “sadness and loneliness appear to be on the rise, not least among young people” (Misericordia et misera, 3). Since technological advances can become closely tied with a frantic search for quick and easy money, this can lead to what Pope Francis calls a “throw-away culture”, where everything, even sometime relationships, are short and used as a means to an end. It should also be mentioned that the globalization and connectedness of today’s world has led to societies being more multicultural and multireligious. This could “lead to uncertainty and the temptation of relativism, but, at the same time, can provide for increased possibilities for fruitful dialogue and mutual enrichment.” (Pg. 10)

2. New Generations

Belonging and Participation

“[Young people] wish to be an active part in the process of change taking place at this present time.” (Pg. 11) Young people are often willing and ready to commit to personally contributing to the Church and society, in part as it is an opportunity to learn more about themselves. On the other hand, young people can often show anger or mistrust towards places where they feel they are not given the opportunity to contribute.

Personal and Institutional Points of Reference

Young people are often searching for credible, authentic, and honest people and places to test how they relate to others (adults and peers) and to openly express their developing thoughts and emotions. The role of parents and families are crucial, and yet, can sometimes be problematic when “absent or overprotective parents make their children more unprepared to face life and tend to underestimate the risks involved or are obsessed by a fear of making mistakes.” (Pg. 12) “Young people, cautious by nature of those who are outside their circle of personal relationships, oftentimes nourish mistrust, indifference or anger towards institutions.” (Pg. 13) Though many young people are not in open opposition to the faith, they learn to live without it, relying instead on close relationships and alternative, minimally institutionalized groups.

Towards a Hyper-Connected Generation

Modern technologies and methods of communication are an important characteristic of the younger generation which provide potential access to a range of opportunities, but not without some risks. Nevertheless, it is important to understand how these technologies might affect young people’s concept of the world, reality, and interpersonal relationships, and the Church must seek to evaluate and develop her means of technological communication with young people.

3. Young People and Choices

Within all these rapid changes and needs of young people previously outlined, “the transition to adult life and the building of a personal identity increasingly requires a ‘reflective course of action.’” (Pg. 14) There is a need among young people for suitable cultural, social, and spiritual means and

tools for decision-making, so that process does not stall and the youth end up undergoing change rather than guiding it. Sometimes this decision-making process stalls out of fear of making a mistake, but Pope Francis tells young people to “Take a risk. Whoever does not risk does not walk. ‘But what if I make a mistake?’. Blessed be the Lord! You will make more mistakes if you remain still” (Discourse at Villa Nazareth, 18 June 2016). Inequalities and lack of opportunities for a good education can also limit choices for young people, particularly when their families are experiencing economic and social hardships. “If society or the Christian community want to make something new happen again, they have to leave room for new people to take action.” (Pg. 16)

Move on to discuss the questions listed under
I. Young People in Today’s World Questions

II. Faith, Discernment, Vocation

1. Faith and Vocation

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another” (Jn 15:16-17).

“**Vocation** to the joy of love is the fundamental call that God has placed in the heart of every young person so that each one’s existence will bear fruit” “**Faith** is both a gift from on high and a response to feeling oneself chosen and loved.” (pg. 18)

The task of each young person is to discern the voice of the Spirit from other calls and decide how to respond. Others may and should accompany and affirm a person in this process, but the final choice always remains up to that person. (pg. 19)

2. The Gift of Discernment

The Preparatory Document explains that there are different forms of discernment, such as: reading the signs of the times, moral discernment, and spiritual discernment. The focus of this synod is on vocational discernment, which is “the process by which a person makes fundamental choices, in dialogue with the Lord and listening to the voice of the Spirit, starting with the choice of one’s state in life.” (pg. 20) In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis describes discernment using three verbs: “to recognize,” “to interpret” and “to choose.”

Recognizing

This first step of the process has to do with “recognizing” how our experiences and the people we encounter affect our “desires, feelings and emotions” (*Amoris laetitia*, 143) Meditating on the Word of God can be a very useful tool during this stage of discernment. (pg. 21)

Interpreting

“Interpreting [is] to understand what the Spirit is calling the person to do through what the Spirit stirs up in each one.” (pg. 20) Often a person may recognize or recall an experience and the impact it had, but it is more difficult to understand the meaning behind those desires and emotions and interpret whether they lead in a constructive or destructive direction. We must seek out constructive opportunities that make the most of our gifts and possibilities. This interpretation comes out through prayer and internal dialogue with the Lord, but the assistance of an experienced adult in listening to the Spirit is a valuable support the Church offers to young people.

Choosing

Making a choice is the next step in the discernment process, and is “an exercise of authentic human freedom and personal responsibility,” but this choice and the freedom to choose can be limited by the reality of each individual situation. (pg. 22) “Promoting truly free and responsible choices... remains the goal of every serious pastoral vocational program.” (pg. 23) Discernment relies heavily on an individual’s well-informed conscience, “without pretending to replace it” (cf. *Amoris laetitia*, 37). Once a choice is made, it “is called to be translated into action, to take flesh, to embark on a path... Other desires and emotions will arise in this stage; “recognizing” and “interpreting” them will allow the possibility of seeing whether the decision is good or whether it is advisable to re-

evaluate it. Consequently, “going out” is important, even with the fear of making a mistake, which, as previously seen, can be crippling.” (pg. 23)

3. Paths Toward Vocation and Mission

“Vocational discernment is not accomplished in a single act [...] vocational discernment is a long process unfolding over time, during which one continues to monitor the signs used by the Lord to indicate and specify a vocation that is very personal and unique.” (pg. 23-24) One must also be open to sacrifice, because “only by giving up being selfishly occupied with one’s needs does a person become open to accommodate God’s plan in family life, the ordained ministry or consecrated life and seriously to carry out one’s profession as well as sincerely to seek the common good.” (pg. 24)

4. Accompaniment

The document lays out three basic beliefs that underlie the process of discernment: “The first is that the Spirit of God works in the heart of every man and woman through feelings and desires that are bound to ideas, images and plans. [...] The second belief is that the human heart, because of its weakness and sin, is normally divided because it is attracted to different and even contrary feelings. The third belief is that every way of life imposes a choice,” because even by not making a choice, a person chooses to decline all other options or allow things to play out naturally. (pg. 25) A very important and helpful tool of the Church to help young people navigate this process of discernment is “personal accompaniment.” In personal accompaniment with young people, leaders seek to foster a person’s relationship with God. “Spiritual guidance re-orientates a person towards the Lord and prepares the ground for an encounter with him (cf. Jn 3:29-30).” (pg. 25) “In the task of accompanying the younger generation, the Church accepts her call to collaborate in the joy of young people rather than be tempted to take control of their faith (cf. 2 Cor 1:24). Such service is ultimately founded in prayer and in asking for the gift of the Spirit, who guides and enlightens each and everyone.” (pg. 26)

Move on to discuss the questions listed under

II. Faith, Discernment, Vocation Questions

III. Pastoral Activity

“The purpose of this chapter is to focus on how earnestly to respond to the challenge of pastoral care and vocational discernment, taking into consideration those involved in this task, the places where this guidance takes place and the resources which are available.” (pg. 26)

1. Walking with Young People

“Pope Francis said: “Vocational pastoral ministry is learning the style of Jesus, who passes through the places of daily life, stops without being hurried and, by looking at our brothers with mercy, leads them to encounter God the Father (Address to Participants in the International Conference on Pastoral Work for Vocations, 21 October 2016). Walking with young people builds up the entire Christian community.” (pg. 27)

“Three verbs from the Gospel, which describe the way Jesus encountered the people of his time, can be of assistance in adopting this pastoral style: ‘going out’, ‘seeing’ and ‘calling.’” (pg. 27)

Going Out

“Going out” means to leave behind rigid, sometime outdated, attitudes and frameworks that make people feel hemmed in, no longer using the excuse “we’ve always done it this way.” Instead, going out means welcoming and openly accepting the new and unique contributions of young people to the Christian community.

Seeing

“To “go out” into the world of young people requires a willingness to spend time with them, to listen to the story of their lives and to be attentive to their joys, hopes, sadness and anxieties; all in an effort to share them.” (pg. 28)

Calling

“Above all, calling means awakening a desire and jarring people from what blocks them or from the complacency which slows them down.” (pg. 28-29)

2. Agents

All Young People, Without Exception

“In pastoral activity, young people are not objects but agents.” “Consequently, each community is called to be attentive to young people, especially those who are experiencing poverty, marginalization or exclusion and lead them to become involved in life.” (pg. 29)

A Responsible Community

“The entire Christian community should feel the responsibility of educating new generations.” (pg. 29) “the Church needs to give major importance to young people’s involvement in the structures of participation in diocesan and parish communities... inviting young people to make their creative contribution and accepting their ideas.” (pg. 29-30)

People of Reference

“The role of credible adults and their cooperation” is essential for young people in their process of vocational discernment. (pg. 30) This includes parents and family; clergy and religious; teachers, ministers, and volunteers.

3. Places

Daily Life and Social Commitment

Becoming an adult means learning to live independently, managing and prioritizing the use of one’s time and money in everyday life. Authentic faith plays a role in everyday life, guiding these choices and priorities. (pg. 32)

Specific Places in Pastoral Activity

This section references the importance of specific places of ministry that offer activities and opportunities for the formation and development of young people; on the national and international level, as well as in parishes, schools, and volunteer opportunities within the community”

The Digital World

The document gives the digital world special attention in this section because it occupies a major place in the lives of young people today. The digital world offers great new opportunities, but also poses great risks (cyber-bullying, pornography, manipulation of thoughts, etc.) The Christian community must continue to develop her presence in the digital world, and she can learn greatly from young people how best to do this.

4. Resources

The Means and Expression in Pastoral Work

“Although many fruitful encounters take place in the Church’s activity...the Church sometimes has a difficult time finding the proper language and expressions to speak to young people. Many dream of a Church capable of significantly involving young people in her activity...by showing appreciation and the importance of young people’s creativity and talents.” (pg. 34)

Educative Care and the Path of Evangelization

There is a close connection between evangelization and education, between appealing to the heart and developing the mind. The Church must “become more attentive to the individuality of each person.” (pg. 35) She must be mindful that alongside those who continue to follow the traditional stages of entering and growing in the faith, there are those who will encounter the Lord and community of believers in other ways.

Silence, Contemplation, and Prayer

Finally and most importantly, no discernment is possible without prayer and cultivating a relationship with the Lord. “In particular, *Lectio divina* [a method of prayerfully reading scripture] is a valuable method, which Church tradition has always followed.” (pg. 35) In an increasingly noisy society one important goal is to “provide the young with opportunities to enjoy the value of silence

and contemplation and to receive formation in understanding one's experiences and to listen to one's conscience." (pg. 36)

5. Mary of Nazareth

"The synodal process is entrusted to Mary. [...] Each young person can discover in Mary's life the way to listen, the courage that faith generates, the depths of discernment and dedication to service (cf. Lk 1:39-45). [...] In her eyes every young person can rediscover the beauty of discernment; in her heart every young person can experience the tenderness of intimacy and the courage of witness and mission." (pg. 36)

Move on to discuss the questions listed under

III. Pastoral Activity Questions

Response *Evaluating the Situation*

I. Young People in Today's World Questions

These questions refer both to young people who take part in Church programs, as well as those who do not take part or have no interest to participate.

1. In what manner does the Church listen to your situations and the experiences of other young people?
2. What are the main challenges facing youth today? What are the most significant opportunities?
3. What programs and gatherings for youth have a major success within the Church, and why?
4. What programs and gatherings for youth have a major success outside the Church, and why?
5. How does your community care for young people who experience extreme violence and hardships (gangs, prison, drug addiction) and accompany them in various ways in their life?

III. Pastoral Activity Questions

These questions refer both to young people who take part in Church programs, as well as those who do not take part or have no interest to participate.

11. How has the Church responded to the cultural changes resulting from the development of the digital world?

12. How can World Youth Days or other national or international events become a part of ordinary practice?

13. What experiences are offered in your parish and diocese for young people seeking help discerning God's call for them?

14. What formation is offered to support the engagement of young people in society and civil life, for the common good?

15. In a world which is greatly secularized, what activities and opportunities are most effective for continuing the journey of faith after Confirmation?

Icebreaker Options

You can use one of these icebreaker options, or come up with your own, but the icebreaker should not exceed 5-7 minutes. If there are young people in your focus group that do not know each other's names well yet, use Icebreaker Option 1. If everyone in the group has met before, begin the process with Icebreaker Option 2.

Icebreaker Option 1:

Descriptive Adjective Name Game

In a circle (or circles) of 5-8 students, ask the students to think of a single word adjective that describes them, BUT the adjective must start with the same letter as their first names. For instance, "Annie" might say "amiable Annie" if she is really friendly and Russ might say "running Russ" if he likes to jog.

After giving the group 30 seconds to come up with a descriptive adjective start with one person who gives the adjective and their first name and then allow the person to his/her right to go next. However the next person in line has to repeat the adjective and name of the person who just went before doing his/her name and adjective. Have every person after that go all the way back to the first person and give the name and adjective. So, the second person does person number one and himself; the third person does persons number 1 and 2 and herself; and so on until the last person who has to do the whole circle.

Icebreaker Option 2:

Two Truths and a Lie

In a circle (or circles) of 5-8 students, ask the students to think of three things about themselves, two that are true and one that is false, but believable. For instance, "I play the guitar" (True); "I love cats" (False); and "I was born in Cleveland" (True).

After giving the group 30 seconds to come up with their two truths and a lie, start with one person who will make their three statements in any random order. Then, have everyone else raise 1, 2, or 3 fingers based on which of the three statements they believe to be false. Once everyone has guessed, have the person share which statement is actually the lie. Then, continue around the circle allowing each the opportunity to share their three statements. Have the students keep track of the number of times they guessed correctly during the game. At the end, have the person with the most correct guesses share with the whole group his or her secrets for discerning the truth.