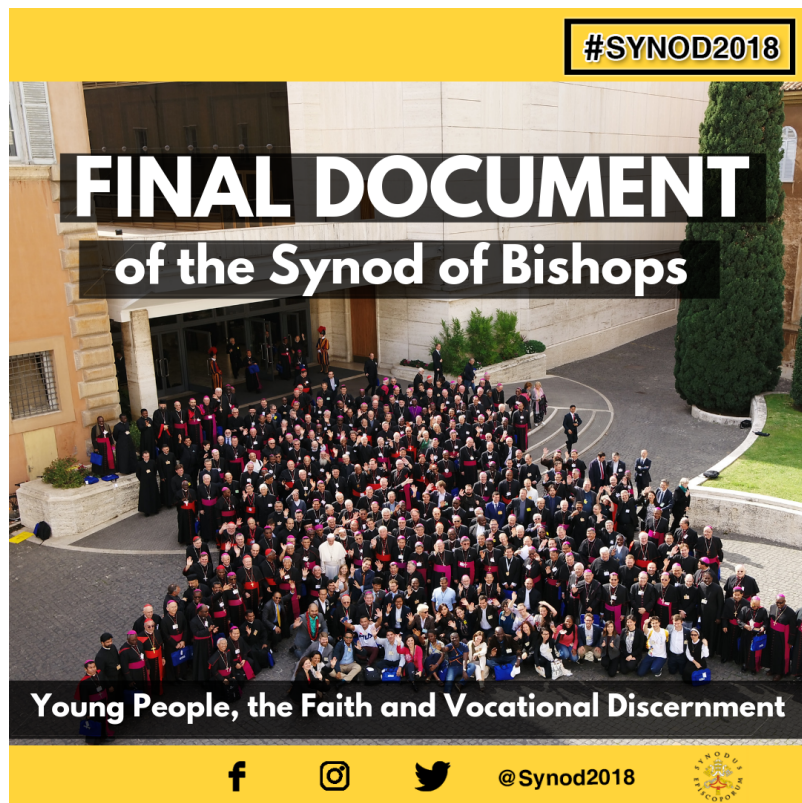


# Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment



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### **INTRODUCTION**

*The Synodal event that we experienced*

1. “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (*Acts 2:17; cf. Joel 3:1*).

This is what we experienced during the Synod, walking together and listening out for the voice of the Spirit. He astonished us with the wealth of his gifts, he filled us with his courage and his strength so as to bring hope to the world.

We journeyed together, with the Successor of Peter, who strengthened us in faith and gave us fresh vigour and enthusiasm for the mission. Even though we came from widely differing backgrounds in cultural and ecclesial terms, we were aware from the outset of a spiritual bond uniting us, a desire for dialogue and a real empathy. We worked together, sharing our deepest concerns, communicating our anxieties, not concealing our burdens. Many of the interventions touched us deeply and awakened our evangelical compassion: we felt as one body, suffering and rejoicing together. We want to share with everyone the grace that we experienced and we want to pass on the joy of the Gospel to our Churches and to the whole world.

The presence of young people was a new departure: through them the voice of a whole generation was heard loud and clear at the Synod. Journeying with them as pilgrims to the tomb of Peter, we experienced how coming together in this way creates the conditions for the Church to become a space for dialogue and a witness to a life-giving fraternity. The strength of this experience overcomes all weariness and weakness. The Lord continues to say to us again and again: Do not be afraid, I am with you.



### *The process of preparation*

2. We drew great benefit from the contributions of the episcopates and from the insights of pastors, religious, laypersons, experts, teachers and many others. From the outset the young people were involved in the synodal process: the online questionnaire, the large number of personal contributions and above all the Presynodal Meeting were an eloquent indication of this. Their contribution was essential, just as in the story of the loaves and the fish: Jesus was able to perform the miracle thanks to the helpful actions of a boy who generously offered what he had (cf. *Jn* 6:8-11).

All the contributions were summarized in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which provided a solid basis for discussion throughout the weeks of the Assembly. Now the Final Document gathers together the results of this process and launches it into the future: it expresses what the Synod Fathers recognized, interpreted and chose in the light of God's Word.

### *The Final Document of the Synodal Assembly*

3. It is important to clarify the relationship between the *Instrumentum Laboris* and the *Final Document*. The former is the comprehensive and synthetic frame of reference that emerged from two years of listening; the latter is the fruit of the discernment that followed and it draws together thematically the key discussion points that the Synod Fathers focused on with particular intensity and passion. So we recognize the diversity and the complementarity of these two texts.

The present Document is offered to the Holy Father (cf. Francis, *Episcopalis Communio*, 18; Instruction, art. 35 §5) and also to the whole Church as a fruit of this Synod. Since the Synodal process is not yet over and the phase of implementation is still to come (cf. *Episcopalis Communio*, 19-21), the *Final Document* will be a roadmap for the next steps the Church is called to take.

\* In the present document the term "Synod" may refer to the entire Synodal process or else to the General Assembly held from 3 to 28 October 2018.

## **PREAMBLE**

### *Jesus journeys with the Emmaus disciples*

4. We took the account of the journey to Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35) as a paradigmatic text for understanding the Church's mission to younger generations. This passage expresses well what we experienced at the Synod and what we would like every one of our particular Churches to be able to experience in relation to the young. Jesus walks with these two disciples who have not grasped the meaning of what happened to him, while they are moving away from Jerusalem and from the community. So as to be in their company, he walks alongside them. He asks them questions and he listens patiently to their version of events, so as to help them *recognize* what they are experiencing. Then, with affection and energy, he proclaims the Word to them, leading them to *interpret* the events



they have experienced in the light of the Scriptures. He accepts the invitation to stay with them as evening falls: he enters into their night. As they listen, their hearts burn within them and their minds are enlightened; in the breaking of bread their eyes are opened. It is they who then *choose* to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community, sharing the experience of their encounter with the Risen Lord.

In continuity with the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the *Final Document* consists of three parts which correspond to the stages of this Gospel story. The first part is entitled “He walked with them” (Lk 24:15) and it seeks to illuminate what the Synod Fathers *recognized* of the context in which the young find themselves, highlighting its strengths and its challenges. The second part, “Their eyes were opened” (Lk 24:31), is *interpretative* and it provides some fundamental tools for understanding the synodal theme. The third part, entitled “They set out at once” (Lk 24:33), presents the *choices* for a spiritual, pastoral and missionary conversion.

## **PART I**

### **“He WALKED WITH THEM”**

5. “*That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them*” (Lk 24:13-15).

In this passage the evangelist conveys the need of the two wayfarers to search for meaning in the events they have lived through. He focuses especially on the attitude of Jesus who joins them on their journey. The Risen Lord wants to walk alongside all young people, hearing their expectations, even those that are unmet, and their hopes, even those that are paltry. Jesus walks, listens and shares.

## **Chapter 1**

### **A Listening Church**

#### **Listening and seeing with empathy**

##### *The value of listening*

6. Listening is an encounter in freedom, which requires humility, patience, readiness to understand, and a commitment to formulate the answers in a new way. Listening transforms the hearts of those who do it, especially when it takes place with an interior disposition of harmony and docility to the Spirit. So it is not just a gathering of information, nor is it a strategy for achieving a goal, but it is the manner in which God himself relates to his people. God sees the wretchedness of his



people and he hears their cry, he is deeply moved and he comes down to deliver them (cf. *Ex 3:7-8*). The Church, through listening, enters into the movement of God who, in his Son, comes close to every human being.

### *The young want to be heard*

**7.** The young are called to make constant choices that give direction to their lives; they express the desire to be heard, recognized, accompanied. Many find that their voice is not considered interesting or useful in social and ecclesial circles. In some situations little attention is paid to their cry, particularly the cry of the poor and the exploited - few older people are willing and able to listen to them.

### *Listening in the Church*

**8.** In the Church there are plenty of initiatives and consolidated experiences that can offer young people an experience of acceptance, listening and making themselves heard. The Synod recognizes, though, that the ecclesial community does not always succeed in conveying the attitude shown by Jesus towards the Emmaus disciples, when he asked them, before enlightening them with the Word, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" (*Lk 24:17*).

Sometimes there can be a tendency to provide pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing the young people's questions to emerge in their freshness and engaging with 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 grasp new sensitivities and to consider new questions. At the same time it sets the conditions for a proclamation of the Gospel that can truly touch the heart, incisively and fruitfully.

### *Listening as practised by pastors and qualified laypersons*

**9.** Listening is a key element in the ministry of pastors, above all in that of bishops, although bishops are frequently burdened by many duties and they struggle to find enough time for this essential service. Many have pointed out the shortage of qualified people dedicated to accompaniment. Belief in the theological and pastoral value of listening implies the need to rethink and renew the ways in which priestly ministry is ordinarily exercised and to conduct a review of its priorities. Moreover, the Synod recognizes the need to prepare consecrated persons and laypersons, male and female, who are qualified to accompany young people. The charism of listening that the Holy Spirit calls forth within the communities might also receive institutional recognition as a form of ecclesial service.

## **The variety of contexts and cultures**

### *A plural world*



**10.** The very composition of the Synod brought out the presence and the contribution of many different regions of the world, highlighting the beauty of being a universal Church. Notwithstanding a context of growing globalization, the Synod Fathers asked that the many differences between contexts and cultures, even within a single country, be duly noted. The plurality of young people's worlds is so great that in some countries there is a tendency to use the term "youth" in the plural.

Moreover, the age range considered by the present Synod (16-29 years) does not represent a homogeneous category, but is made up of different groups each with their own life experience.

All these differences have a profound impact on young people's concrete experience: they affect the different phases of maturing, the forms of religious experience, the structure of the family and its importance for the transmission of the faith, relations between generations – as for example the role of the elderly and the respect due to them – ways of participating in the life of society, attitudes towards the future, ecumenical and interreligious questions. The Synod recognizes and accepts the richness of the diversity of cultures and puts itself at the service of the communion of the Spirit.

### *Changes that are taking place*

**11.** Of particular significance is the difference in demographic dynamics between countries with a high birthrate, where young people represent a significant and growing proportion of the population, and those in which the influence of the young is on the wane. A further differentiating factor is the result of history: there are countries and continents of ancient Christian tradition, whose culture is marked by a memory that is not to be lightly dismissed, but there are also countries and continents marked by other religious traditions, in which Christianity is a minority presence - often a recent one.

In other territories again, the Christian communities and the young people who belong to them suffer persecution.

### *Exclusion and marginalization*

**12.** Then there are differences between countries - and within countries - caused by the structure of society and the economic power that separates, dramatically at times, those with access to the increasing opportunities offered by globalization from those who live on the margins of society or in the rural world and who find themselves excluded or discarded. A number of interventions signalled the need for the Church to align herself courageously on their side and to help build alternatives that remove exclusion and marginalization, reinforcing acceptance, accompaniment and integration.

This highlights the need to be aware of the indifference that affects many Christians too, so as to overcome it by deepening the social dimension of the faith.

### *Men and women*

**13.** Nor must we overlook the difference between men and women with their characteristic gifts, their specific sensitivities and their experiences of life. This difference can give rise to forms of domination, exclusion and discrimination, from which all societies, including the Church, need to be liberated.

The Bible presents man and woman as equal partners before God (cf. *Gen 5:2*): all domination and discrimination based on sex is an offence against human dignity. The Bible also presents the



difference between the sexes as a mystery that is constitutive of the human being and cannot be reduced to stereotypes. The relation between man and woman is understood in terms of a vocation to live together in reciprocity and in dialogue, in communion and in fruitfulness (cf. *Gen* 1:27-29; 2:21-25) in every area of human experience: life as a couple, work, education and so on. God has entrusted the earth to their covenant.

### *Cultural colonization*

**14.** Many Synod Fathers coming from non-Western contexts point out that in their countries globalization brings with it forms of cultural colonization which uproot young people from their cultural and religious origins. The Church needs to make a commitment to accompany them in this process so that they do not lose sight of the most precious features of their identity.

There are contrasting interpretations of the process of secularization. Some see it as a welcome opportunity to be purified from a religiosity based on mere custom or on ethnic and national identities, while others see it as an obstacle to the transmission of the faith. In secular societies we are also witnessing a rediscovery of God and of spirituality. For the Church this should act as a stimulus to recover the importance of the dynamisms of faith, proclamation and pastoral accompaniment

## **A first look at the Church of today**

### *The Church's involvement in education*

**15.** There are many regions where young people see the Church as a force that is alive and engaging, of significance also for their contemporaries who do not believe or who belong to other religions. The Church's educational institutions seek to welcome all young people, irrespective of their religious choices, their cultural origins and their personal, family or social situation. In this way the Church makes a fundamental contribution to the integral education of the young in many different parts of the world. This happens through education in schools of every shape and size, in centres of professional formation, in colleges and in universities, but also in youth centres and oratories; this commitment is also demonstrated through the welcome given to refugees and the great variety of forms of social engagement. In all these ways the Church unites her witness and her proclamation of the Gospel to her educational work and her human promotion. When inspired by intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the Church's educational activity is appreciated even by non-Christians as an authentic form of human promotion.

### *Activities in youth ministry*

**16.** As the Synod progressed, it became clear that youth ministry needs a vocational slant, and that vocational pastoral care should be directed towards all young people. It was emphasized that pastoral programmes need to address the whole period from infancy through to adult life, helping the young to find their place in the Christian community. It was also noted that numerous parish groups, movements and youth associations already offer an effective process of accompaniment and formation for the young in their life of faith.



World Youth Day – the fruit of a prophetic insight of St John Paul II, who remains a point of reference for young people in the third millennium – along with the national and diocesan meetings, has an important part to play in the lives of many young people because it offers a lived experience of faith and communion that helps them to address life's great challenges and to assume responsibly their position in society and in the Church community. These gatherings can feed into ordinary pastoral accompaniment of individual communities, where reception of the Gospel has to be deepened and translated into life choices.

#### *The burden of administration*

**17.** Many Fathers pointed out that the burden of administrative duties absorbs the energy of many pastors in an excessive and sometimes suffocating way; this is one of the reasons why it can be difficult to encounter and accompany the young. To highlight the priority of pastoral and spiritual duties, the Synod Fathers insist on the need to rethink the concrete ways in which the ministry is exercised.

#### *The situation of parishes*

**18.** While parishes remain the first and principal way of being Church in a particular territory, there were indications from several quarters that the parish is struggling to be relevant to young people and that its missionary vocation needs to be rethought. Its low profile in urban areas, the lack of dynamism in parish activities, together with spatio-temporal changes in lifestyles all cry out for a renewal. Even if there have been various attempts at innovation, the river of young life often flows along the margins of the community, without encountering it.

#### *Initiation into Christian life*

**19.** Many note that programmes of Christian initiation do not always succeed in introducing children, adolescents and young adults to the beauty of the experience of faith. When the community is a place of communion and a true family of the children of God, it expresses a generative force which transmits the faith; where, on the other hand, it yields to the logic of delegation and where bureaucratic organization holds sway, Christian initiation is misinterpreted as a course of religious instruction which ends with the sacrament of Confirmation. So we urgently need a profound rethink of the way catechesis is presented and the link between transmission of the faith in the family and in the community, providing space for processes of personal accompaniment.

#### *Formation of seminarians and consecrated persons*

**20.** Seminaries and houses of formation are most important places in which the young who are called to the priesthood and to the consecrated life can deepen their vocational choice and can mature in discipleship. Sometimes these settings do not take sufficient account of the candidates' previous experience, underestimating its importance. This blocks the person's growth and risks giving rise to



the adoption of formal attitudes rather than the development of God's gifts and profound conversion of the heart.

## **Chapter II**

### **Three crucial Elements**

#### **The newness of the digital environment**

##### *A pervasive reality*

**21.** The digital environment is characteristic of the contemporary world. Broad swathes of humanity are immersed in it in an ordinary and continuous manner. It is no longer merely about “using” instruments of communication, but living in a highly digitized culture that has had a profound impact on ideas of time and space, on self-understanding, on understanding of others and of the world, on how to communicate, to learn, to inform oneself, to enter into relationship with others. An approach to reality that privileges images over listening and over reading influences the way people learn and the development of their critical faculty. It is already clear that “The digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but is part of the daily experience of many people, especially the young” (Benedict XVI, *Message for the XLVII World Day of Social Communications*).

##### *The network of opportunities*

**22.** The internet and social networks are a public square where the young spend much of their time and meet one another easily, even if not all have equal access to it, particularly in some regions of the world. They provide an extraordinary opportunity for dialogue, encounter and exchange between persons, as well as access to information and knowledge. Moreover, the digital world is one of socio-political engagement and active citizenship and it can facilitate the circulation of independent information that can provide effective protection for the most vulnerable, publicizing violations of their rights. In many countries, internet and social networks already represent a firmly established forum for reaching and involving young people, not least in pastoral initiatives and activities.

##### *The dark side of the internet*

**23.** The digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, up to the extreme case of the “dark web”. Digital media can expose people to the risk of dependency, isolation and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships. New forms of violence are being spread through social media, for example cyber-bullying; the internet is also a channel for spreading pornography and exploitation of persons for sexual ends or through gambling.



**24.** Finally, there are huge economic interests operating in the digital world, capable of exercising forms of control as subtle as they are invasive, creating mechanisms of manipulation of consciences and of the democratic process. The way many platforms work often ends up favouring encounter between persons who think alike, shielding them from debate. These closed circuits facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate. The proliferation of fake news is the expression of a culture that has lost its sense of truth and bends the facts to suit particular interests. The reputation of individuals is put in jeopardy through summary trials conducted online. The Church and her pastors are not exempt from this phenomenon.

## **Migrants as a paradigm of our time**

### *A multi-faceted phenomenon*

**25.** Migration considered globally is a structural phenomenon, not a passing emergency. Migration may occur within a country or between different countries. The Church's concern is focused especially on those fleeing from war, violence, political or religious persecution, from natural disasters including those caused by climate change, and from extreme poverty: many of them are young. In general they are seeking opportunities for themselves and their families. They dream of a better future and they want to create the conditions for attaining it.

Many Synod Fathers stressed that migrants are a "paradigm" able to shed light on our times and particularly on the youthful condition, and they remind us of the originating condition of faith, that of being "strangers and exiles on the earth" (*Heb11:13*).

### *Violence and vulnerability*

**26.** Other migrants are attracted by Western culture, and sometimes they form unrealistic expectations which expose them to grave disappointments. Unscrupulous traffickers, often linked to drug cartels or arms cartels, exploit the weakness of migrants, who too often experience violence, trafficking, psychological and physical abuse and untold sufferings on their journey. Nor must we overlook the particular vulnerability of migrants who are unaccompanied minors or the situation of those compelled to spend many years in refugee camps or those who remain trapped for a long time in transit countries, without being able to pursue a course of studies or to express their talents.

In some host countries, migration causes fear and alarm, often fomented and exploited for political ends. This can lead to a xenophobic mentality, as people become closed in on themselves, and this needs to be addressed decisively.

### *Stories of separation and of encounter*

**27.** Young migrants experience separation from their place of origin and often a cultural and religious uprooting as well. Fragmentation is also felt by the communities they leave behind, which lose their most vigorous and enterprising elements, and by the families, especially when one or both of the parents migrates, leaving the children in the country of origin. The Church has an important role as a point of reference for the young members of these divided families. But the stories of migrants are also stories of encounter between persons and between cultures: for the communities and societies



where they arrive, they bring an opportunity for enrichment and the integral human development of all. Initiatives of welcome involving the Church have an important role from this perspective and they can bring new life to the communities capable of adopting them.

### *The prophetic role of the Church*

**28.** Given the varied backgrounds of the Synod Fathers, the theme of migrants saw many different perspectives coming together, in particular between countries of departure and countries of arrival.

Moreover, alarm bells sounded from the Churches whose members are forced to escape war and persecution and who see these forced migrations as a threat to their survival. The very fact that the Church embraces all these various perspectives gives her a prophetic role vis-à-vis society on the theme of migration.

## **Recognizing and reacting to all types of abuse**

### *Establishing the truth and asking for forgiveness*

**29.** The various forms of abuse perpetrated by certain bishops, priests, religious and laypersons give rise in the victims, many of whom are young, to sufferings that can last a lifetime and that no repentance can remedy. This phenomenon is widespread in society and it affects the Church too and represents a serious obstacle to her mission. The Synod underlines the firm commitment to adopt rigorous preventative measures intended to avoid any recurrence, starting with the selection and formation of those to whom tasks of responsibility and education will be entrusted.

### *Going to the roots*

**30.** Abuse exists in various forms: abuse of power, abuse of conscience, sexual or financial abuse.

Clearly, the ways of exercising authority that make all this possible have to be eradicated and the irresponsibility and lack of transparency with which so many cases have been handled have to be challenged. The desire to dominate, the lack of dialogue and transparency, forms of double life, spiritual emptiness, as well as psychological weaknesses are the ground on which corruption thrives.

Clericalism, in particular, “arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a *power* to be exercised rather than as a free and generous *service* to be given.

This leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or learn anything, or that pretends to listen” (Francis, *Address to the 1st General Congregation of the XV General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 3 October 2018).

### *Thanks and encouragement*

**31.** The Synod expresses thanks to those who have the courage to denounce the evil they have suffered: they help the Church to acknowledge what has happened and the need to respond decisively. The Synod appreciates and encourages also the sincere commitment of countless lay men and women, priests, consecrated men, consecrated women and bishops who devote



themselves every day with honesty and dedication to the service of the young. Their work is like a forest that grows silently. Many of the young people present at the Synod also expressed thanks for those who have accompanied them and they emphasized the great need for figures of reference.

The Lord Jesus, who never abandons his Church, offers her the strength and the tools to set out on a new path. Confirming the line of timely “actions and sanctions that are so necessary” (Francis, *Letter to the People of God*, 20 August 2018, 2) and aware that mercy demands justice, the Synod recognizes that confronting the question of abuse in all its aspects, not without the valuable help of the young, can truly be an opportunity for a reform of epoch-making significance.

## **Chapter III**

### **Identity and relations**

#### **Family and intergenerational relations**

##### *The family as a privileged point of reference*

**32.** The family continues to be the principal point of reference for young people. Children appreciate the love and care of their parents, they hold family ties dear and they hope to succeed in forming a family in their turn. Undoubtedly the increase in separations, divorces, second unions and one-parent families can cause great suffering and identity crises in young people. Sometimes they must shoulder responsibilities disproportionate to their age which force them to become adults ahead of time. Grandparents often make a decisive contribution in affection and religious education: with their wisdom they are a decisive link in the relationship between generations.

##### *The importance of maternity and paternity*

**33.** Mothers and fathers have distinct roles but they are equally important as points of reference in forming children and passing on the faith to them. The maternal figure continues to have a role that young people consider essential for their growth, even if it is not sufficiently recognized in cultural, political and employment terms. Many fathers perform their own role with dedication, but we cannot conceal the fact that in some contexts, the paternal figure is absent or evanescent, and in others oppressive or authoritarian. These ambiguities are also reflected in the exercise of spiritual paternity.

##### *The relations between generations*

**34.** The Synod recognizes the dedication of many parents and teachers who are deeply committed to the transmission of values, notwithstanding the difficulties of the cultural context. In some regions, the role of the elderly and reverence for ancestors are key elements for education and contribute strongly



to the formation of personal identity. The extended family – which in some cultures is what the family really means – also plays an important role. Some young people, though, find family traditions oppressive and they flee from them under the impulse of a globalized culture that sometimes leaves them without points of reference. In other parts of the world, though, there is no actual generational conflict between young people and their elders, but rather a mutual estrangement. Sometimes older people do not try or do not succeed in transmitting the basic values of life or else they adopt “youthful” styles, reversing the relationship between generations. In this way the relationship between young people and their elders risks remaining on the affective level, leaving the educative and cultural dimensions untouched.

### *The young and cultural roots*

**35.** The young are focused on the future and they face life with energy and dynamism. But they are also tempted to concentrate on enjoying the present and sometimes they tend to give little attention to the memory of the past from which they come, in particular the many gifts transmitted to them by their parents, their grandparents and the cultural baggage of the society in which they live. Helping the young discover the living richness of the past, treasuring its memory and making use of it for their choices and opportunities, is a genuine act of love towards them for the sake of their growth and the choices they are called upon to make.

### *Friendship and relationships between peers*

**36.** Alongside intergenerational relationships, those between contemporaries are not to be overlooked. These represent a fundamental experience of interaction and gradual emancipation from the family context of origin. Friendship and debate, often within more or less structured groups, offer the opportunity to strengthen social and relational skills in a context in which one is neither valued nor judged. Group experience is also a great resource for sharing the faith and for mutual help in witness. The young are able to guide other young people and to exercise a genuine apostolate among their friends.

## **Body and affectivity**

### *Changes taking place*

**37.** The young recognize how important the body and sexuality are for their lives and for the growth of their identity, since they cannot live friendship and affectivity without these. In the modern world, though, they encounter phenomena in rapid evolution in regard to these things. Above all, developments in science and in biomedical technologies have a strong influence on the perception of the body, leading to the idea that it is open to unlimited modification. The capacity to intervene in DNA, the possibility of inserting artificial elements into the organism (cyborg) and the development of neurosciences constitute a great resource, but at the same time they raise anthropological and ethical questions. An uncritical acceptance of the technocratic approach to the body weakens one's awareness of life as a gift and the sense of creaturely limits: one can be misled or exploited by economic and political forces (cf. Francis, *Laudato si'*, 106).



Moreover, in some youth circles, there is a growing fascination for risk-taking behaviour as a tool for self-exploration, for seeking powerful emotions and obtaining recognition. Alongside the continuation of older phenomena, such as precocious sexual behaviour, promiscuity, sexual tourism, the exaggerated cult of the physical, today one notes the widespread diffusion of digital pornography and exhibition of one's body online. Such phenomena, to which young generations are exposed, constitute an obstacle for serene maturation. They point to social forces that are utterly new and that influence personal choices and experiences, making them fertile terrain for a kind of ideological colonization.

### *Reception of the Church's moral teachings*

**38.** This is the context in which Christian families and ecclesial communities seek to help young people discover sexuality as a great gift indwelt by Mystery, so as to live relationships according to the logic of the Gospel. But they do not always succeed in translating this aspiration into a thorough affective and sexual education, going above and beyond occasional input. Where such education has been genuinely taken up as an option to be proposed, there are positive results which help young people grasp the relationship between their adherence to faith in Jesus Christ and their way of living affectivity and interpersonal relationships. These results invite and encourage greater investment of the Church's energies in this area.

### *The questions of the young*

**39.** The Church has a rich tradition on which to build and from which to put forward her teaching in this area: for example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the theology of the body developed by St John Paul II, the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* by Benedict XVI, the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* by Pope Francis. But the young, including those who know this teaching and live by it, express a wish to hear from the Church a clear, humane and empathetic word. Frequently, though, sexual morality gives rise to incomprehension and distancing from the Church, inasmuch as she is perceived as a space of judgement and condemnation. In the face of social changes and new ways of living affectivity and the multiplicity of ethical perspectives, the young show themselves sensitive to the value of authenticity and dedication, but are often disoriented. They express more particularly an explicit desire to debate questions concerning the difference between masculine and feminine identity, the reciprocity between men and women, and homosexuality.

## **Forms of vulnerability**

### *The World of Work*

**40.** The world of work remains an area in which the young express their creativity and their innovative capacity. At the same time they experience forms of exclusion and marginalization. The first and most serious is youth unemployment, which in some countries reaches exorbitant levels. Besides making them poor, the lack of work impacts negatively on young people's capacity to dream and to hope and it deprives them of the possibility of contributing to the development of society. In many countries this situation depends on the fact that some swathes of the young population lack adequate professional skills, perhaps because of deficiencies in the educational and formational system. Often



the precariousness in employment that afflicts the young is linked to economic interests that exploit labour.

### *Violence and persecutions*

**41.** Many young people live in war zones and they experience violence in countless different forms: kidnappings, extortion, organized crime, human trafficking, slavery and sexual exploitation, wartime rape, etc. Other young people, because of their faith, struggle to find their place in society and they undergo various types of persecution, even to death. Plenty of young people, whether through force or through lack of alternatives, live by committing crimes and acts of violence: child soldiers, armed gangs, criminal gangs, drug-trafficking, terrorism, etc. This violence destroys many young lives.

Abuses and dependencies, just like violence and deviance, are among the reasons that lead young people into prison, with a higher incidence in certain ethnic and social groups. All these situations present the Church with questions.

### *Marginalization and social malaise*

**42.** Even more numerous in the world are the young people who suffer forms of marginalization and social exclusion, for religious, ethnic or economic reasons. Let us recall the difficult situation of adolescents and young people who become pregnant and the plague of abortion, as also the spread of HIV, the various forms of dependency (drugs, gambling, pornography, etc.) and the situation of street children, without homes, families or economic resources; particular attention is owed to young prisoners. Various interventions underlined the need for the Church to value the skills of excluded young people and the contributions they can offer to their communities. The Church should courageously take their side, accompanying them as they set about regaining their dignity and a role in building the common good.

### *The experience of suffering*

**43.** Contrary to a widespread stereogype, the world of young people is profoundly marked by the experience of vulnerability, disability, sickness and suffering. In many countries, especially among the young, there are increasing levels of psychological suffering, depression, mental illness and eating disorders, linked to experiences of profound unhappiness or to the inability to find a place within society; nor should one forget the tragic phenomenon of suicides. The young who experience these various trials, together with their families, count on the support of Christian communities, but these communities are not always adequately equipped to welcome them.

### *The resource of vulnerability*

**44.** Many of these situations are brought about by the “throwaway culture”: young people are among its first victims. Nevertheless, this culture can also taint the young, Christian communities and their leaders, thereby contributing to the human, social and environmental degradation that afflicts our world. The Church’s response is an appeal for conversion, for solidarity and renewed educative action, as she makes herself especially present in these situations of hardship. The young who live in these situations have precious resources to share with the community and they teach us to measure



ourselves against the limit, helping us to grow in humanity. There is no end to the creativity with which a community animated by Gospel joy can present an alternative to malaise and to situations of hardship. In this way society can experience that the stones rejected by the builders can become cornerstones (cf. *Ps* 118:22; *Lk* 20:17; *Acts* 4:11; *1 Pet* 2:4).

## Chapter IV

### Being young Today

#### Aspects of today's youth culture

##### *Originality and specificity*

**45.** The way young generations approach reality has some particular characteristics. The young ask to be accepted and respected in their originality. To mention some of the most evident characteristics of youth culture, preference is given to the image over and above other forms of communication, importance is attached to sensations and emotions as a way of approaching reality and priority is given to the concrete and the operative rather than to theoretical analysis. Friendship is very important for them, as is belonging to peer groups, held together through social media. The young are generally spontaneous and open with regard to diversity, and this makes them attentive to the themes of peace, inclusiveness and dialogue between cultures and religions. There is plenty of evidence from many parts of the world that the young know how to be pioneers of intercultural and interreligious encounter and dialogue, in the context of peaceful coexistence.

##### *Commitment and social engagement*

**46.** Albeit in a different way from earlier generations, social commitment is a specific feature of today's young people. Alongside some who are indifferent, there are many others who are ready to commit themselves to initiatives of voluntary work, active citizenship and social solidarity, and they need to be accompanied and encouraged, so as to bring out their talents, skills and creativity and to provide incentives for them to assume responsibility. Social commitment and direct contact with the poor remain a fundamental opportunity for discovery or deepening of faith and discernment of vocation. There is strong and widespread sensitivity to ecological themes and sustainability, that the encyclical *Laudato si'* has galvanized. It has also been pointed out that the young are ready to engage in the political field so as to build the common good, something that the Church has not always been able to accompany by providing opportunities for formation and spaces for discernment.

With regard to the promotion of justice, the young ask the Church to show decisive and consistent engagement, stamping out any complicity with a worldly mentality.

##### *Art, music and sport*

**47.** The Synod recognizes and appreciates the importance that the young give to artistic expression in all its forms: there are many young people who use their God-given talents in this field, promoting



beauty, truth and goodness, growing in humanity and in their relationship with God. For many, artistic expression is also an authentic professional vocation. We must not forget that for centuries the “way of beauty” has been one of the privileged ways of expressing faith and evangelization.

Music is particularly important, representing as it does a real environment in which the young are constantly immersed, as well as a culture and a language capable of arousing emotion and shaping identity. Musical language also represents a pastoral resource with a particular bearing on the liturgy and its renewal. The standardization of tastes through commercial interests sometimes risks compromising the link with traditional forms of musical and liturgical expression.

Equally significant is the emphasis that young people place on sporting activity, whose potential for education and formation the Church must not underestimate, maintaining a solid presence there.

The world of sport needs to be helped to overcome the ambiguities by which it is afflicted, such as the idolization of champions, subservience to commercial interests and the ideology of success at any cost. One way forward is to underline the value of accompaniment and support for the disabled in sporting activity.

## **Spirituality and religiosity**

### *The different religious contexts*

**48.** The religious experience of the young is strongly influenced by the social and cultural context in which they live. In some countries the Christian faith is a strong and lively community experience, in which the young participate with joy. In other areas of ancient Christian tradition, the majority of the Catholic population does not experience a real sense of belonging to the Church; yet there is no shortage of creative minorities and experiences that point to a revival of religious interest as a reaction against a reductive and suffocating vision. In other places still, Catholics along with other Christian denominations form a minority that sometimes experiences discrimination or even persecution. Finally there are places where sects or forms of alternative religiosity are on the rise; their followers frequently become disillusioned and averse to any form of religion. If in some regions the young have no opportunity to express their faith publicly or find their religious freedom is not recognized, in others they feel the weight of historic choices – including political ones – that have undermined the Church’s credibility. It is not possible to speak of the religiosity of the young without taking all these differences into account.

### *The religious quest*

**49.** In general the young say they are searching for the meaning of life and they show interest in spirituality. This attention, though, can sometimes take the form of a search for psychological well-being rather than openness to encounter with the Mystery of the living God. Particularly in some cultures, many see religion as a private matter and they choose from a variety of spiritual traditions those elements in which they find their own convictions mirrored. There thus spreads a certain syncretism, which develops on the relativistic assumption that all religions are equal. Adherence to a community of faith is not seen by everyone as a privileged way to access the meaning of life, and it is accompanied and sometimes replaced by ideologies or by the cult of success in professional and economic terms, with a view to material self-fulfilment. Certain practices inherited from tradition remain alive, though, such as pilgrimages to shrines, which at times involve large numbers of young



people, and expressions of popular piety, often linked to devotion to Mary and the Saints, which preserve the faith experience of a people.

#### *The encounter with Jesus*

**50.** The same variety is found in the relationship of the young with the figure of Jesus. Many recognize him as Saviour and Son of God and they often feel close to him through Mary, his mother, and they commit themselves to a journey of faith. Others have no personal relationship with him, but consider him a good man and an ethical point of reference. Others again encounter him through a powerful experience of the Spirit. For others, though, he is a figure from the past who is very remote from human experience and has no relevance for their lives.

Even though to many young people God, religion and the Church seem empty words, they are sensitive to the figure of Jesus when he is presented in an attractive and effective way. In many ways, the young people of today are saying to us: “We wish to see Jesus” (*Jn 12:21*), thus manifesting the healthy restlessness that characterizes the heart of every human being: “the restlessness of spiritual seeking, the restlessness of the encounter with God, the restlessness of love” (Francis, *Mass for the Beginning of the General Chapter of the Order of Saint Augustine*, 28 August 2013).

#### *The desire for living liturgy*

**51.** In many settings, young Catholics ask for prayer opportunities and sacramental celebrations capable of impacting upon their daily lives through a fresh, authentic and joyful liturgy. In some parts of the world liturgical experience is the principal resource for Christian identity and there is a good level of participation, with conviction. The young see the liturgy as a privileged moment of experience of God and of the ecclesial community and a point of departure for the mission. Elsewhere, though, we are witnessing a certain abandonment of the sacraments and of the Sunday Eucharist, perceived more as a moral precept than as a joyful encounter with the Risen Lord and the community. In general it seems that even where sacramental catechesis is offered, there is little by way of educative accompaniment for living the celebration profoundly, for entering into the mysterious riches of its symbols and its rites.

### **Participation and active involvement**

#### *The young want active involvement*

**52.** In the face of society’s contradictions, many young people wish to offer the fruits of their talents, skills and creativity and they are ready to assume responsibility. Among the themes they hold most dear are social and environmental sustainability, discrimination and racism. The involvement of the young often follows entirely new paths, and this includes harnessing the potential of digital communication in terms of mobilization and political pressure: spread of lifestyles and critical models of consumption and investment, in solidarity and attentive to the environment; new forms of commitment and participation in society and in politics; new forms of welfare in aid of the weakest.



### *Reasons for a distance*

**53.** The Synod is aware that a substantial number of young people, for all sorts of reasons, do not ask the Church for anything because they do not see it as significant for their lives. Some, on the contrary, expressly ask to be left alone, as they find the presence of the Church a nuisance, even an irritant. This request does not always stem from uncritical or impulsive contempt, but may also be based on serious and respectable reasons: sexual and economic scandals; the fact that the clergy are ill prepared to engage effectively with the sensitivities of the young; lack of care over homily preparation and the presentation of the Word of God; the passive role given to the young within the Christian community; the Church's difficulty in explaining its doctrinal and ethical positions in the face of contemporary society.

### *Young people in the Church*

**54.** Young Catholics are not merely on the receiving end of pastoral activity: they are living members of the one ecclesial body, baptized 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 protagonists 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.

### *Women in the Church*

**55.** The young also clamour for greater recognition and greater valuing of women in society and in the Church. Many women play an essential part in Christian communities, but often it is hard to involve them in decision-making processes, even when these do not require specific ministerial responsibilities. The absence of the feminine voice and perspective impoverishes debate and the Church's journey, depriving discernment of a precious contribution. The Synod recommends that everyone be made more aware of the urgency of an inevitable change, not least on the basis of anthropological and theological reflection on the reciprocity between men and women.

### *The mission of the young towards their peers*

**56.** In various contexts there are groups of young people, often from ecclesial movements and associations, who are actively involved in the evangelization of their peers through a transparent life witness, accessible language and the capacity to establish authentic bonds of friendship. This apostolate makes it possible to bring the Gospel to people who might not otherwise be reached by ordinary youth ministry and it helps to mature the faith of those who engage in it. So it deserves to be appreciated, supported, wisely accompanied and integrated into the lives of communities.



## *Desire for a more authentic and fraternal ecclesial community*

**57.** 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.

## **Part II**

### **“Their eyes were opened”**

**58.** *“And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying ‘Stay with us, for it is towards evening and the day is now far spent.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight” (Lk 24:27-31).*

After listening to them, the Lord addresses an incisive and decisive, authoritative and transforming “word” to the two wayfarers. In this way, gently but firmly, the Lord enters their dwelling, he stays with them and he shares the bread of life: he is the eucharistic sign that permits the two disciples finally to open their eyes.

## **A new Pentecost**

### *The action of the Holy Spirit*

**59.** The Holy Spirit inflames the heart, opens the eyes and awakens the faith of the two wayfarers. He is at work from the beginning of the creation of the world so that the Father’s plan to recapitulate all things in Christ may reach fulfilment. He acts in every time and in every place, in the variety of contexts and cultures, calling forth even in the midst of difficulties and sufferings the commitment to justice, the search for truth, the courage of hope. Hence Saint Paul states that “the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now” (*Rom 8:22*). The desire for life in love and the healthy restlessness that is found in the hearts of young people form part of the great longing of all creation for the fullness of joy. In each of them, including those who do not know Christ, the Creator Spirit acts so as to lead them to beauty, goodness and truth.

### *The Spirit rejuvenates the Church*



**60.** 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 youth of the Church, opening ourselves to the grace of a new Pentecost.

### *The Spirit in the life of the believer*

**61.** The Christian’s vocation is to follow Christ, passing through the waters of Baptism, receiving the seal of Confirmation and becoming part of his Body through the Eucharist. “So the Holy Spirit comes, fire after water, and you are baked into the bread which is the body of Christ” (Saint Augustine, Sermon 227). In the journey of Christian initiation, it is above all Confirmation that allows believers to relive the Pentecostal experience of a new outpouring of the Spirit for growth and mission. It is important to rediscover the richness of this sacrament, to grasp its link with the personal vocation of every baptized person and with the theology of charisms, to take greater care over the way it is presented pastorally, so that it does not become a formal and insignificant moment. Every vocational journey has the Holy Spirit as protagonist: He is the “interior teacher” whose lead it behoves us to follow.

### *An authentic experience of God*

**62.** The first condition for vocational discernment in the Spirit is an authentic experience of faith in Christ, dead and risen, remembering that faith “is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey” (Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 57). In Christian communities we sometimes risk proposing, even without intending it, an ethical and therapeutic theism, which responds to the human need for security and comfort, rather than a living encounter with God in the light of the Gospel and in the strength of the Spirit. If it is true that life is awakened solely through life, it becomes clear that young people need to encounter Christian communities that are truly rooted in friendship with Christ, who leads us to the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

## **Chapter I**

### **The gift of Youth**

### **Jesus as a young man among the young**

#### *The youth of Jesus*



**63.** “A youth for youths, becoming an example to the young, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, II, 22, 4), Christ sanctified the stage of youth by the very fact that he lived it. The biblical narrative presents only one episode from Jesus’ youth (cf. *Lk* 2:41-52), which was spent without fuss, in simplicity and in the working environment of Nazareth, so much so that he was known as “the carpenter” (*Mk* 6:3) and “the carpenter’s son” (*Mt* 13:55).

Contemplating his life is the best way to grasp the blessing of youth: Jesus had an unconditional trust in the Father, he maintained friendship with his disciples and even in moments of crisis he remained faithful to them. He showed a profound compassion for the weakest, especially the poor, the sick, sinners and the excluded. He had the courage to confront the religious and political authorities of his time; he had the experience of feeling misunderstood and rejected; he experienced the fear of suffering and he knew the fragility of the Passion; he turned his gaze towards the future, entrusting himself into the Father’s safe hands in the strength of the Spirit. In Jesus, all the young can see themselves, with their fears and their hopes, their uncertainties and their dreams and they can entrust themselves to him. For them it will be a source of inspiration to contemplate Jesus’ encounters with the young.

#### *With the Lord’s gaze*

**64.** Listening to Christ and communion with him help pastors and educators to cultivate a wise interpretation of this stage in life. The Synod tried to look at the young with the attitude of Jesus, to discern in their lives the signs of the Spirit’s activity. We believe that even today God speaks to the Church and to the world through the young, their creativity and their commitment, as well as their sufferings and their pleas for help. With them we can read our era more prophetically and recognize the signs of the times; hence the young are one of the “theological arenas” in which the Lord tells us some of his expectations and challenges for building tomorrow.

#### *Characteristics of youth*

**65.** Youth, as a phase in the development of the personality, is marked by dreams which gather momentum, by relationships which acquire more and more consistency and balance, by trials and experiments, and by choices which gradually build a life project. At this stage in life, the young are called to move forward without cutting themselves off from their roots, to build autonomy, but not in solitude. The social, economic, cultural context does not always offer favourable conditions. Many young saints have allowed the features of youth to shine forth in all their beauty and in their day they have been real prophets of change. Their example shows what the young are capable of when they open themselves up to encounter with Christ.

Young people with disabilities or marked by illness can also offer a valuable contribution. The Synod invites communities to make room for initiatives that recognize and permit them to be protagonists, for example through the use of sign language for the deaf, suitably tailored catechetical programmes, social experiences and work experience.

#### *The healthy restlessness of the young*



**66.** The young experience a restlessness that above all is to be accepted, respected and accompanied, with utter confidence in their freedom and responsibility. The Church knows from experience that their contribution is fundamental for renewal. Young people, in some respects, can be a step ahead of their pastors. On Easter morning the young Beloved Disciple arrived first at the tomb, before Peter, who was weighed down by age and by betrayal (cf. *Jn* 20:1-10); in the same way in the Christian community youthful dynamism is a renewing energy for the Church, because it helps her to shake off anything weighing her down or holding her back, so as to open up to the Risen Lord. At the same time, the attitude of the Beloved Disciple indicates that it is important to remain in touch with the experience of the elderly, to recognize the role of pastors and not to go forward alone. Hence the symphony of voices that is the fruit of the Spirit.

### *Wounded young people*

**67.** The young, like everyone else, also carry wounds. There are the wounds of the defeats they have suffered, frustrated desires, experiences of discrimination and injustice, of not feeling loved or recognized. There are physical and psychological wounds. Christ, who consented to endure his passion and death, comes close, through his cross, to all suffering young people. Then there are moral wounds, the weight of one's errors, the sense of guilt for having made mistakes. Today more than ever, to be reconciled with one's wounds is a necessary condition for a good life. The Church is called to support all the young in their trials and to promote whatever pastoral action may be needed.

## **Becoming adult**

### *The age of choices*

**68.** Youth is a time of life which has to come to an end, to make way for adult life. This transition does not take place automatically, but it implies a journey of maturation, not always helped by the environment in which young people live. In many regions there is a widespread culture of the provisional which favours an indefinite prolongation of adolescence and postponement of decisions; fear of the definitive thus generates a kind of paralysis of decision-making. Yet youth cannot remain on hold. It is the age of choices and herein lies its fascination and its greatest responsibility. Young people take decisions in professional, social and political fields and in other more radical ways that determine the shape of their lives. It is because of choices of this kind that one can speak more precisely of "life choices": a young person's life, in its unrepeatable uniqueness, is given a definitive orientation.

### *Life under the sign of mission*

**69.** Pope Francis invites young people to view their lives within the horizon of mission: "So often in life, we waste time asking ourselves: 'Who am I?' You can keep asking, 'Who am I?' for the rest of your lives. But the real question is: 'For whom am I?'" (*Address during the Prayer Vigil in preparation for World Youth Day, Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, 8 April 2017*). This statement sheds a profound light on life choices, because it invites us to make them within the liberating horizon of self-giving. This is the only way to arrive at an authentic and lasting happiness! Effectively "My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is



not an 'extra' or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world" (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 273).

### *A pedagogy capable of dialogue*

**70.** Mission is a sure target for life's journey, but not a "satellite navigation system" which lays out the whole route in advance. Freedom always entails a dimension of risk which needs to be evaluated with courage and accompanied wisely, according to the "law of graduality". Many pages in the Gospel portray Jesus inviting us to be daring, to put out into the deep, to pass from the logic of following commandments to that of generous and unconditional gift, without concealing the requirement to take up one's cross (cf. *Mt* 16:24). He is radical: "He *gives all and he asks all*: he gives a love that is total and asks for an undivided heart" (Francis, *Homily*, 14 October 2018). Without misleading the young through minimalist proposals or overwhelming them with a corpus of rules that give Christianity a reductive and moralistic image, we are called to invest in their fearlessness and to educate them to take on responsibilities, in the sure knowledge that error, failure and crisis are experiences that can strengthen their humanity.

### *The true sense of authority*

**71.** In order to undertake a true journey of maturation, the young need authoritative adults. In its etymological meaning, *auctoritas* indicates the capacity to cause to grow; it does not express the idea of a directive power, but of a real generative force. When Jesus encountered the young, in whatever state and condition they might find themselves, even if they were dead, in one way or another he said to them: "Arise! Grow!" And his word brought about what he was saying (cf. *Mk* 5:41; *Lk* 7:14).

In the episode of the healing of the possessed epileptic (cf. *Mk* 9:14-29), which evokes so many of the forms of alienation experienced by young people today, it seems clear that Jesus stretches out his hand not to take away freedom but to activate it, to liberate it. Jesus fully exercises his authority: he wants nothing other than the growth of the young person, without a trace of possessiveness, manipulation or seduction.

### *Family bonds*

**72.** The family is the first faith community where, for all its limitations and incompleteness, the young person experiences God's love and begins to discern a vocation. The last two Synods and the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* which came out of them, repeatedly emphasized that the task of the family, as a domestic Church, is to live the joy of the Gospel in daily life and to bring all its members to do so, according to their circumstances, remaining open to the dimension of vocation and mission.

Yet families do not always teach their children to consider the future through the lens of vocation.

Sometimes the desire for social prestige and personal success, the ambition of parents or a tendency to determine the choices of their children leave little room for discernment and condition the decisions that are made. The Synod recognizes the need to help families arrive at a clearer understanding of life as a vocation. The Gospel account of the adolescent Jesus (cf. *Lk* 2:41-52),



subject to his parents but able to detach himself from them so as to concern himself with his Father's affairs, can shed valuable light on how to interpret family relationships from a Gospel perspective.

## **Called to Freedom**

### *The Gospel of freedom*

**73.** Freedom is the essential condition for every authentic life choice. Yet there is a risk of it being misunderstood, not least because it is often inadequately presented. The Church herself comes across to many young people as an institution that imposes rules, prohibitions and obligations. Yet Christ “has set us free for freedom” (*Gal 5:1*), leading us from the regime of the Law to that of the Spirit.

In the light of the Gospel, it is helpful today to acknowledge more clearly that freedom is essentially relational and to show that passions and emotions matter in so far as they guide us towards authentic encounter with others. This perspective clearly shows that true freedom is intelligible and possible only in relation to truth (cf. *Jn 8:31-32*) and above all to charity (cf. *1 Cor 13:1-13; Gal 5:13*): freedom is being oneself in the heart of another.

### *A responsorial freedom*

**74.** Through lived experience of fraternity and solidarity, especially with the lowliest, young people learn that authentic freedom comes from feeling accepted, and the more we make space for others, the more it grows. They have a similar experience when they make a commitment to simplicity of life or respect for the environment. When they experience mutual recognition and shared commitment, they discover within their hearts a silent appeal to love that comes from God. This makes it easier to recognize the transcendent dimension that lies at the heart of freedom and that comes alive through contact with the most intense life experiences – birth and death, friendship and love, guilt and forgiveness. These are the experiences that help us to see that the nature of freedom is radically responsorial.

### *Freedom and faith*

**75.** More than 50 years ago, Saint Paul VI introduced the expression “dialogue of salvation” and he interpreted the mission of the Son in the world as an expression of an “appeal of love”. He added, though, that we are “free to respond to it or to reject it” (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*, 75). From this perspective, the act of personal faith appears both free and liberating: it will be the point of departure for a gradual appropriation of the contents of the faith. So faith is not an element added to freedom as if from outside, but it fulfils the desire of conscience for truth, goodness and beauty, rediscovering them fully in Jesus. The witness of so many young martyrs past and present, echoed powerfully at the Synod, is the most convincing proof that faith makes us free in the face of the powers of this world, in the face of its injustices and even in the face of death.

### *Freedom that is wounded and redeemed*



**76.** Human freedom is scarred by wounds from personal sin and from concupiscence. But when, by experiencing forgiveness and mercy, people become aware of the obstacles that imprison them, they grow in maturity and can commit themselves with greater transparency in definitive life choices.

From an educative perspective, it is important to help young people not to feel discouraged in the face of errors and failures, even humiliating ones, because these form an integral part of the journey towards a more mature freedom, aware of its greatness and its weakness.

But evil does not have the last word : “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (*Jn* 3:16).

He loved us to the end and thus he ransomed our freedom. Dying for us on the cross, he poured out the Spirit, and “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (*2 Cor* 3:17 : a new freedom, a paschal freedom, which is fulfilled in the daily gift of self.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Mystery of Vocation**

#### **The search for vocation**

*Vocation, journey and discovery*

**77.** The account of the call of Samuel (cf. *1 Sam* 3:1-21) enables us to gather together the fundamental elements of discernment: listening and recognition of the divine initiative, a personal experience, gradual growth in understanding, patient and respectful accompaniment of the mystery as it unfolds, a mission to the community. The vocation is not imposed upon Samuel as a destiny to be undergone; it is a proposal of love, a missionary sending in a story of daily mutual trust.

As for the young Samuel, so too for every man and every woman - vocation, while it may have strong and privileged moments, involves a long journey. The Word of the Lord needs time to be understood and interpreted; the mission to which it calls is revealed step by step. The young are fascinated by the adventure of gradual self-discovery. They learn willingly from the activities they carry out, from their encounters and their relationships, putting themselves to the test in daily life. Yet they need help to piece together the various experiences and to read them from a faith perspective, overcoming the risk of dispersal and recognizing the signs by which God speaks. In the discovery of a vocation, things are not all clear at once, because “faith ‘sees’ to the extent that it journeys, to the extent that it chooses to enter into the horizons opened up by God’s word” (Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 9).

*Vocation, grace and freedom*

**78.** Over the centuries, theological understanding of the mystery of vocation has seen different emphases, according to the social and ecclesial context in which the theme has been elaborated.

In any case, the analogical character of the term “vocation” should be recognized as well as the many dimensions of the reality designated. This leads, from time to time, to emphasis on individual aspects, in ways that have not always done justice to the complexity of the overall picture. In order to grasp profoundly the mystery of a vocation whose ultimate origin lies in God, we are therefore called to purify our imagination and our religious language, and to rediscover the richness and balance of



the biblical narrative. In particular, the interplay between divine choice and human freedom needs to be thought through, prescinding from all determinism and from all extrinsecism. Vocation is neither a pre-composed script that the human being has simply to recite nor is it an unwritten theatrical improvisation. Since God calls us to be friends and not servants (cf. *Jn* 15:13), our choices make a real contribution to the historical unfolding of his loving plan. The economy of salvation, on the other hand, is a Mystery that infinitely surpasses us; hence only through listening to the Lord do we learn what part we are called to play in it. Understood in this light, vocation appears as a real gift of grace and a gift of covenant - the most beautiful and precious secret of our freedom.

### *Creation and vocation*

**79.** In asserting that all things were created through Christ and for him (cf. *Col* 1:16), Scripture directs us to read the mystery of vocation as a reality imbuing God's creation itself. God created with his Word, which "calls" into being and into life, and then "establishes distinctions" within the chaos of the indistinct, imprinting on the cosmos the beauty of order and the harmony of diversity. If St Paul VI had already said that "every life is vocation" (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 15), Benedict XVI added that the human being is created as a dialogical being: the creative Word "calls each one of us personally, revealing that *life itself is a vocation from God*" (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 77).

### *Towards a vocational culture*

**80.** To speak of human life in vocational terms allows us to highlight some elements that are very important for the growth of young people: it means excluding the view that they are determined by destiny or are the product of chance, or else that they are a private good to be managed at will.

If in the first case there is no vocation, because there is no recognition of a destination worthy of existence, in the second a human being thought of as "rootless" becomes "vocationless". This is why it is important to establish the conditions to allow all Christian communities, building on the baptismal consciousness of their members, to develop a genuine vocational culture and a constant commitment to pray for vocations.

## **The vocation to follow Jesus**

### *The attractiveness of Jesus*

**81.** Many young people are fascinated by the figure of Jesus. To them his life appears good and beautiful, because it is poor and simple, built on sincere and profound friendships, given for his brethren with generosity, never closed towards anyone, but always open to gift. Still today the life of Jesus is profoundly attractive and inspiring; for all young people it is a provocation which challenges them. The Church knows that this is due to the fact that Jesus has a deep bond with every human being because "Christ, the new Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

### *Faith, vocation and discipleship*



**82.** Indeed Jesus not only fascinated people with his life - he also issued an explicit call to faith. He encountered men and women who recognized in his words and actions the right way to speak of God and to relate to him, pointing them towards the faith that leads to salvation: "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace!" (*Lk* 8:48). Others who met him were called to become his disciples and witnesses. He did not conceal from those who wanted to be disciples the need to take up the cross every day and follow him on a paschal journey of death and resurrection. Faith as witness lives on in the Church, the sign and instrument of salvation for all peoples. There have always been various forms of discipleship within the community of Jesus. Most of the disciples lived the faith in the ordinary circumstances of daily life; others, though, including some women, shared the itinerant and prophetic existence of the Master (cf. *Lk* 8:1-3); from the outset the apostles had a particular role in the community and they were associated by him with his ministry of guiding and preaching.

### *The Virgin Mary*

**83.** Among all the biblical figures who illustrate the mystery of vocation, we should contemplate in a particular way the figure of Mary. This young woman, with her "yes", made the Incarnation possible, thereby creating the conditions for every other ecclesial vocation. She remains the first disciple of Jesus and the model of all discipleship. In her pilgrimage of faith, Mary followed her Son to the foot of the Cross and after the Resurrection she accompanied the nascent Church to Pentecost. As mother and merciful teacher she continues to accompany the Church and to implore the Spirit who gives life to every vocation. Clearly, then, the "Marian principle" has an eminent role and illuminates the whole life of the Church in its various manifestations. Alongside the Virgin, the figure of Joseph her spouse constitutes another exemplary model of vocational response.

## **Vocation and vocations**

### *Vocation and mission of the Church*

**84.** It is not possible to understand the significance of the baptismal vocation in its fulness unless we remember that for everyone, without exception, it is a call to holiness. This call necessarily implies an invitation to share in the Church's mission, which has as its fundamental goal communion with God and communion among all people. Ecclesial vocations are multiple and articulated expressions through which the Church realizes her call to be a real sign of the Gospel received in a fraternal community. The different ways of following Christ express, each in its own way, the mission to bear witness to the event of Jesus, in which every man and every woman finds salvation.

### *The variety of charisms*

**85.** Saint Paul returns many times in his letters to this theme, recalling the image of the Church as a body made up of various members and emphasizing that each member is necessary and at the same time a part of the whole, since only the unity of all makes the body alive and harmonious. The origin of this communion Saint Paul locates in the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (*1 Cor* 12:4-6). The



Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Magisterium offer valuable indications for elaborating a correct theology of charisms and ministries in the Church, in such a way as to receive with recognition and to value with wisdom the gifts of grace that the Spirit continually calls forth in the Church to rejuvenate her.

### *Profession and vocation*

**86.** Many young people live their professional lives within a vocational horizon. They often reject attractive work proposals that are not in line with Christian values and they make their choice of career by asking how best to bring their personal talents to bear fruit in the service of the Kingdom of God. Work is seen by many as an opportunity to recognize and value the gifts they have received: in this way men and women participate actively in the Trinitarian mystery of creation, redemption and sanctification.

### *The family*

**87.** The two recent Synodal Assemblies on the family, followed by the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, offered a rich contribution on the vocation of the family in the Church and the essential contribution that families are called to make in witness to the Gospel through mutual love and through the procreation and education of children. Speaking of the riches contained in the recent documents reminds us how important it is to take up their message again so as to rediscover and help today's young people to understand the beauty of the vocation to marriage.

### *Consecrated life*

**88.** The gift of consecrated life, both contemplative and apostolic, which the Spirit calls forth in the Church, has a particular prophetic value inasmuch as it is a joyful witness of the gratuitousness of love. When religious communities and new foundations live their fraternity authentically, they become schools of communion, centres of prayer and contemplation, places of witness of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and arenas for evangelization and charity. The mission of many consecrated men and women who take care of the lowliest on the world's peripheries manifests concretely the dedication of an outward-looking Church. If in some regions it is experiencing reduction in numbers and the fatigue of ageing, consecrated life continues to be fruitful and creative, not least through co-responsibility with many lay people who share the spirit and the mission of the various charisms. The Church and the world cannot be without this vocational gift, which is a great resource for our time.

### *The ordained ministry*

**89.** The Church has always taken particular care of vocations to the ordained ministry, in the knowledge that holy order is a constitutive element of the Church's identity and is necessary for Christian life. Hence she has always devoted special attention to the formation and accompaniment of candidates for the priesthood. The concern of many churches for their numerical decline demands



a renewed reflection on the vocation to the ordained ministry and on the pastoral care of vocations so as to convey the fascination of the person of Jesus and of his call to become pastors of his flock. Likewise the vocation to the permanent diaconate calls for greater attention, because the full potential of this resource has yet to be tapped.

### *The condition of “singles”*

**90.** The Synod reflected on the situation of people who live as “singles”, recognizing that this term can indicate a great variety of circumstances. The single state can have many causes, voluntary or involuntary, and can depend on cultural, religious and social factors. It can therefore express a very broad range of life choices. The Church recognizes that this state, lived in a spirit of faith and gift, can be one of the many roads by which the grace of baptism is realized and a person advances towards the holiness to which are all called.

## **Chapter III**

### **The mission to accompany**

#### **The Church that accompanies**

##### *Faced with choices*

**91.** In the modern world, marked by an ever more evident pluralism and by an ever wider range of possible options, the theme of choices arises with particular force at a variety of levels, especially in the face of life journeys that are less and less linear and marked by great precariousness. Often the young oscillate between approaches as extreme as they are ingenuous: from considering themselves in thrall to a predetermined and inexorable destiny, to finding themselves overwhelmed by an abstract ideal of excellence, within a framework of unregulated and violent competition.

Accompaniment for the sake of valid, stable and well-founded choices, is therefore a service that is widely needed. Being present, supporting and accompanying the journey towards authentic choices is one way for the Church to exercise her maternal function, giving birth to the freedom of the children of God. Service of this kind is simply the continuation of the way in which the God of Jesus Christ acts towards his people: through constant and heartfelt presence, dedicated and loving closeness and tenderness without limits.

##### *Breaking bread together*

**92.** 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 of this reference. 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.

### *Environments and roles*

**93.** 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.

### *Accompanying the entry into society*

**94.** Accompaniment cannot limit itself to the path of spiritual growth and to the practices of the Christian life. Equally fruitful is accompaniment along the path of gradual assumption of responsibilities within society, for example in the professional sphere or in socio-political engagement.

In this sense, the Synodal Assembly points to the importance of the Church's social teaching. In society and in ecclesial communities that are ever more intercultural and multireligious, there is need for accompaniment that focuses specifically on relationship with diversity, that sees it as a mutual enrichment and as a possibility for fraternal communion, against the twofold temptation of retreating within one's own identity and relativism.

## **Community accompaniment, of groups and individuals**

### *A fruitful tension*

**95.** There is an inherent complementarity between personal accompaniment and community accompaniment, which every spirituality or ecclesial sensibility is called to articulate in its own way.

In particularly delicate moments, such as the phase of discernment over fundamental life choices or the negotiation of critical periods, direct personal accompaniment will prove particularly fruitful. Yet it also remains important in daily life as a way of deepening one's relationship with the Lord.

Then one must underline the urgency of personally accompanying seminarians and young priests, religious in formation, as well as couples preparing for marriage and in the early stages after the celebration of the sacrament, drawing inspiration from the catechumenate.



### *Community accompaniment and group accompaniment*

**96.** Jesus accompanied his group of disciples, sharing his daily life with them. Community experience highlights the qualities and the limits of every person and helps us to recognize humbly that unless we share the gifts we have received for the common good, it is not possible to follow the Lord.

This practice continues in the Church today, as the young join groups, movements and associations of various kinds, where they experience a warm and welcoming environment and the intensity of relationships that they desire. Joining organizations of this kind is particularly important once the journey of Christian initiation has been completed, because it offers the young an opportunity to bring their Christian vocation to maturity. Pastors should maintain a presence in these environments, so as to guarantee suitable accompaniment.

In these groups, the formators and animators represent a point of reference in terms of accompaniment, while the friendships that develop within them prepare the ground for peer accompaniment.

### *Personal spiritual accompaniment*

**97.** Spiritual accompaniment is intended to help people integrate step by step the various dimensions of their lives so as to follow the Lord Jesus. In this process three elements can be identified: listening of life, encounter with Jesus and mysterious dialogue between God's freedom and that of the individual. Those who accompany should be welcoming and patient, they elicit pertinent questions and recognize the signs of the Spirit in the replies of the young.

In personal spiritual accompaniment one learns to recognize, interpret and choose from the perspective of faith, listening to the Spirit's promptings within the life of every day (cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169-173). The charism of spiritual accompaniment is not necessarily linked to ordained ministry, nor was it in the past. Never has there been so great a need as there is today for spiritual guides, fathers and mothers with profound experience of faith and humanity, over and above their intellectual preparation. In this area, the Synod devoutly hopes for a rediscovery of the immensely fruitful resource of consecrated life, especially its female form, and of well-formed laypersons, young and old.

### *Accompaniment and the sacrament of Reconciliation*

**98.** The sacrament of reconciliation plays an essential part in helping us move forward in the life of faith, marked as it is not only by limits and frailties, but also by sin. The ministry of reconciliation and spiritual accompaniment must be clearly distinguished from one another, because they take different forms and have different objectives. A healthy and wise graduality of penitential paths is needed pastorally, involving of a range of educative figures, who can help young people to read their moral lives, to develop a correct sense of sin and above all to open themselves to the liberating joy of mercy.



## *Integral accompaniment*

**99.** The Synod recognizes the need to promote an integral accompaniment, in which the spiritual aspects are well integrated with the human and the social. As Pope Francis explains, “spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights drawn from the human sciences. At the same time, it transcends them” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 170). It is a question of absorbing all these elements dynamically, respecting different spiritualities and cultures, without exclusion and without confusion.

Psychological or psychotherapeutic accompaniment, as long as it is open to transcendence, can prove fundamental for a journey of integration of the personality, and it can reopen to the possibility of vocational growth certain aspects of the personality that are closed or blocked. Young people live all the richness and fragility of being an “open book”. Psychological assistance could not only help them patiently to relive their personal history, but also to reopen questions so as to help them arrive at a more stable affective equilibrium.

## *Accompaniment during formation for the ordained ministry and consecrated life*

**100.** When young people are admitted to houses of formation or seminaries, it is important to establish whether they are sufficiently rooted in a community, and whether they show stability in relations of friendship with peers, in commitment to study or work, and in contact with poverty and suffering. In spiritual accompaniment, it is crucial to begin with prayer and the interior world, learning discernment above all in their own lives, not least through forms of renunciation and asceticism.

Celibacy for the Kingdom (cf. Mt 19:12) should be understood as a gift to be recognized and verified in freedom, joy, gratuitousness and humility, before admission to candidacy or first profession. The contribution of psychology is to be understood as an aid to affective maturation and integration of the personality, to be used in formation according to professional ethics and with respect for the effective freedom of those in formation. The figure of the rector or whoever is responsible for formation becomes ever more important for unifying the journey of formation, for arriving at a realistic discernment, consulting all those involved in formation, and for deciding whether or not to interrupt the journey of formation, guiding individuals onto a different vocational path.

Once the initial phase of formation is concluded, there is a need for ongoing formation and accompaniment of priests and consecrated men and women, especially younger ones, who often have to face challenges and responsibilities that are quite out of proportion. The task of accompanying them falls not only upon those duly delegated, but must be personally exercised by bishops and superiors.

## **Quality accompaniers**

### *Called to accompany*

**101.** In many ways, the young ask us to describe the qualities needed in an accompanier. The service of accompaniment is a genuine mission, which requires apostolic availability on the



part of those who provide it. Like the deacon Philip, the accompanier is called to obey the call of the Spirit, going outwards and leaving behind the safe area enclosed by the walls of Jerusalem, a figure of the Christian community, so as to set out towards an inhospitable desert place, perhaps a dangerous one, in which he makes the effort to pursue a chariot. Having reached it, he must find a way of entering into a relationship with the foreign traveller, so as to elicit a question that perhaps would never have been formulated spontaneously (cf. Acts 8:26-40). In brief, to accompany requires placing oneself at the disposal of the Spirit of the Lord and of the one accompanied, with all his or her qualities and capacities, and then having the courage to step aside with humility.

### *The profile of the accompanier*

**102.** 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.

### *The importance of formation*

**103.** 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.

## **Chapter IV**

### **The Art of Discernment**



## **The Church, an environment for discernment**

### *A constellation of meanings in the variety of spiritual traditions*

**104.** Vocational accompaniment is a key dimension of a process of discernment on the part of the person who is called to choose. The term “discernment” is used in a variety of ways, albeit interrelated. In a more general sense, discernment indicates the process by which important decisions are taken; in a second sense, more typical of the Christian tradition and more relevant for our purposes, it corresponds to the spiritual dynamic by which a person, a group or a community seek to recognize and to follow the will of God in their particular situation: “test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess5:21). In so far as it involves seeking to recognize the Spirit’s voice and to accept the Spirit’s call, discernment is an essential dimension of Jesus’ manner of life, a fundamental attitude rather than a particular action.

Throughout Church history, different spiritualities have addressed the topic of discernment with different emphases, and in relation to different charismatic sensitivities and historical epochs. During the Synod we recognized some common elements, which do not take away from differences of language: the presence of God in the life and the history of every person; the possibility of recognizing God’s action; the role of prayer, of sacramental life and of asceticism; continual engagement with the demands of the Word of God; freedom with regard to acquired certainties; constant evaluation in the light of everyday life; the importance of adequate accompaniment.

### *At the heart of the Word and of the Church*

**105.** In so far as it is an “interior attitude rooted in an act of faith” (Francis, *Address to the 1st General Congregation of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 3 October 2018), discernment lies at the heart of the Church, whose mission is to bring every man and every woman to meet the Lord who is already at work in their lives and in their hearts.

The ecclesial context favours a climate of trust and freedom as individuals search for their vocation in an environment of recollection and prayer; it offers concrete opportunities for rereading one’s history and for the discovery of one’s gifts and vulnerabilities in the light of God’s Word; it permits engagement with witnesses who act out a variety of life choices. And encounter with the poor rapidly deepens what is essential in life, while the sacraments – especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation – nourish and sustain those who set out on the path of discovery of God’s will.

The horizon of community is always implied in every discernment, which can never be reduced to the merely individual dimension. At the same time every personal discernment puts a question to the community, inviting it to listen to what the Spirit is saying through the spiritual experience of its members: like every believer, the Church too is always in discernment.

## **Conscience in discernment**

### *God speaks to the heart*

**106.** Discernment focuses attention on what is actually happening in the heart of every man and every woman. In the Bible, the term “heart” is used to indicate the central point of interiority of



the person, where listening to the Word that God is constantly addressing to us becomes a criterion for evaluating our life and our choices (cf. *Ps* 139). The Bible considers the personal dimension, but at the same time underlines the community dimension. Moreover, the “new heart” promised by the prophets is not an individual gift, but concerns the whole of Israel, within whose tradition and salvation history the believer takes his place (cf. *Ezek* 36:26-27). The Gospels follow the same line: Jesus insists on the importance of interiority and he locates the centre of the moral life in the heart (cf. (*Mt* 15:18-20).

### *The Christian idea of conscience*

**107.** Saint Paul amplifies what the biblical tradition had to say about the heart, placing it in relation to the term “conscience”, which he takes from the culture of his time. In the conscience we gather the fruit of encounter and communion with Christ: a salvific transformation and acceptance of a new freedom. The Christian tradition insists on the conscience as the privileged place for special intimacy with God and encounter with Him, where his voice is heard: “Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16). This conscience is not about immediate and superficial sentiment, nor about “self-consciousness”: it testifies to a transcendent presence, which each person discovers in his own interiority, but which he does not control.

### *The formation of conscience*

**108.** Forming our conscience is the work of a lifetime, in which we learn to cultivate the very sentiments of Jesus Christ, adopting the criteria behind his choices and the intentions behind his actions (cf. *Phil* 2:5). To reach the deepest dimension of conscience, according to the Christian vision, it is important to cultivate the interiority that thrives on periods of silence, on prayerful, listening contemplation of the Word, on the sustenance gained from the sacraments and from Church teaching. Moreover we need to develop the habit of doing good, which we review in our examination of conscience: an exercise which is not just about identifying sins, but includes recognizing God’s work in our daily lives, in the events of our history and our cultures, in the witness of so many other men and women who went before us or who accompany us with their wisdom. All this helps us to grow in the virtue of prudence, giving an overall direction to our life through concrete choices, in the serene awareness of our gifts and limitations. The young Solomon asked for this gift more than any other (cf. *1 Kings* 3:9).

### *Ecclesial conscience*

**109.** At the most personal level, the conscience of every believer is always related to the ecclesial conscience. It is only through the mediation of the Church and its tradition of faith that we can access the real face of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Spiritual discernment is therefore seen as a sincere work of conscience, in our duty to know the good that is possible, on the basis of which to make responsible decisions as to the right exercise of practical reason, within and in the light of our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.



## The practice of discernment

### *Familiarity with the Lord*

**110.** As an encounter with the Lord that takes place deep within the heart, discernment can be understood as an authentic form of prayer. Hence it requires sufficient periods of recollection, both in the context of daily life and at privileged moments, like retreats, courses of spiritual exercises, pilgrimages, etc. Serious discernment is helped by all those occasions when we encounter the Lord and deepen our familiarity with Him, in the various forms in which he makes himself present: the Sacraments, and especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation; listening and meditating on the Word of God, *Lectio Divina* in the community, the fraternal experience of common life, and encounter with the poor - with whom the Lord Jesus identifies.

### *The attitudes of the heart*

**111.** Opening ourselves to listen to the Spirit's voice requires particular interior dispositions: the first is the attention of the heart, favoured by silence and by a self-emptying that demands asceticism. Equally fundamental are self-awareness, self-acceptance and repentance, combined with a willingness to put one's life in order, abandoning whatever might emerge as an obstacle and regaining the interior freedom necessary to make choices that are guided only by the Holy Spirit. Good discernment also requires attention to the movements of the heart, as we grow in the capacity to recognize and name them. Finally, discernment requires the courage to engage in spiritual combat, as there will be no shortage of temptations and obstacles that the Evil One places in our path.

### *The dialogue of accompaniment*

**112.** The various spiritual traditions all agree that good discernment requires regular interaction with a spiritual guide. Putting our lived experience into words authentically and personally helps us to see it more clearly. At the same time, the accompanier provides us with an essential element of accountability, becoming a mediator of the maternal presence of the Church. This delicate function was considered in the previous chapter.

### *Decision and confirmation*

**113.** Discernment as a dimension of the manner of life of Jesus and his disciples makes possible the concrete processes that carry us beyond uncertainty, to the point where we can assume responsibility for decisions. Hence processes of discernment cannot last indefinitely, either in our personal lives, or in the lives of communities and institutions. Decision-making is followed by an equally fundamental phase of implementation and verification in daily life. It is therefore essential to proceed via attentive listening to interior promptings so as to hear the voice of the Spirit. Engagement with daily reality takes on special importance in this phase. Various spiritual traditions point out the value of fraternal life and service to the poor as a test for decisions that have been taken and as a setting in which the person fully reveals himself.



## Part III

### They set off without delay

**114.** *“They said to each other: ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?’ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem: and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ They they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24:32-35).*

From listening to the Word, we pass to the joy of an encounter that fills the heart, gives meaning to life and injects new energy. Faces light up and the journey gains new energy: the light and strength of the vocational response becomes mission towards the community and the whole world. Without delay and without fear, the disciples retrace their steps to join their brethren and to testify to their encounter with the risen Jesus.

### A young Church

#### *An icon of resurrection*

**115.** In continuity with the paschal inspiration of Emmaus, the icon of Mary Magdalene (cf. *Jn* 20:1-18) illuminates the path that the Church seeks to follow with and for the young as a fruit of this Synod: a path of resurrection that leads to proclamation and mission. Nursing a profound desire for the Lord and defying the darkness of the night, Mary Magdalene runs to Peter and the other disciple; her movement triggers theirs, her womanly dedication anticipates the path of the apostles and opens up the way for them. At the dawn of that day, the first day of the week, she experiences a surprise encounter: Mary went in search because she loved, but she finds because she is loved. The Risen One makes himself known as he calls her by name and he asks her not to cling to him, because his risen Body is not a treasure to be locked up, but a Mystery to be shared. Thus she becomes the first missionary disciple, the apostle of the apostles. Healed from her wounds (cf. *Lk* 8:2) and a witness of the resurrection, she is the image of the young Church of our dreams.

#### *Walking with the young*

**116.** Passion for seeking truth, amazement at the Lord's beauty, the capacity to share and the joy of proclamation are still alive today in the hearts of many young people who are living members of the Church. This is not about simply doing something “for them”, but living in communion “with them”, growing together in understanding of the Gospel and in the search for more authentic ways of living it and bearing witness to it. The responsible participation of young people in the life of the Church is not optional, but it is a demand of baptismal life and an essential element for the life of every community. The trials and frailties of young people help us to be better, their questions challenge us, their doubts cause us to reflect on the quality of our faith. Their criticisms are also necessary



for us, because often it is through them that we hear the voice of the Lord asking us for conversion of heart and renewal of structures.

### *The desire to reach all the young*

**117.** At the Synod we have always questioned ourselves about young people, by which we mean not only those who belong to the Church and work actively in her, but also all those who have other visions of life, who belong to other religions or who distance themselves from religion altogether. All the young, without exception, are in the heart of God and therefore also in the heart of the Church.

But we recognize frankly that this statement on our lips does not always find real expression in our pastoral actions: often we remain closed in our environments, where their voice does not penetrate, or else we dedicate ourselves to less demanding and more enjoyable activities, suppressing that healthy pastoral restlessness that would urge us to move out from our supposed security. And the Gospel too asks us to be daring and we want to be so without presumption and without proselytizing, testifying to the love of the Lord and stretching out our hands to all the young people in the world.

### *Spiritual, pastoral and missionary conversion*

**118.** Pope Francis often reminds us that this is not possible without a serious journey of conversion. We are aware that it is not just a question of starting up new activities, nor do we want to write “vast apostolic projects, meticulously planned, just like defeated generals” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 96). We know that in order to be credible, we must live a reform of the Church, which implies purification of the heart and changes of style. The Church must truly allow herself to take on the form of the Eucharist, which she celebrates as the source and summit of her life – the form of a loaf made up of many grains and broken for the life of the world. The fruit of this Synod, the choice that the Spirit has inspired in us through listening and discernment, is to walk with the young, going out towards everyone, so as to bear witness to the love of God. We could describe this process by speaking of synodality for mission, or missionary synodality: “Making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God.”[1] We are dealing here with a prophecy of the Second Vatican Council, which we have yet to absorb in all its profundity and to develop in its daily implications, as Pope Francis reminds us when he says: “It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (Francis, *Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). We are convinced that this choice, a fruit of prayer and debate, will allow the Church, by God’s grace, to be and to appear more clearly as the “youth of the world”.

## **Chapter I**

### **The Missionary Synodality of the Church**

#### **A constitutive dynamism**

#### *The young ask us to walk together*



**119.** 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 co-protagonists of 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 solicitude for the people of God is called to express itself and enrich itself through the practice of synodality at all levels.

#### *The Synodal process continues*

**120.** The ending 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 the 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.

#### *The Synodal form of the Church*

**121.** The experience they shared has made the Synod participants aware of the importance of a synodal form of the Church for the proclamation and transmission of the faith. The participation of the young helped to “reawaken” synodality, which is a “constitutive element of the Church ... as Saint John Chrysostom says, that ‘Church and Synod are synonymous’,<sup>(19)</sup> inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the ‘journeying together’ of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord” (Francis, *Address for the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). Synodality characterizes both the life and the mission of the Church, which is the People of God formed of young and old, men and women of every culture and horizon, and the Body of Christ, in which we are members one of another, beginning with those who are pushed to the margins and trampled upon. In the course of the exchanges and the testimonies, the Synod brought to life certain fundamental traits of a synodal style: this is the goal of the conversion to which we are called.

**122.** It is in relationships – with Christ, with others, in the community – that faith is handed on. For the sake of mission, too, the Church is called to adopt a relational face that places the emphasis on listening, welcoming, dialogue and common discernment in a process that transforms the lives of those taking part. “A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that



listening 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (*Jn 14:17*), in order to know what he 'says to the Churches' (*Rev 2:7*)" (Francis, *Address for the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). In this way the Church presents herself as the "tent of meeting" in which the Ark of the Covenant is preserved (cf. *Ex 25*): a dynamic Church, in movement, which accompanies while journeying, strengthened by many charisms and ministries. Thus does God make himself present in this world.

### *A participatory and co-responsible Church*

**123.** 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 activate it, conversion of the heart becomes necessary, as well as a readiness for mutual listening, which builds an effective common mind. Animated by this spirit, we can proceed towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, able to value 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 should 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 normal 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 international level.

### *Joint processes of discernment*

**124.** The experience of "walking together" as the People of God helps us to understand more and more deeply the sense of authority as service. Pastors need to have the capacity to increase collaboration in witness and mission and to accompany processes of joint discernment so as to interpret the signs of the times in the light of faith and under the guidance of the Spirit, with all the members of the community contributing, starting with those on the margins. Church leaders with these capacities need a specific formation for synodality. In this regard, it would seem desirable to devise joint formation courses for young lay people, young religious and seminarians, especially where matters like the exercise of authority or collaborative ministry are concerned.

## **A style for mission**

### *Missionary communion*

**125.** The synodal life of the Church is essentially oriented towards mission: it is "the sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of unity for the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1),



until the day when God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). The young, open to the Spirit, can help the Church to make the paschal transition of going out “from ‘I’ understood in a self-centred way to the ecclesial ‘we’, where every ‘I’, clothed in Christ (cf. Gal 3:27), lives and journeys with his or her brothers and sisters as a responsible and active agent of the one mission of the People of God” (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, 107). Under the impulse of the Spirit and the guidance of the bishops, the same transition must take place for the Christian community, called to move away from the self-referentiality of the ‘I’ of self-preservation towards serving the building of a ‘we’ that is inclusive vis-à-vis the whole human family and the whole of creation.

### *A mission in dialogue*

**126.** This fundamental dynamic has precise consequences for the way the mission is conducted jointly with young people, which requires us to engage, frankly and without compromise, in a dialogue with all men and women of good will. As St Paul VI stated: “The Church ... has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 65). In a world marked by diversity of peoples and variety of cultures, “walking together” is fundamental if the initiatives of solidarity, integration and promotion of justice are to be credible and effective, and to show what is meant by a culture of encounter and gratuitousness.

It is the young who live day by day in contact with their peers from other Christian confessions, religions, convictions and cultures, who stimulate the entire Christian community to practise ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. This calls for the courage of the *parresia* in speaking and the courage of humility in listening, taking up the asceticism – and sometimes the martyrdom – that this implies.

### *Towards the peripheries of the world*

**127.** The practice of dialogue and the search for shared solutions represent a clear priority at a time when democratic systems are challenged by low levels of participation and by a disproportionate influence of small interest groups who do not enjoy wide support in the population, with the danger of reductionistic, technocratic and authoritarian consequences. Faithfulness to the Gospel will direct this dialogue towards a search for how to reply to the twofold cry of the poor and of the earth (cf. Francis, *Laudato si'*, 49), to which the young show particular sensitivity, ensuring that social processes are inspired by the principles of social teaching: the dignity of the person, the universal destination of goods, the preferential option for the poor, the primacy of solidarity, attention to subsidiarity, care of our common home. No vocation within the Church can place itself outside this communitarian dynamism of going out and dialoguing; hence every effort of accompaniment is called to measure itself against this horizon, giving privileged attention to the poorest and most vulnerable.

## **Chapter II**

### **Walking together in daily life**



## **From structures to relationships**

### *From delegation to involvement*

**128.** Missionary synodality does not merely apply to the universal dimension of the Church. The demand to journey together, bearing a real witness of fraternity in a renewed and more visible community, applies above all to individual communities. It is therefore necessary to reawaken in every local reality the awareness that we are the people of God, responsible for incarnating the Gospel in our different contexts and in all daily situations. This involves stepping outside the logic of delegation, which so greatly conditions pastoral action.

We may refer, for example, to catechetical courses in preparation for sacraments, a task that many families delegate entirely to the parish. This mentality has the result that children risk seeing the faith not as a reality that illumines their daily life, but as a collection of ideas and rules belonging to a separate sphere of their existence. Instead the two must journey together: the parish needs the family to help the young to experience the daily realism of the faith; the family conversely needs the ministry of catechists and of the parish structure to offer the children a more organic vision of Christianity, so as to introduce them into the community and open them to broader horizons. So it is not enough to have structures, if authentic relationships are not developed within them; it is actually the quality of these relationships that evangelizes.

### *The renewal of the parish*

**129.** The parish has to be involved in this process, as it seeks to become a more generative community, an environment which spearheads the mission towards the lowliest. There are signs that the parish does not always succeed in meeting the spiritual needs of the people of our day, largely because of certain factors which have profoundly changed people's lifestyles. We now live in a culture "without boundaries", marked by new spatio-temporal relationships - partly because of digital communication - and by constant mobility. In this context, an understanding of the parish defined solely by territorial borders and incapable of engaging the faithful with a wide range of initiatives, especially the young, would imprison the parish in unacceptable stagnation and in worryingly repetitive pastoral cycles. So the parish needs to be rethought pastorally, in terms of ecclesial co-responsibility and missionary vigour, exploring new synergies within its territory. Only then will it become a significant environment in which to engage the lives of the young.

### *Open and decipherable structures*

**130.** In the same line of greater openness and sharing, it is important that individual communities ask themselves whether their lifestyles and use of structures offer the young a recognizable testimony of the Gospel. No doubt the personal lives of many priests, sisters, religious, and bishops are marked by simplicity and commitment to the people; but this is almost invisible to most, especially to the young. Many of them find that our ecclesial world is hard to read; they are kept at a distance by the roles we carry out and by the stereotypes that accompany these. Let us aim to make our day-to-day life, in all its expressions, more accessible. Effective closeness, the sharing of spaces and activities, create the conditions for authentic communication, free from prejudices. This is how Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom and his Spirit urges us to follow the same path today.



## The life of the community

### *A mosaic of faces*

**131.** A synodal and missionary Church is manifested through local communities with a variety of faces. The Church has never been rigidly monochrome, but she has developed as a polyhedron of persons with varying sensitivities, origins and cultures. In this way she has carried in the earthenware vases of human frailty the incomparable treasure of Trinitarian life. The harmony that the Spirit gives does not abolish differences, but it makes them resonate together, generating a symphonic richness.

This encounter between different persons in the one faith is the fundamental condition for pastoral renewal of our communities. This has a bearing on proclamation, on celebration and on service, that is, on the fundamental spheres of normal pastoral activity. Popular wisdom says that “it takes a village to rear a child”: this principle applies to all spheres of pastoral activity today.

### *The community in the territory*

**132.** The effective realization of a community with many faces also has a bearing on its relationship with the local area, on its openness to the social fabric and on its dealings with civil authorities.

Only a united and diversified community is able to present itself in an open way and to shine the light of the Gospel onto the concerns of society that challenge us today: ecological questions, work, support for the family, marginalization, renewal of politics, cultural and religious pluralism, the quest for justice and peace, the digital environment. This is already happening in ecclesial associations and movements. The young ask us not to face these challenges alone but to dialogue with all, not so as to cut back a slice of power, but so as to contribute to the common good.

### *Kerygma and catechesis*

**133.** The proclamation of Jesus Christ, dead and risen, who has revealed the Father and imparted the Spirit, is the fundamental vocation of the Christian community. Part of this proclamation is the invitation to the young to recognize in their lives the signs of God’s love and to discover the community as a place of encounter with Christ. This proclamation, ever new, is the very foundation of the catechesis of young people and gives it a kerygmatic quality (cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 164). We must keep alive our commitment to offer ongoing, holistic pathways that are able to integrate: living knowledge of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, the capacity to read personal experience and historical events in the light of faith, accompaniment for prayer and for the celebration of the liturgy, an introduction to *Lectio Divina* and support for the witness of charity and the promotion of justice. In this way, we put forward an authentic spirituality for the young.

Catechetical courses need to illustrate the intimate connection of faith with the concrete experience of every day, with the world of sentiments and attachments, with the joys and disappointments that we meet in study and in work; they should include the Church’s social teaching; they should be open to the languages of beauty, music and different artistic expressions, and to the forms of digital communication. The dimensions of bodiliness, affectivity and sexuality should be taken very much into account, as there is a profound link between education in faith and education in love. Faith, after all, should be understood as praxis, or as a way of living in the world.



In catechesis of the young, it is urgent to continue seeking out the right types of language and methodology, without ever losing sight of the essential, namely the encounter with Christ, who is the heart of catechesis. *YouCat*, *DoCat* and similar instruments are appreciated, though this is not to undervalue the catechisms produced by the various Episcopal Conferences. There is also a need for renewed commitment to catechists, who are often young and serving other young people, virtually their contemporaries. It is important to take sufficient care over their formation and to see that their ministry is more widely recognized by the community.

### *The centrality of the liturgy*

**134.** The eucharistic celebration generates the life of the community and the synodality of the Church. It is a place of transmission of the faith and formation for mission, in which it becomes evident that the community lives by grace and not by the work of our hands. In the words of the eastern tradition, we can say that the liturgy is an encounter with the Divine Servant who binds our wounds and prepares the paschal banquet for us, sending us out to do the same for our brothers and sisters. So let us reiterate that the commitment to celebrate with noble simplicity, involving various lay ministries, is an essential element of the Church's missionary conversion. The young have shown that they appreciate and wish to engage deeply with authentic celebrations in which the beauty of signs and the care taken over preaching and community involvement truly speak of God. It is therefore necessary to promote their active participation, while keeping alive a sense of awe before the Mystery; to acknowledge their musical and artistic sensitivities, but also to help them understand that the liturgy is not purely self-expression but an action of Christ and the Church. It is equally important to help the young discover the value of eucharistic adoration as a prolongation of the celebration, in which to live contemplation and silent prayer.

**135.** Great importance in faith journeys attaches also to the practice of the sacrament of Reconciliation. The young need to feel loved, forgiven and reconciled and they have a secret longing for the merciful embrace of the Father. For this it is essential that priests generously make themselves available to celebrate this sacrament. Communal penitential services help the young to approach individual confession and they make the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament more explicit.

**136.** In many contexts, popular piety plays an important role in bringing the young to the life of faith in a practical, sensitive and immediate way. Valuing body language and affective participation, popular piety brings with it the desire to enter into contact with the God who saves, often through the mediation of the Mother of God and of the saints.

Pilgrimage, for the young, is an experience of journeying that becomes a metaphor for life and the Church: contemplating the beauty of creation and art, living fraternally and uniting oneself to the Lord in prayer are once again proposed as the best conditions for discernment.

### *The generosity of diakonia*



**137.** The young can help renew the style of parish communities and build a fraternal community that is close to the poor. The poor, the young who are cast aside, those who are suffering most, can become the principle of community renewal. They should be recognized as subjects of evangelization and they help us free ourselves from spiritual worldliness. Often the young are sensitive to the dimension of *diakonia*. Many are actively committed in voluntary work and they find in service the way to encounter the Lord. Dedication to the lowliest thus becomes a practice of faith, in which one discovers the love “in loss” that is at the heart of the Gospel and the foundation of the whole Christian life. The poor, the lowly, the sick, the elderly, are the suffering body of Christ: hence to place oneself at their service is a way of meeting the Lord and a privileged space for discernment of one’s vocation. A particular openness is required, in different contexts, towards migrants and refugees. With them it is necessary to work for acceptance, protection, promotion and integration. Social inclusion of the poor makes the Church the house of charity.

### **Youth pastoral ministry from a vocational perspective**

#### *The Church, a home for the young*

**138.** Only a pastoral approach capable of renewal on the basis of care for relationships and the quality of the Christian community will be significant and attractive for the young. The Church will thus be able to present herself to them as a welcoming home, characterized by a family atmosphere built on trust and confidence. The longing for fraternity, which emerged so many times as the Synod listened to the young, asks the Church to be “a home for many peoples, a mother for all peoples” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 288): pastoral ministry has the task of realizing in history the Church’s universal maternity through concrete and prophetic gestures of joyful, daily welcome that make her a home for the young.

#### *Vocational animation of pastoral ministry*

**139.** Vocation is the hinge around which all dimensions of the person are integrated. This principle concerns not only the individual believer, but also pastoral ministry as a whole. So it is very important to clarify that only in the vocational dimension does all pastoral ministry find a unifying principle, because here it finds its origin and its fulfilment. With regard to the journeys of pastoral conversion that are under way, no one is therefore asking to strengthen vocational ministry as a separate and independent sector, but rather to animate the entire pastoral approach of the Church, presenting effectively the great variety of vocations. The goal of pastoral ministry is to help everyone, through a journey of discernment, to attain to “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (*Eph 4:13*).

#### *A pastoral vocational ministry for the young*

**140.** From the beginning of the synodal process, it became very clear that youth ministry needs a vocational slant. In this way, the two essential characteristics of a pastoral approach to young generations emerge: it is “for youth”, because it is aimed at those in the singular and unrepeatable stage in life which is youth; it is “vocational”, because youth is the privileged season for life choices and for responding to God’s call. The “vocationality” of youth ministry should not be understood in an



exclusive sense, but an intensive sense. God calls at every age in life – from the mother's womb to old age – but youth is the privileged moment for listening, for availability and for accepting God's will.

The Synod put forward the proposal that at the level of National Episcopal Conferences a "Directory of Youth Ministry" be prepared from a vocational perspective, so as to help diocesan leaders and local workers to offer good formation and action with and for the young.

### *From fragmentation to integration*

**141.** While recognizing that planning for pastoral activities is necessary, in order to avoid improvisation, on several occasions the Synod Fathers voiced their disquiet over a certain fragmentation of the Church's pastoral approach. In particular, they spoke of the multiplicity of pastoral approaches to the young: youth ministry, family or vocational ministry, school and university chaplaincy, social, cultural, charitable, free time activities, etc. The multiplication of offices that are highly specialized, but sometimes working independently of one another, does not make the Christian message any more accessible. In a fragmented world, the young need to be helped to unify life, interpreting their daily experiences and discerning deeply. If this is the priority, it is necessary to develop greater coordination and integration between the different spheres, passing from a work for "offices" to a work for "projects".

### *The fruitful relationship between events and daily life*

**142.** During the Synod, there was frequent reference to World Youth Day and the many related events that take place on a continental, national and diocesan level, together with those organized by associations, movements, religious congregations and other ecclesial entities. These moments of encounter and sharing are widely appreciated, because they offer the possibility of journeying together as if on pilgrimage, of experiencing fraternity with all, of sharing the faith joyfully and growing closer to the Church. For many young people these moments have been an experience of transformation, in which they have experienced the beauty of the face of the Lord and have made important life choices. The best fruits of these experiences are gathered in daily life. It therefore becomes important to plan and to experience these gatherings as significant stages of a larger virtuous process.

### *Youth Centres*

**143.** Specific places dedicated to the young by the Christian community, such as oratories, youth centres and other similar structures, manifest the Church's passion for education. They can take many forms, but they remain privileged spaces in which the Church becomes a welcoming home for adolescents and young adults, who discover their talents and offer them for service. They transmit a very rich educational patrimony, to be shared on a large scale, to support families and civil society itself.

In the context of a Church that looks outwards, though, a creative and flexible renewal of these realities is needed, moving away from the idea of static centres, to which the young can come, towards the idea of pastoral subjects moving with and towards the young, capable, that is, of meeting



them in their ordinary places of life – school and the digital environment, existential peripheries, the rural world, the world of work, musical and artistic expression, etc. – generating a new type of apostolate that is more dynamic and active.

## **Chapter III**

### **Renewed Missionary Vigour**

#### *Some urgent challenges*

**144.** Synodality is the method by which the Church can address ancient and new challenges, gathering and bringing into dialogue the gifts of all her members, starting with the young. Building on the work of the Synod, the First Part of this *Document* outlined some areas in which it is urgent to launch or renew the Church's vigour in realizing the mission that Christ assigned her, which we here seek to address in a more concrete manner.

#### *Mission in the digital environment*

**145.** The digital environment presents a challenge to the Church on various levels; it is essential, therefore, to deepen knowledge of its dynamics and its range of possibilities from the anthropological and ethical point of view. This requires not only entering into it and promoting its communicative potential with a view to the Christian proclamation, but also giving a Gospel flavour to its culture and its dynamics. Some initiatives along these lines are already under way and should be encouraged, deepened and shared. The priority that many give to the image as a communicative vehicle cannot fail to raise questions about ways of transmitting a faith that is based on hearing God's Word and reading the Sacred Scripture. Young Christians, who like their contemporaries are digital natives, find here an authentic mission, in which some are already engaged. What is more, they are the same young people who ask to be accompanied in a discernment on mature life-patterns in today's highly digitalized environment, to help them seize the opportunities while avoiding the risks.

**146.** The Synod would like to see dedicated Offices for digital culture and evangelization set up in the Church at appropriate levels, so as to promote ecclesial action and reflection in this environment, making good use of the essential contribution of the young. Among their functions, besides favouring the exchange and dissemination of good practice at individual and community level, and developing appropriate instruments of digital formation and evangelization, they could also manage systems of certification for Catholic sites, to combat the spread of "fake news" about the Church, and they could seek ways of persuading public authorities to promote ever more stringent policies and instruments for the protection of minors on the web.

#### *Migrants: knocking down walls and building bridges*



**147.** Many migrants are young. The universality of the Church offers them an excellent opportunity to foster dialogue between their communities of origin and those to which they migrate, helping to overcome fears and hesitations and strengthening the bonds that migrations risk breaking.

“Welcome, protect, promote and integrate”, the four verbs with which Pope Francis synthesizes the action needed to support migrants, are synodal verbs. Implementing them requires the Church’s action at all levels and it involves all the members of Christian communities. For their part, migrants, appropriately accompanied, can offer spiritual, pastoral and missionary resources to the host communities. Of particular importance is cultural and political engagement, involving appropriate structures, to fight against the spread of xenophobia, racism and rejection of migrants. The resources of the Catholic Church are a vital element in the fight against human trafficking, as is clearly seen in the work of many religious sisters. The role of the *Santa Marta group*, which brings together religious leaders and those responsible for law and order, is crucial and represents a good practice from which to draw inspiration. Nor must we overlook the commitment to guarantee the effective right to remain in the country of origin for those who do not wish to migrate but are forced to do so, and to provide support for Christian communities that are at risk of depopulation through migration.

### *Women in a synodal Church*

**148.** A Church that seeks to live a synodal style cannot fail to reflect on the condition and role of women within it, and consequently in society more generally. Young men and women ask this question forcefully. The fruits of such reflection need to be implemented through a courageous change of culture and through change in daily pastoral practice. A sphere of particular importance in this regard is the female presence in ecclesial bodies at all levels, including positions of responsibility, as well as female participation in ecclesial decision-making processes, respecting the role of the ordained minister. This is a duty of justice, which draws inspiration both from the way Jesus related to men and women of his day, and from the importance of the role of certain female figures in the Bible, in the history of salvation and in the life of the Church.

### *Sexuality: a clear, free, authentic word*

**149.** In the current cultural context, the Church struggles to communicate the beauty of the Christian vision of bodiliness and sexuality, as it emerges from Sacred Scripture, from Tradition and from the Magisterium of recent Popes. It therefore seems urgent to search for better ways, that can be translated concretely into new formation pathways. We must propose to the young an anthropology of affectivity and sexuality that is also able to give the right value to chastity, showing with pedagogical wisdom its most authentic meaning for the growth of the person, in all states of life. It is about emphasizing empathetic listening, accompaniment and discernment, along the lines indicated by the recent Magisterium. For this is it necessary to devote care to the formation of pastoral workers who have credibility, beginning with the maturing of their own affective and sexual dimensions.

**150.** There are questions about the body, affectivity and sexuality that require deeper anthropological, theological and pastoral study, in whatever forms and at whatever level seems most appropriate, from local to universal. Among the questions that emerge are those regarding the difference and harmony between male and female identity and sexual inclinations. In this regard, the Synod stresses that God loves every person and the Church does the same, renewing her commitment against all discrimination and violence on sexual grounds. Equally, she reiterates



the key anthropological relevance of the difference and reciprocity between men and women and believes it to be reductionist to define personal identity on the sole basis of the person's "sexual orientation" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons*, 1 October 1986, 16).

Many Christian communities already offer journeys of accompaniment in faith for homosexual persons: the Synod recommends that such initiatives be supported. In these journeys, people are helped to read their own history; to adhere with freedom and responsibility to their baptismal calling; to recognize the desire to belong and contribute to the life of the community; to discern the best ways of realizing this. Thus, all young people, without exception, are helped to integrate the sexual dimension of their personality more and more fully, as they grow in the quality of their relationships and move towards the gift of self.

#### *Economics, politics, work, common home*

**151.** The Church is committed to the promotion of social, economic and political life marked by justice, solidarity and peace, which is something the young ask for insistently. This requires the courage to be a voice for the voiceless in addressing world leaders, by denouncing corruption, wars, the arms trade, drug trafficking and exploitation of natural resources, and by calling those responsible for it to conversion. As part of the larger picture, this cannot be separated from the commitment to include those who are weakest, building pathways that allow them not only to find an answer to their own needs, but also to make their contribution to building up society.

**152.** Aware that "work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth" (St John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 4) and that the lack of work is humiliating for many young people, the Synod recommends that local Churches help and accompany young people as they take their place in this world, perhaps through the support of young business initiatives. Experiences of this kind are found in many local Churches and should be supported and strengthened.

**153.** The promotion of justice also affects the management of the Church's goods. The young feel at home in a Church where economics and finance are lived transparently and consistently. Courageous choices are needed in the area of sustainability, as indicated by the encyclical *Laudato si'*, inasmuch as a lack of respect for the environment generates new forms of poverty, of which the young are the first victims. Systems are changing, and this shows us that a different way of living the economic and financial dimension is possible. The young urge the Church to be prophetic in this field, through her words but above all through choices which show that financial management can be both person-friendly and environmentally friendly. Together with them we can do it.

**154.** As far as ecological matters are concerned, it is important to offer guidelines for concrete implementation of *Laudato si'* in church praxis. Several interventions underlined the importance of offering young people formation in socio-political engagement and the resource that the Church's social teaching represents in this regard. Young people who take part in politics should be supported and encouraged to work for a real change of unjust social structures.



### *In intercultural and interreligious contexts*

**155.** Cultural and religious pluralism is a growing reality in the social life of the young. Young Christians offer a beautiful witness of the Gospel when their faith has a transforming effect on their lives and their daily actions. They are called to open themselves to the young of other religious and spiritual traditions, and to maintain with them authentic relationships that favour mutual knowledge and bring healing from prejudices and stereotypes. They are thus pioneers of a new form of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, which helps to liberate our societies from exclusion, extremism, fundamentalism and also from the manipulation of religion for sectarian or populist ends.

Witnesses of the Gospel, these young people, along with their peers, become promoters of a citizenship that includes diversity and socially responsible religious commitment for building up social bonding and peace.

Recently, at the suggestion of the young, initiatives have been launched which bring people of different religions and cultures to experience living alongside one another, so that in a climate of conviviality and respect for each other's religions, all may actively promote a common shared commitment in society.

### *The young for ecumenical dialogue*

**156.** As for the journey of reconciliation among all Christians, the Synod is grateful for the desire of many young people to foster unity among the separated Christian communities. Committing themselves to this line, very often the young deepen the roots of their own faith and experience a real opening towards what others can give. They know intuitively that Christ already unites us, even if certain differences remain. As Pope Francis stated on the occasion of the visit to Patriarch Bartholomew in 2014, it is the young "who urge us today to take steps forward towards full communion. And this is not because they do not know the significance of the differences that still keep us apart, but because they are able to see beyond, they are capable of grasping the essentials that unite us already" (Francis, *Address at the Divine Liturgy, Patriarchal Church of Saint George, Istanbul*, 30 November 2014).

## **Chapter IV**

### **Integral Formation**

#### *Concreteness, complexity and integration*

**157.** The present day is marked by growing complexity of social phenomena and individual experience. In daily life, the changes that are taking place have an impact on one another and cannot be addressed selectively. In real life, everything is interconnected: family life and professional



engagement, the use of technologies and the way of experiencing community, defence of the embryo and defence of the migrant. Concreteness presents us with an anthropological vision of the person as a whole and a way of knowing that does not separate but grasps connections, learns from experience, re-reads it in the light of the Word, and draws inspiration from exemplary testimonies rather than from abstract models. This requires a new type of formation which aims to integrate perspectives, makes them capable of grasping the interconnectedness of problems and knows how to unify the various dimensions of the person. This approach is in profound harmony with the Christian vision which contemplates, in the incarnation of the Son, the inseparable encounter between the divine and the human, between earth and heaven.

### *Education, school and university*

**158.** During the Synod there was a particular insistence on the decisive and essential task of professional formation in schools and universities, not least because these are places where most young people spend much of their time. In some parts of the world basic education is the first and most important question that the young put to the Church. For the Christian community it is important therefore to maintain a significant presence in these fields with good teachers, flourishing chaplaincies and serious cultural engagement.

Catholic educational institutions should be the subject of particular reflection. They express the Church's solicitude for the integral formation of the young. These are precious arenas for encounters between the Gospel and the culture of a people and for the development of research. They are called to propose a model of formation that can bring faith into dialogue with the questions of the contemporary world, with different anthropological perspectives, with the challenges of science and technology, with changes in social customs and with the commitment to justice.

Special attention should be given in these settings to the promotion of young people's creativity in the fields of science and art, poetry and literature, music and sport, the digital world and the media, etc. In this way the young will be able to discover their talents and put them at the disposal of society for the good of all.

### *Preparing new formators*

**159.** The recent Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* on ecclesiastical faculties and universities put forward some fundamental criteria for formation capable of addressing the challenges of the present day: spiritual, intellectual and existential contemplation of the kerygma, holistic dialogue, multi-disciplinary work carried out with wisdom and creativity and the urgent need for "networking" (cf. *Veritatis Gaudium*, 4d). These principles can inspire all educative and formative spheres; their adoption will be particularly beneficial for forming new educators, helping them to open themselves to a vision capable of integrating experience and truth. At global level the Pontifical Universities play a key part and so too, at a continental and national level, do Catholic universities and centres of study. Periodic review, aiming for the highest standards and the constant renewal of these institutions, is a great strategic investment for the good of the young and of the whole Church.

### *Forming missionary disciples*



**160.** The Synodal journey underlined the growing desire to give a higher profile to the active involvement of the young. Clearly the apostolate of the young towards other young people cannot be improvised, but must be the fruit of a serious and thorough formative journey: how to accompany this process? How to offer the best instruments to the young, so that they can be authentic witnesses of the Gospel? This question also reflects the desire of many young people to know their faith better: to discover its biblical roots, to grasp the historical development of doctrine, the meaning of dogmas, the richness of the liturgy. This makes it possible for the young to reflect on current issues in which the faith is tested, so as to know how to give a reason for the hope that is in them (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*).

Hence the Synod proposes that experiences of mission for the young be enhanced by setting up centres of formation for evangelization, aimed at the young and at young couples and by an integral experience that will conclude with sending them on mission. There are already initiatives of this kind in various territories, but every Episcopal Conference is asked to study how it can be achieved in the particular setting.

#### *A time for accompanying discernment*

**161.** Frequently in the Synod Hall there were heartfelt pleas to invest generously, for the young, educational passion, extended periods of time and also economic resources. Gathering together various contributions and wishes that emerged during the synodal exchanges, and listening to experiences already under way, the Synod proposes with conviction to all the particular Churches, to the religious congregations, to the movements, to associations and to other ecclesial bodies that they offer the young an experience of accompaniment with a view to discernment. This experience – whose duration should be determined according to contexts and opportunities – can be described as *a time destined for the maturation of adult Christian life*. It should involve prolonged detachment from habitual environments and relationships, and it should be built around at least three indispensable elements: an experience of fraternal life shared with older formators that is essential, simple and respectful of the common home; an apostolic proposal that is strong and significant, to be lived together; an offer of spirituality rooted in prayer and sacramental life. In this way all the necessary ingredients are in place for the Church to be able to offer the young who wish it a profound experience of vocational discernment.

#### *Accompaniment for marriage*

**162.** It is important to accompany couples in their preparation for marriage, remembering that there are different legitimate ways of organizing such itineraries. As we read in *Amoris Laetitia*, 207: “They do not need to be taught the entire Catechism or overwhelmed with too much information ... marriage preparation should be a kind of ‘initiation’ to the sacrament of matrimony, providing couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family.” It is important to accompany young families, above all in the first years of marriage, and this includes helping them to play an active part in the Christian community.

#### *The formation of seminarians and of consecrated men and women*



**163.** The specific task of integral formation of candidates for the ordained ministry and for male or female consecrated life remains an important challenge for the Church. We note also the importance of a solid cultural and theological formation for consecrated women and men. As far as seminaries are concerned, the first task is obviously the assumption and putting into practice of the new *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. During the Synod, some important emphases emerged, which are worth mentioning.

In the first place, the choice of formation staff: it is not enough for them to be well qualified; they need to be capable of fraternal relationships, listening with empathy, profound inner freedom. In the second place, what is necessary in accompanying seminarians adequately is serious and competent work in differentiated educative teams, which include women. The make-up of these formation teams, where different vocations interact, is a small but precious form of synodality, which can have an impact on the minds of young people in their initial formation. In the third place, formation must focus on developing in future pastors and consecrated men and women their ability to carry out their role as guides in an authoritative, but not authoritarian, way, educating young candidates to give themselves for the community. Special attention needs to be given to some criteria of formation, such as: overcoming tendencies towards clericalism, the ability to work in a team, sensitivity towards the poor, transparency of life-style, the willingness to allow themselves to be accompanied. In the fourth place, serious initial discernment is crucial, because too often young people who offer themselves to seminaries or houses of formation are admitted without their past history being known sufficiently well or studied in depth. This question becomes particularly delicate in the case of "wandering seminarians": relational and affective instability, and the lack of ecclesial roots, are danger signals. Ignoring ecclesial norms on these matters is irresponsible behaviour, which can have serious consequences for the Christian community. A fifth point concerns the size of formation communities: those that are too big run the risk of de-personalization and inadequate knowledge of the young people on their journey, while those that are too small can be suffocating and suffer from a logic of dependency; in these cases it is better to found inter-diocesan seminaries or houses of formation shared by several religious provinces, with clear formation projects and well-defined responsibilities.

**164.** The Synod has formulated three proposals to encourage renewal.

The first concerns joint formation of lay people, religious and priests. It is important to keep young men and women in formation in touch with the daily life of families and communities, paying special attention to the presence of women and Christian couples, such that formation is grounded in the reality of life and marked by relationships that can be integrated into the social and cultural context.

The second proposal concerns including in the curriculum of preparation for ordained ministry or consecrated life specific courses on pastoral care of young people, through well-planned programmes and experiences of pastoral work and evangelization.

The third proposal asks for consideration - within the authentic discernment of people and situations according to the vision and spirit of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* - of the possibility of backing up the formation journey in terms of experience and in a community context. This is particularly the case in the final stage of that journey, which envisages candidates being introduced gradually to pastoral responsibility. The ways this is explained and put into practice can be indicated by the Bishops' Conference of each country, in accordance with their own versions of the *Ratio Fundamentalis*.



## 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 because they have not found holiness in the Church, 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.

### *Dragged 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).



[1] International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, §9. The document illustrates, moreover, the nature of synodality in these terms: “It is possible to go deeper into the theology of synodality on the basis of the doctrine of the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the sacramental collegiality of the episcopate in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome. This ecclesiological vision invites us to articulate synodal communion in terms of ‘all’, ‘some’ and ‘one’. On different levels and in different forms, as local Churches, regional groupings of local Churches and the universal Church, synodality involves the exercise of the *sensus fidei* of the *universitas fidelium* (all), the ministry of leadership of the College of Bishops, each one with his presbyterium (some), and the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome (one). The dynamic of synodality thus joins the communitarian aspect which includes the whole People of God, the collegial dimension that is part of the exercise of episcopal ministry, and the primatial ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

This correlation promotes that *singularis conspiratio* between the faithful and their Pastors, which is an icon of the eternal *conspiratio* that is lived within the Trinity” (§64).

Dokument Ko#cowy Synodu Biskupów

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Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi

Final Document of the Synod of Bishops

Documento final del Sínodo de los Obispos

Document final du synode des évêques

Documento Final do Sínodo dos Bispos

Das Abschlussdokument der Bischofssynode