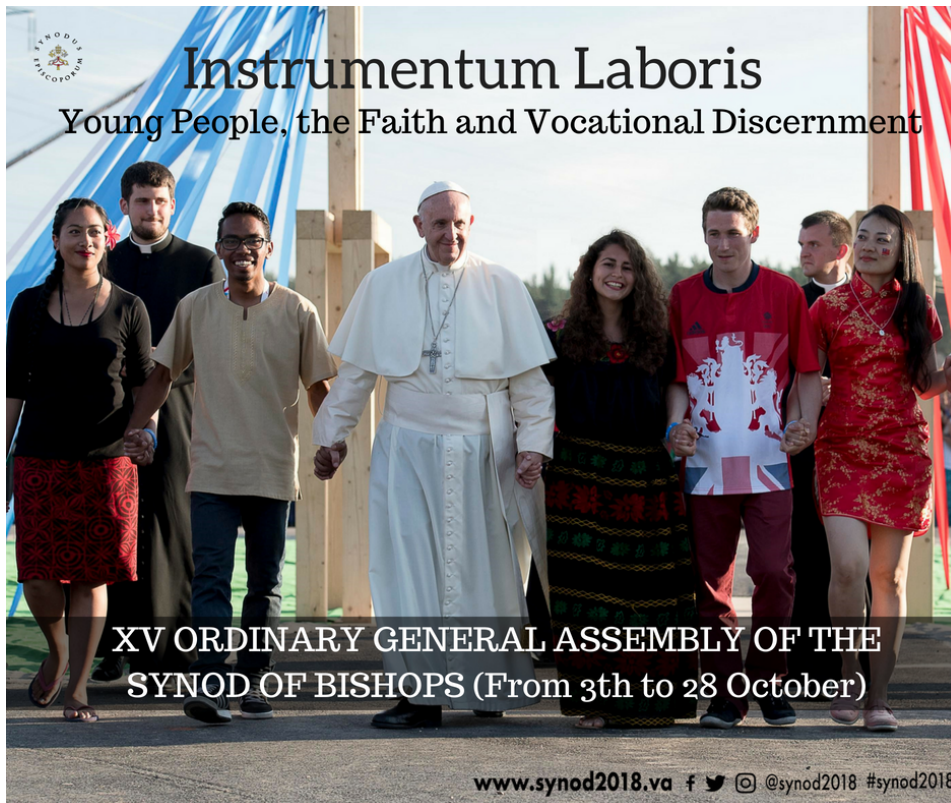


Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod 2018. Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment



Instrumentum laboris

XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF SYNOD OF BISHOPS

YOUNG PEOPLE, THE FAITH

AND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

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ABBREVIATIONS

AL Amoris laetitia

BC	Bishops' Conference/Bishops' Conferences
DC	Deus caritas est
DP	Preparatory Document
CL	Christifideles laici
DV	Vatican Dicastery
EG	Evangelii gaudium
EN	Evangelii nuntiandi
GE	Gaudete et exsultate
GS	Gaudium et spes
IE	Iuvenescit ecclesia
IS	International Seminar on the Condition of Youth (11-15 September 2017)
LF	Lumen fidei
LG	Lumen gentium
LS	Laudato si'
NMI	Novo millennio ineunte
PD	Placuit Deo
PDV	Pastores dabo vobis
OLQ	Online Questionnaire for young people by the Synod Secretariat
PM	Pre-synodal meeting (19-24 March 2018)
PO	Presbyterorum ordinis
PP	Populorum progressio
RFIS	Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis
USG	Union of Superiors General
WYD	World Youth Day

VC	Vita consecrata
VG	Veritatis gaudium
VD	Verbum Domini

PRESENTATION

On 6 October 2016, the Holy Father announced the theme of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment”.

The work of the Synod began immediately with the drafting of the *Preparatory Document* (DP), which was published on 13 January 2017, together with a “Letter to young people” by the Holy Father. The DP included a *Questionnaire*, mainly addressed to Bishops’ Conferences, to the Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches and to other ecclesial bodies, with fifteen questions for everybody and three specific questions for each continent, as well as a request to share three “best practices”.

From 11 to 15 September 2017, an *International Seminar on the Condition of Youth in the World* took place, with the participation of many experts and young people, that helped focus on the situation of young people today from a scientific standpoint.

Besides these initiatives, aimed at involving the entire Church, there have been several opportunities to listen to the voice of young people themselves, so as to make them key players right from the very beginning. First of all, a multilingual *Online Questionnaire* was prepared and translated by several Bishops’ Conferences, and replies were received from more than one hundred thousand young people. The wealth of material collected is remarkable. Next, the *Pre-synodal meeting* took place (Rome, 19-24 March 2018), ending on Palm Sunday, when a *Final Document* was delivered to the Holy Father. About three hundred young people from five continents participated, as well as fifteen thousand more through social media. This event, which was the expression of the Church’s wish to listen to all young people, without exception, garnered a great deal of attention.

The material collected through these four main sources – together with the “Remarks” that were sent directly to the General Secretariat of the Synod – is certainly quite extensive. With the support of several experts, it was thoroughly analyzed, meticulously summarized and then presented in this “Working Document”, that was approved by the XIV Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, in the presence of the Holy Father.

This text is arranged in three parts and addresses the themes in a way that reflects the program of the Synod Assembly in October, based on the discernment method: Part I, under the heading “recognizing”, brings together, in five chapters with different perspectives, a variety of situations in which we listen to reality and take stock of the situation of young people; Part II, under the heading “interpreting”, provides in four chapters some interpretative keys for the decisive issues submitted to the Synod for discernment; Part III, geared towards “choosing”, gathers different elements in four chapters, to help Synod Fathers decide on what directions to follow and which decisions to make.

The text ends with a significant focus on the theme of holiness, for the Synod Assembly to recognize this as «the most attractive face of the Church» (GE 9) and to be able to communicate it to all young people today.

The Vatican, 8 May 2018

Lorenzo Card. Baldisseri

Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops

INTRODUCTION

Synod Purposes

1. Taking care of young people is not an optional task for the Church, but an integral part of her vocation and mission in history. In just a few words, this is the specific scope of the upcoming Synod: just as our Lord Jesus Christ walked alongside the disciples of Emmaus (cf. *Lk 24:13-35*), the Church is also urged to accompany all young people, without exception, towards the joy of love.

With their presence and their words, young people can help rejuvenate the face of the Church. There is a thematic link between the *Message to Young People* of the Second Vatican Council (8 December 1965) and the Synod of Young People (3-28 October 2018), something the Holy Father highlighted when he introduced the Pre-synodal meeting: «The splendid Message to the Young of Vatican Council II comes to mind. [...] It is an invitation to seek new paths and to journey along them boldly and trustfully, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus and opening up to the Holy Spirit, to rejuvenate the very countenance of the Church», as we accompany young people in their journey of vocational discernment during this “epoch change”.

Discernment Method

2. In discernment, we recognize a way of life, a style, a fundamental attitude and also a working method; it is a path to walk together, whereby we look at the social and cultural dynamics we are steeped in, through the eyes of the disciple. Discernment leads us to recognize - and become attuned with - the action of the Spirit, in true spiritual obedience. In this way, it becomes openness to new things, courage to move outwards and resistance to the temptation of reducing what is new to what we already know. Discernment is a truly spiritual attitude. Since it is obedience to the Spirit, discernment is listening, first and foremost, that can also become a driver for our actions, the ability to be creatively faithful to the one single mission the Church has always been entrusted with. Hence, discernment becomes a pastoral instrument, that is able to identify liveable pathways today's young people can follow, and to provide guidance and suggestions for the mission that are not ready-made, but are the fruit of a journey that enables us to follow the Spirit. A pathway that is structured in this way invites us to open and not to close, to ask questions without suggesting pre-defined answers, to point to alternatives and probe opportunities. In this framework, it is clear that the Synod Assembly itself, next October, needs to be approached with the proper attitudes for a discernment process.

Text Structure

3. The *Instrumentum Laboris* gathers and summarizes the contributions that were collected during the pre-synodal process in a document that is structured in three parts, which explicitly reflect the structure of the discernment process described in EG 51: recognizing, interpreting, choosing. Hence, the parts are not independent of one another, but are stages in a single overall process.

Recognizing. The first step is to look and to listen. This requires paying attention to the real situation of today's young people, in the diverse circumstances and contexts they live in. It requires humility, closeness and empathy, in order to get in tune with them, and grasp what their joys and hopes are, their griefs and their anxieties (cf. GS 1). Likewise, we should turn our caring and concerned eyes and ears towards the experience of the ecclesial communities involved with young people around the world. In this first step, we should focus on grasping concrete realities: social sciences provide an essential contribution which, incidentally, is well represented in the sources that are being used, but what they have to say is looked at and re-read in the light of faith and the experience of the Church.

Interpreting. The second step leads us to review what we have recognized, using interpretation and evaluation criteria derived from a faith perspective. The reference framework must be based on the biblical, anthropological and theological categories that are expressed in the Synod's key words: youth, vocation, vocational discernment and spiritual accompaniment. Therefore, building an adequate reference framework from the theological, ecclesiological, pedagogical and pastoral standpoint is strategically important: something that can help us avoid hasty judgements, albeit recognizing «that in the Church there legitimately coexist different ways of interpreting many aspects of doctrine and Christian life» (GE 43). This is why we must acquire an open spiritual dynamism.

Choosing. Only in the light of a vocation that has been accepted is it possible to understand what concrete steps the Spirit is calling us to make, and what direction to follow to respond to His call. In this third phase of discernment, we need to examine pastoral approaches and practices, and cultivate the inner freedom that enables us to choose those that better allow us to reach our goals, and discard those that are less effective. Therefore, it is an operational evaluation and a critical analysis, not a judgement on the value or meaning that such approaches might have in other circumstances or times. This step will allow us to identify where reforms are needed, as well as changes to ecclesial and pastoral practices that otherwise might become fossilized.

PART I

RECOGNIZING:

THE CHURCH LISTENS TO REALITY

4. «Realities are greater than ideas» (cf. EG 231-233): in Part I we are urged to listen to and look at young people in the real circumstances of their lives, and the actions of the Church towards them. This is not about amassing sociological data, but rather addressing the challenges and opportunities that emerge in the various contexts in the light of faith, allowing them to touch us deeply in order to provide a concrete foundation for all that will follow (cf. LS 15). Since space is obviously limited, we will briefly touch upon broad and complex issues: the Synod fathers are called to recognize in such issues the calls coming from the Spirit.

Chapter I Being Young Today

5. We immediately embrace the dynamism that Pope Francis injected into his first official meeting with young people: «This first journey is about meeting the young people, but not in isolation from their lives – I would rather meet them within their social context, in society. Because when we isolate the young, we do them an injustice; we take away their “belonging”. The young do belong, they belong to a family, to a homeland, to a culture, to a faith» (*Apostolic Journey to Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the 28th World Youth Day. Meeting of the Holy Father Francis with the journalists during the flight to Brazil, 22 July 2013*).

A Multifaceted Variety of Contexts

6. There are about 1.8 billion people aged between 16 and 29 in the world, who correspond to almost a quarter of humankind, although forecasts point to a gradual decrease in the percentage of young people in the overall population. The concrete situations of young people vary a lot between countries, as the answers from Bishops’ Conferences have highlighted. In some countries, young people account for a sizable portion of the population (above 30%), whereas their share is much lower in others (around 15%, or less); there are countries where life expectancy does not reach 60 and others where it can exceed 80, on average. Opportunities to access education, healthcare, environmental resources, culture and technology, or to participate in civil, social and political life, vary substantially between regions. Even within the same country, we can find differences, very remarkable at times, between urban and rural areas.

7. The pre-synodal consultation process highlighted the potential young generations have, and the hopes and wishes they harbor: young people are major seekers of meaning, and are intrigued and motivated to action by anything that is in tune with their quest to give value to their lives. Their fears emerged as well, together with certain social and political dynamics that, with varying intensity in different parts of the world, hinder their progress towards a full and harmonious development, leading to vulnerability and poor self-esteem. Examples of this are: the remarkable social and economic inequalities that generate a climate of widespread violence and drive some young people into the world of organized crime and drug trafficking; a political system dominated by corruption, that undermines confidence in our institutions and legitimizes fatalism and disengagement; situations of war and extreme poverty that drive people to emigrate in search of a better future. In some regions, young people resent the fact that fundamental freedoms and personal autonomy are not recognized by the State, including religious freedom; whereas, in other regions, social exclusion and performance anxiety drive some young people into cycles of addiction (drugs and alcohol in particular) and social isolation. In many places, poverty, unemployment and marginalization are increasing the number of young people who live in precarious conditions, both materially, socially and politically.

Facing Globalization

8. Despite regional differences, the influence of globalization processes on young people worldwide is obvious, whereby they have to operate at different levels of social and cultural engagement (locally, nationally and internationally; but also intra- and extra-ecclesially). In general, as some BC reported, we notice a growing demand for freedom, autonomy and expression, starting

with the sharing of experiences coming from the Western world, perhaps through social media. Other BC fear that, irrespective of young people's deepest wishes, a culture inspired by individualism, consumerism, materialism and hedonism will prevail in the end, where appearances hold sway.

9. Several non-Western BC are wondering how they can accompany young people in dealing with this cultural change that is unravelling traditional cultures rich in solidarity, communal ties and spirituality, feeling they do not have adequate tools. Furthermore, the acceleration of social and cultural processes widens generation gaps, even within the Church. The answers received by BC also reveal some difficulty in understanding the context and culture in which young people live. Some BC view the difference brought by young people as a sign of moral decadence to complain about, rather than a fruitful new development.

10. In this context, the perspective that has been repeatedly mentioned by Pope Francis is still an important reference point: «This is why I like to talk about another geometric figure, not the sphere: the polyhedron. Yes, there is a many-sided globalization, there is a unity, but every person, every race, every country, every culture always retains its own identity. And this is the unity in diversity that globalization must try» (*Meeting with young people at the Roma Tre University, 17 February 2017*; Free Speech published in gina.uniroma3.it/download/1491300733.pdf). This was echoed by the words of young people, who see diversity as a treasure, and pluralism as an opportunity within an interconnected world: «Multiculturalism has the potential to facilitate an environment for dialogue and tolerance. We value the diversity of ideas in our globalized world, the respect for other's thoughts and freedom of expression. [...]We should not fear our diversity but celebrate our differences and what makes each one of us unique» (PM 2). Still, they seek to «preserve [their] cultural identity and avoid uniformity and a throwaway culture» (PM 2).

The Role of Families

11. In this context of change, the family is still a prominent reference point in the process of integral development of the human person: all contributors to the discussion agree on this. Therefore, there is a deep connection between this Synod and those immediately prior to it, that needs to be highlighted. However, there are significant differences in the way in which the family is viewed. Young people say as much, using words that are close to the ones used by several BC: «In many parts of the world, the role of elders and reverence for one's ancestors are contributing factors to the formation of their identities. However, this is not shared universally, as traditional family models in other places are in decline» (PM 1). Young people also underline how the troubles, divisions and fragility of families are a source of great suffering to many of them.

12. The answers to the Online Questionnaire show how mothers are the preferred reference persons for young people, whereas a reflection is needed regarding fathers, whose absence or evanescence in certain contexts, especially in Western countries, generates ambiguity and vacuums that also affect the exercise of spiritual fatherhood. Some BC point to the significant role played by grandparents in conveying faith and values to young people, generating questions regarding the future evolution of society. Single parent households are also on the rise.

13. The relationship between young people and their families should not be taken for granted: «Some young people move away from their family traditions, hoping to be more original than what they see as "stuck in the past" and "old fashioned." On the other hand, in some parts of the world, young people seek identity by remaining rooted within their family traditions and striving to stay true to the way they were raised» (PM 1). These situations call for a deeper insight into the relationship between youth culture and family morality. Several sources report a growing gap between them; however, others argue that there are still young people who are interested in living

authentic and lasting relationships and give great value to the indications coming from the Church. To many, marriage and family are still among the ambitions and plans young people pursue.

Intergenerational Relationships

14. Amongst the features of our time, confirmed by many BC and by the International Seminar, as well as by several social analyses, there is a kind of reversal in the relationship between generations: today, adults often refer to young people as role models for their lifestyle, within a global culture that is dominated by an individualistic focus on the self. As a Vatican Dicastery states, «the problem here is the dismissal of adult life, which is the true hallmark of the Western cultural universe. Not only there is a lack of adults in the faith. There is a lack of adults “period”». Several BC argue that there is not so much a generational conflict between young people and adults nowadays, but rather a “mutual alienness”: adults are not interested in conveying the founding values of our existence to younger generations, who view them more as competitors than potential allies. In this way, the relationship between young people and adults risks being purely affective, without involving any educational and cultural dimension. From the ecclesial standpoint, involving young people in the Synod was seen as an important sign of intergenerational dialogue: «We have been thrilled to be taken seriously by the hierarchy of the Church and we feel that this dialogue between the young Church and the old Church is a vital and fruitful listening process» (PM 15).

15. Alongside intergenerational relationships, we should not forget peer relationships, which are a fundamental experience in the interaction with others, and in the gradual emancipation from the family context of origin. Some BC underline the fundamental value of hospitality, friendship and mutual support that characterize young people today. Peer relationships, experienced in more or less structured groups, provide the opportunity to strengthen social and relational skills in a context where young people are not being evaluated and judged.

Life Choices

16. Youth is seen as a special time in which individuals make choices that determine their identity and the course of their existence. The young people of the PM are fully aware of this: «Crucial moments for the development of our identity include: deciding our course of study, choosing our profession, deciding our beliefs, discovering our sexuality and making life-changing commitments» (PM 1). Due to social, economic, political and cultural reasons, the time when people leave their family of origin, or make fundamental choices, varies a great deal. In some countries, people get married or choose the priesthood or religious life even before they turn 18, whereas elsewhere this happens after 30, when youth is actually over. In several contexts, transitioning into adulthood has become a long, complicated and non linear process, where progress and setbacks occur and, in general, job searching prevails over the affective dimension. This makes it harder for young people to make definitive choices and, as one African BC pointed out, «highlights the need to create a formal framework within which to provide individually tailored support».

17. At the stage in life when important decisions must be made, amid the opportunities and constraints that come from a constantly evolving social context, generating precariousness and uncertainty (cf. DP I, 3 and III, 1), both the possibilities and the psychological difficulties that are typical of youth come into play and must be recognized, processed and resolved during the growth process, with adequate support if needed. Among the difficulties young people face, experts mention rigidity or impulsive behavior, lack of stable commitment, coldness and lack of empathy, reduced emotional insight, inability or excessive fear to establish relationships. More commonly, attitudes emerge that point to the need for purification and liberation: affective dependency, feelings of inferiority, lack of courage and strength in the face of risk, propensity for self-centered sexual

gratification, aggressiveness, exhibitionism and the need to always be at the center of attention. Instead, the valuable resources we need to cherish and exercise in our daily lives are: empathy towards the people we meet, a balanced perception of guilt feelings, being in touch with our intimacy, willingness to help others and work together, the ability to identify our needs and responsibilities as distinct from those of others, standing by our choices even when we are alone, resisting and fighting against difficulties and failures, responsibly completing the tasks we have undertaken.

18. Therefore, youth is not just a transition phase between the first steps towards autonomy we took in our teens and the responsibilities of adulthood, it is also a time to make a qualitative leap forward in terms of our personal commitment to our relationships and duties, and in our ability to be in touch with our inner selves and deal with loneliness. Of course, it is a time of experimentation, of ups and downs, of hope alternated with fear, and unavoidable tension between positive and negative aspects, through which we learn to express and integrate our affective, sexual, intellectual, spiritual, bodily, relational and social dimensions. This journey, which unfolds through our small daily choices and more consequential decisions, allows each one of us to discover our singularity and the originality of our vocation.

Education, School and University

19. Educational and training institutions are not just the places where young people spend most of their time: first and foremost these are existential spaces that society dedicates to their intellectual and human growth and vocational guidance. However, there are several problems, mainly related to the fact that school and university systems often provide information without formation, and do not foster the development of critical thinking and a deeper sense of what studying means, also in vocational terms. In many countries, unequal access to school systems is evident, as well as training opportunity gaps between rural and urban areas and alarming drop-out rates: all in all, these things are a threat to the future of young people and society. In some countries, the situation of those who neither study nor work (so-called “NEETs”) is equally worrisome and requires attention also in terms of pastoral care.

20. In many countries where education systems are inadequate, the Church and her educational institutions play a fundamental remedial role, whereas elsewhere they have a hard time keeping up with national quality standards. A particularly sensitive domain is professional training, where in several countries Catholic school institutions play an important role: they do not just teach technical skills but help students discover how they can make the most of their abilities, irrespective of what and how many they are. Distance learning or informal education initiatives are extremely important in contexts where poverty and deprivation are greater, since they provide opportunities to bridge the gaps in access to schooling.

21. It is not just schools: as the PM states, «the young person’s identity is also shaped by our external interaction and membership within specific groups, associations and movements which are also active outside of the Church. Sometimes, parishes are no longer places of connection» (PM 1). The wish to find positive role models is still strong: «We also recognize the role of educators and friends, such as leaders of youth groups who can become good examples. We need to find attractive, coherent and authentic models» (PM 1).

Jobs and Professions

22. The transition to working and professional life is still very important and, in some places, the distance between school and university studies, and the demands of the labor market, makes this topic even more sensitive. The young people who replied to the OLQ stated that having

stable employment is fundamental (82.7%), because it implies economic and relational stability and the possibility for personal fulfillment (89.7%). Work is the necessary, albeit not sufficient, means to achieve one's own life plan, such as having a family (80.4%) and children.

23. Concern is greater where youth unemployment is particularly high. In poorer contexts, work also has a social redemption value, while joblessness is among the main causes for people to migrate to other countries. In Asia, in particular, young people have to measure up to a culture of success, social standing and work ethics that permeates parents' expectations and defines school systems, generating a highly competitive climate, selective outlook and very heavy and stressful workloads. Young people – the PM states – still believe in the need to «affirm the inherent dignity of work» (PM 3), but also indicate how hard it is to cherish hopes and dreams in extremely harsh economic conditions, that generate fear (cf. PM 3). According to some BC, the relationship between vocation and professions should be better explored, as well as the differing “vocational intensity” of the various professions.

Young people, Faiths and Religions

24. Variety and differences also apply to the religious context in which young people grow up: in some countries, Catholics are the majority, while in others they are just a tiny minority which sometimes is socially accepted, and at other times suffers discrimination and persecution to the point of martyrdom. In some contexts, Christianity must cope with the consequences of past choices, even political ones, that undermine its credibility; in others, Catholics interact with the cultural and spiritual richness of other religious traditions or traditional cultures; some contexts are secularized, and consider faith as a purely private matter, while in others the influence of religious cults or different religious proposals (new age, etc.) is growing dramatically. In some regions, Christianity and religion are considered relics of the past, whereas in others they are still the backbone of social life. In some countries, the Catholic community is not homogeneous, but includes ethnical and cultural minorities (native communities) as well as religious minorities (a plurality of rites); in others, it is called to open its doors to the faithful who arrive as immigrants.

25. Sociological studies show that the context is quite varied also if we look at young people's relationship with faith and denominational membership. As was highlighted in the IS, «part of young people's lack of interest and apathy regarding faith (and of Churches' lesser appeal) is due to the difficulty major religious institutions have to become attuned with our modern conscience; and this happens in social contexts that generate new and heartwrenching requests for meaning, due to the many uncertainties that bear heavily on individual and collective life. Furthermore, amid the great diversity to be found among young people today, there are plenty of signs of religious and spiritual vitality, which can be seen both in major Churches and outside of them». And also: «This widespread co-presence of believers, non believers and “people who believe differently”, rather than generate tension and conflict, seems to favor – under specific conditions – situations of mutual recognition. This applies in particular when, on the one hand, there is a kind of atheism or agnosticism that has a more human face, that is not arrogant or self-conceited; and on the other hand, there is a religious belief that is more open to dialogue, rather than being fanatical».

Chapter II

Experiences and Types of Language

26. As the PM has effectively highlighted, young generations are the bearers of a particular approach to reality, that is an asset and a source of originality; however, it can also be disconcerting

or perplexing to adults. We need to avoid hasty judgements, though. Their approach is based on the priority of concreteness and action over theoretical analysis. It is not blind activism and contempt for the intellectual dimension: in the way young people spontaneously act, things are understood by doing and problems are solved as they arise. An equally evident fact is that the pluralism of differences, even in its radical forms, is something young people take as a given. This is not a relativistic renunciation of identity affirmation, but something that implies a basic awareness of the existence of other lifestyles and a deliberate effort towards their inclusion, so that everyone might feel represented by the fruit of our common work.

Social Engagement and Participation

27. Looking at society's contradictions, several BC notice young people's sensitivity and engagement, also through volunteer work, which is a clue to their willingness to take responsibility and their wish to make the most of the talents, skills and creativity they have. Among the issues that are closer to their hearts, social and environmental sustainability, discrimination and racism stand out. Youth involvement often follows unprecedented paths, also by exploiting the potential of digital communication to achieve mobilization and political pressure: the dissemination of lifestyles and consumer and investment models that are critical, based on solidarity and mindful of the environment; new forms of engagement and participation in society and politics; new modes of welfare and protection for weaker individuals. As shown by several recent examples from every continent, young people are able to mobilize, in particular to support causes they feel directly involved in and when they can truly be key players and not simply tag along other groups.

28. Young people underline how the image of the Church appears to be "dicothomic", when it comes to promoting justice: on the one hand, the Church wants to be present in the folds of history alongside the least of our brothers and sisters, on the other hand it still has a lot to do to eliminate situations of corruption, often grave and widespread, whereby she runs the risk of conforming to the world rather than bringing an alternative that is inspired by the Gospel.

Spirituality and Religiosity

29. The PM has clearly shown that variety is what best describes young people's relationship with faith and religious practice. Generally speaking, they declare themselves to be open to spirituality, although the sacred is often quite separate from their daily lives. Many believe that religion is a private matter and see themselves as being spiritual but not religious persons (in the sense of belonging to a religious denomination) (cf. PM 7). Religion is not seen any longer as the preferred gateway to the meaning of life, and it is often placed alongside – and sometimes replaced by – ideologies and other currents of thought, or even by personal and professional success (cf. PM 5).

30. The same variety can be seen in the relationship young people have with Jesus Christ. Many consider Him the Savior and the Son of God, and often feel close to Him through Mary, His mother. Others do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, but see Him as a good man and an ethical reference-point. To others, He is a character from the past with no existential relevance, or someone who is very distant from human experience (just as the Church is perceived as being distant). False images of Jesus deprive Him of any appeal in the eyes of young people, just as the notion that Christian perfection is beyond the reach of human capacities leads young people to perceive Christianity as an unattainable standard (cf. PM 6). In several contexts, young Catholics are looking for prayer opportunities and sacramental moments that can have an impact on their daily lives, but we must also realize that pastors are not always able to become attuned to the generational specificities of these expectations.

Young People in the Life of the Church

31. A greater or lesser number of young people feel they are a living part of the Church and firmly express this through their active engagement in the Church. There are young people who «experience the Church as very close to them, in places such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as in different global movements; even some young people who do not live the Gospel feel connected to the Church» (PM 7). Several BC note that young people are – and should be considered as – an integral part of the Church and that committing to them is a fundamental dimension of pastoral care. It is not unusual to see youth groups, even the ones belonging to movements and associations, that are not really integrated into the life of their communities: overcoming this dynamics of separation is a synodal goal for some BC.

32. Despite the fact that many young people mention the risk of being sidelined, there are many ecclesial activities in place in which they are actively engaged and even key players. The different forms of volunteer work stand out, which is the hallmark of young generations. The animation of catechesis and liturgy, just like the care of smaller children, are additional areas of activity that, in oratories and other similar pastoral structures, prove to be particularly fruitful. Movements, associations and religious congregations also provide young people with opportunities for engagement and co-responsibility. In many contexts, popular piety is still an important access point to faith for younger generations, who find in the body, in affectivity, in music and singing important conduits to express themselves. Together with other national, international and continental meetings, WYD plays a remarkable role in the lives of many young people because, as one BC puts it, it provides «a vivid experience of faith and communion, that helps them face life's major challenges and responsibly find their place in society and in the ecclesial community».

33. Young people noticeably like teamwork and are good at it, which is an asset in many situations. Sometimes this openness clashes with excessive authoritarianism on the part of adults and ministers: «On many occasions, young people have difficulty finding a space in the Church where they can actively participate and lead. Young people interpret their experience of the Church as one where they are considered too young and inexperienced to lead or make decisions as they would only make mistakes» (PM 7). It is equally clear that, wherever young people are involved and appreciated, the style and dynamism of the Church acquire a powerful vitality that is able to draw people's attention.

The Ubiquitousness of the Digital Continent

34. The pervasiveness of digital and social media in the world of young people is evident. This was clearly stated by young people in the PM: «The impact of social media in the lives of young people cannot be understated. Social media are a significant part of young people's identity and way of life. Digital environments have a great potential to unite people across geographical distances like never before. The exchange of information, ideals, values and common interests is now more possible. Access to online learning tools has opened up educational opportunities for young people in remote areas and has brought the world's knowledge to one's finger tips» (PM 4).

35. The web can also be a place of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, up to the extreme case of the “dark web”. Young people are aware that risks are out there: «The duplicity of

technology however, becomes evident when it leads to the development of certain vices. This danger is manifested through isolation, laziness, desolation and boredom. It is evident that young people around the world are obsessively consuming media products. Despite living in a hyper-connected world, communication among young people remains limited to those who are similar to them [...]. With the advent of social media, this has led to new challenges over the extent to which new media companies have power over the lives of young people» (PM 4). Developing the ability to engage in a sober conversation and dialogue with diversity is being hindered by this situation, and becomes a real educational challenge where the young are concerned. BC also agree on this ambiguity, albeit focusing more on critical evaluations. Also due to ignorance or inadequate formation, pastors and adults in general have a hard time understanding this new language and also tend to be scared, feeling they are in front of an “invisible and ubiquitous enemy” that they demonize at times.

Music and Other Forms of Artistic Expression

36. As a great many BC point out, music is a fundamental language for young people: it is the soundtrack of their lives, in which they are constantly plunged, and it contributes to the formation of their identity in a way that the Church seldom explores in depth, despite having a general awareness of its importance. Music elicits emotions, involving people also physically; it opens up spaces of interiority and favors their communication. It also conveys messages, as well as life styles and values that are consistent with or alternative to the ones promoted by other forms of education. In some youth cultures, the music world can become a kind of safe haven that is inaccessible to adults. Due to its power, the music world can easily be influenced and manipulated also by business, or even speculative, interests.

37. Music and the sharing of it trigger socialization processes. Concerts bring thousands of young people together: but there are ambiguities, since individual differences take a backseat to the pressure to come together. Major music events can be a totalizing experience: visual and sound entertainment, dancing, motion, closeness and physical contact that allow people to step outside themselves and to feel in tune with strangers; at the same time, they can also provide the opportunity for passive listening where the effect of music, sometimes enhanced by the use of drugs, has a depersonalizing effect. Performing music has a personal and social value as well. Many young composers and musicians feel the responsibility of interpreting their generation’s life experience and they try to communicate messages on socially relevant themes to their peers: from sexuality to interpersonal relationships to the enhancement of traditional cultures.

38. Albeit less pervasive than music, the enjoyment of many other forms of artistic expression plays a fundamental role in the formation of young people’s personal and social identity: painting, sculpture, film-making, the visual arts, dance, theater, photography, comics, graphic design, web art, writing, poetry, literature, etc. When they are actively practiced, they allow young people to exercise their personal creativity and participate in cultural expression, in particular through experimental initiatives which rely on the increasing use of new technology. Forms of artistic expression that are tied to folk and local traditions are very interesting, especially those associated with ethnic minorities, since they connect young people with the legacy of the past and provide opportunities for cultural activity, irrespective of education levels or the availability of technical or technological tools.

The World of Sports

39. Sport is another significant area of growth and dialogue for young people, in which the Church is investing in many parts of the world. Pope Francis sees sport as being part of informal education, and calls for more action in this domain to offset the intellectual impoverishment of formal education (cf. *Address to the participants in the World Congress on “Educating Today and Tomorrow.*

A Renewing Passion”, 21 November 2015). Experts believe our societies have become “sportivized”, and this applies to the world of young people in particular. However, we must question what values and models, beyond all the rhetoric, are promoted in our society through sports activity, which is so often focused on success at all costs, even through deceit, consigning to oblivion the hard work and commitment of defeated athletes.

40. Just like big concerts, mass sports events are situations in which our collective identity is forged, with highly ritualized traits. The world of sports is not devoid of forms of business and speculative manipulation, and it too is affected by practices that run counter to the dignity of the human person and to values such as fair play (like doping, all too widespread among young and amateur athletes, or corruption); it is no stranger to forms of violence fueled by disaffection and social tensions that have nothing to do with sports. It can also serve as a very powerful tool to integrate people who suffer from forms of exclusion and marginalization, as many instances show, such as the paralympic movement.

Chapter III In the Throwaway Culture

41. The throwaway culture is one of the hallmarks of our contemporary mindset that Pope Francis unceasingly decries. BC warn how young people are often among its victims, in all kinds of ways. At the same time, we must not forget that young people too can imbibe this culture, and engage in behaviors whereby others are “thrown away” or environmental degradation ensues, due to irresponsible consumer choices. Lastly, we must recognize that some Church leaders are aiding and abetting this kind of behavior and thinking, thus fostering indifference and exclusion.

42. The Church, also through this Synod, is called to give specific attention to the young victims of injustice and exploitation, through a fundamental work of recognition: opening up spaces where they can express themselves, and especially be listened to, is a way for them to reclaim their personal dignity against any alleged denial, and it gives a name and face to those who, all too often, are deprived of these by history. This will favor the expression of the potential that “discarded” young people have: they are capable of being the protagonists of their own development, while their viewpoint provides a vital contribution to building the common good, in a dynamics of constant growth and hope, starting from the concrete experience whereby the stone the builders rejected may become the cornerstone (cf. *Ps* 118:22; *Lk* 20:17; *Acts* 4,11; *1Pet* 2:4).

The Issue of Work

43. As BC have highlighted, youth unemployment in many countries has reached levels that can, without exaggeration, be defined as dramatic. The most serious effect is not the economic one, because families, welfare systems and charitable institutions are often able to step in and cater for the material needs of the unemployed. The real issue is that «jobless young people have an anaesthetized utopia, or are on the verge of losing it» (Francis, *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America*, 28 February 2014). The young people at the Pre-synodal Meeting reflected this view in their statements: «Sometimes, we end up discarding our dreams. We are too afraid, and some of us have stopped dreaming, not least because of the many socio-economic

pressures that can severely drain the sense of hope among young people. At times, we have not even had the opportunity to continue dreaming» (PM 3).

44. A similar impact is caused by all those situations where people, including the young, are forced to accept jobs that do not respect their dignity: this is the case with undeclared and informal work – often synonymous with exploitation - human trafficking and the manifold forms of forced labor and slavery that affect millions of people worldwide. Like many others around the world, the young people of the PM expressed their concern regarding the kind of technological progress that may well prove hostile to employment and the workforce: « The advent of artificial intelligence and new technologies such as robotics and automation poses risks to employment opportunities for working-class communities. Technology can be detrimental to human dignity if not used with conscience and caution and if human dignity is not at the center of its usage » (PM 4).

Young Migrants

45. A huge percentage of migrants are young people. The reasons that prompt them to emigrate are manifold, as the PM highlighted: «Young people dream of a better life, yet many are forced to emigrate in order to find a better economic and environmental situation. They hope for peace and are especially attracted to the “Western myth”, as depicted through media» (PM 3); also, they are «afraid because in many of our countries there is social, political and economic instability» (PM 1), and «a common dream across continents and oceans is the desire to find a place where the young person can feel that he or she belongs» (PM 3).

46. The situation of minors who are not accompanied by adult family members, or those who reach a foreign country in their late school years, is particularly sensitive (cf. Francis, *Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2017. Child Migrants, the Vulnerable and the Voiceless*, 8 September 2016). Many risk becoming victims of human trafficking and some of them literally vanish into thin air. We must add second-generation young immigrants, who experience great difficulties in terms of identity and mediation between the cultures they belong to, especially if there are huge social and cultural differences between their countries of origin and destination.

47. As many BC underline, youth migration leads to an impoverishment of the enterprising and brave human capital in their countries of origin and threatens the latter’s sustainable development. On the other hand, for the societies – and Churches – that receive them, they offer an enormous potential for change, but of course they need to be accompanied by adequate and far-sighted programs. On this point, though, the young people of the PM expressed great caution which should make us reflect: «There is still no binding consensus on the question of welcoming migrants and refugees, or on the issues which cause the phenomenon in the first place. This is despite the acknowledgement of the universal call to care for the dignity of every human person» (PM 2). Together with the young who emigrate, we should not forget those who continue to live in situations of war or political instability. The young people of the PM are careful to point out that «despite the many wars and intermittent outbreaks of violence, young people remain hopeful» (PM 3).

The Various Forms of Discrimination

48. International research shows that many young people face inequality and discrimination because of their gender, social class, religious membership, sexual orientation, geographical location, disability or ethnicity. This is an issue young people care deeply about and on which the PM was very clear: «Racism at different levels affects young people in different parts of the world» (PM 2). The same situation is reported by a great many BC. The PM gave specific attention to forms of discrimination impacting young women, also in the ecclesial domain: «Today, there is a general

problem in society in that women are still not given an equal place. This is also true in the Church » (PM 5). Therefore, young people ask themselves «what are the places where women can flourish within the Church and society?» (PM 5), knowing that «the Church can approach these problems with real discussion and open-mindedness to different ideas and experiences » (PM 5). Lastly, young people warn of continuing discrimination based on religion, in particular towards Christians. This applies both to contexts where they are a minority and are exposed to violence and pressures from the majority that demands their conversion, and to highly secularized situations (cf. PM 2).

Sickness, Suffering and Exclusion

49. Several BC and the PM observe that many young people have to cope with the consequences of different kinds of traumatic events, or different forms of sickness, suffering and disability. They rely on the welcoming embrace and support of the Church, that their families also need. In particular, in countries with higher standards of living, forms of psychological malaise, depression, mental illness and eating disorders are becoming increasingly widespread among young people, due to profoundly unhappy circumstances or an inability to find their place in society. In some countries, suicide is the number one cause of death in the 15 to 44 age group.

50. Many BC, in different regions, voice great concern over the spread of various kinds of substance abuse and addiction amongst young – and even very young – people (traditional and synthetic drugs, alcohol, gambling and Internet addiction, pornography, etc.), as well as various forms of deviant behaviors (bullying, violence, sexual abuse). According to Pope Francis, it is clear that, in many instances, these forms of addiction are not the consequence of people succumbing to vice, but rather an effect of the dynamics of exclusion: «There is a global armament of drugs that is destroying this generation of young people, who are destined to be thrown away!» (*Address to Members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America*, 28 February 2014). All this brings to the surface not only how fragile the individuals who engage in these actions are, but also their victims, families and society at large. Abuse and addiction, just like reactions of violence and deviance in the face of society's contradictions, are amongst the main reasons why young people, including minors, end up in jail. Considering how difficult it is for the criminal justice system to provide opportunities for social rehabilitation, there is a high risk that the incarceration of young people who pose little danger to society will insert them in a criminal circuit they will have a hard time escaping, as high recidivism rates show. It is an equally well-known fact that detention disproportionately impacts members of specific ethnic and social groups, also because of bias and discrimination.

Chapter IV

Anthropological and Cultural Challenges

51. The societies and cultures of our time, albeit in different forms, are characterized by certain key questions. Their constant resurfacing allows us to recognize them as signs of change in the anthropological and cultural time we live in. Young people, who are the watchmen and seismographs of every age, perceive them as a source of new opportunities and unprecedented threats more than others do. Some analysts speak of a “metamorphosis” of the human condition that gives rise to

enormous challenges for everyone, and young people in particular, in the path to build a sound identity.

Body, Affectivity and Sexuality

52. A first key question pertains to corporeality and its many facets. The body – located at the intersection between nature and culture – has always symbolized and guarded the sense of our creaturely limit and is a gift to be welcomed with joy and gratitude. Developments in biomedical research and technology are generating a different notion of our body. The prospect of an increasingly daring integration between body and machine, between neuronal and electronic circuits, that finds its icon in the cyborg, favors a technocratic approach to corporeality, also in relation to the control of biological mechanisms. In this regard, the fact that egg donors and surrogate mothers are preferably young should be noticed. Beyond purely ethical evaluations, these new developments cannot but impact our notion of the body and the limits to what can be done with it. Some commentators report that younger generations have a hard time adjusting to this dimension of their creatureliness. In some contexts, we should also mention the growing appeal of extreme experiences, to the point of endangering one's life, as opportunities for social recognition or to feel powerful emotions. Furthermore, early sexual activity, multiple sexual partners, digital pornography, exhibiting bodies online and sexual tourism risk disfiguring the beauty and depth of affective and sex life.

53. In the ecclesial domain, the importance of the body, affectivity and sexuality is recognized, but not always convincingly presented as a key element in educational and faith journeys, by rediscovering and appreciating the meaning of sexual difference and the vocational dynamics that are peculiar to males and females. Sociological studies show that many young Catholics do not follow Church teachings on sexual morals. No BC gives solutions or prescriptions, but many believe that «the sexual question must be discussed in a more open and unbiased way». The PM highlights how Church teachings on controversial issues, such as «contraception, abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation, marriage» (PM 5) are hotly debated by young people, both in the Church and in society. There are young Catholics who believe that Church teachings are a source of joy and would like the Church «to not only hold fast to them amid unpopularity but to also proclaim them with greater depth of teaching» (PM 5). Those who do not agree with them, still wish to be part of the Church anyhow, and ask for greater clarity on this issue. Hence, the PM asks church leaders to «speak in practical terms about controversial subjects such as homosexuality and gender issues, which young people are already freely discussing without taboo» (PM 11).

New Inquiring Paradigms and the Search for Truth

54. With varying degrees of intensity, many countries in the world are dealing with “fake news”, i.e. the uncontrollable spreading of fake information through (digital and other) mass media and the growing difficulty of distinguishing it from real news. In the public debate, truth and reasoning seem to have lost their power of persuasion. This is why the term “post-truth” was coined. As one BC points out, «in social networks and digital media there is no hierarchy of truth».

55. Young people are particularly exposed to this climate, because of their communication habits, and of their need to be accompanied to ultimately find their way. In the world of post-truth, the sentence «Christ is the Truth which makes the Church different from any other worldly group with

which we may identify» (PM 11), that the PM uses, inevitably ends up having a different significance compared to earlier ages. It is not a matter of giving up the most precious hallmark of Christianity to conform to the spirit of the world, nor is this what young people are asking for, but we do need to find a way to convey the Christian message in changed cultural circumstances. In line with biblical tradition, the recognition that truth has a relational basis is a good thing: human beings discover truth once they experience it from God, the only one who is truly reliable and trustworthy. This truth must be testified to and practiced and not just corroborated and demonstrated, something the young people of the PM realize: «The personal stories of Church members are effective ways of evangelizing, as personal experiences cannot be placed in question» (PM 15).

56. Today we have to realize that the way digital media work, and the need to choose which information sources to access amongst endless offerings, are leading people to increasingly make contact only with like-minded individuals. Ecclesial groups, institutions and associations also run the risk of turning into closed circuits (cf. GE 115).

The Anthropological Effects of the Digital World

57. From the anthropological standpoint, the irruption of digital technology is starting to have a very profound impact on the notion of time and space, on our self-perception and on how we see others and the world, on the way we communicate, learn and become informed. An approach to reality that gives precedence to images over listening and reading is changing our way of learning and the development of critical faculties. In the future, it cannot but affect also the way in which the faith is transmitted, based as it is on listening to God's Word and reading Sacred Scripture. The replies of the BC show that few of them seem to be fully cognizant of the current metamorphosis.

58. Superficial use of digital media exposes people to the risk of isolation, that can even become extreme: this situation is known under the Japanese term *hikikomori* and is affecting a growing number of young people in many countries, especially in Asia. Another risk is withdrawing into an illusory and ephemeral happiness that leads to forms of addiction. The young people of the PM realize this: «Often, young people tend to separate their behavior into online and offline environments. It is necessary to offer formation to young people on how to live their digital lives. Online relationships can become inhuman. Digital spaces blind us to the vulnerability of another human being and impede our self-reflection. Problems like pornography distort a young person's perception of human sexuality. Technology used this way creates a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity. Other risks include: the loss of identity linked to a misrepresentation of the person, a virtual construction of personality and the loss of grounded social presence. Furthermore, long-term risks include: the loss of memory, culture, and creativity before the immediacy of access to information and a loss of concentration linked to fragmentation. In addition, there exists a culture and dictatorship of appearance» (PM 4).

Disaffection with Institutions and New Forms of Participation

59. Another characteristic that is found in many contemporary societies is the weakness of institutions, and a decline in the trust people have in them, including the Church. The answers to the OLQ highlight how only a minority of young people (16.7%) believe they have the possibility to impact their country's public life: not that they do not want to, but they believe they have limited opportunities and leeway to do so. The lack of reliable leadership, at different levels, both in the civil and ecclesial domain, is strongly decried by young people. A particularly evident weakness is due to the spread of corruption. Institutions should care about the common good and when someone is able to bend them to serve their particular interests, their credibility is dramatically eroded. This is why corruption is a scourge that undermines the foundation of several societies. The challenge of

social justice necessarily requires the construction of just institutions, that serve human dignity in an integral way.

60. Disenchantment towards institutions can also be beneficial, when it becomes open to pathways of participation and people take more responsibility without falling prey to skepticism. Several BC point out that, in a context of uncertainty and fear about the future, young people no longer connect to institutions as such, but to the people within them who communicate values with their life testimony. Both at personal and institutional level, consistency and truthfulness are fundamental factors for credibility.

A Decision-making Paralysis in an Overproliferation of Proposals

61. Several elements mentioned above, taken together, explain why, in some parts of the world, we are living in a “culture of indecision”, which considers lifelong choices impossible, if not meaningless. In a world where opportunities and proposals increase exponentially, reacting with choices that are always reversible becomes spontaneous, even if this implies a constant mortification of our wishes. The vocational discernment process, along the axis marked by the steps “recognizing, interpreting, choosing”, often gets stuck at the moment when choices must be made or implemented. Sometimes external certainties are sought, that do not require the toil of walking in the faith and surrendering to the Word; at other times, what prevails is the fear of abandoning our beliefs to open up to God’s surprises.

62. The insecurity of working conditions and social precariousness block any medium- to long-term planning. Some BC, especially in the West, argue that it is quite difficult for young people to achieve their plans to get married without jeopardizing their economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, as the answers to the OLQ show, many young people are wondering how definitive decisions can be possible in a world where nothing seems to be stable, not even the distinction between true and false. Therefore, one of the urgent challenges that characterizes our age is how to present life decisions as ways to take responsibility for our own lives.

Beyond Secularization

63. Notwithstanding the predictions made during the last two centuries, secularization does not seem to have become mankind’s unavoidable destiny. In different ways, academic literature constantly uses expressions like “the return of the sacred” or other such. This situation coexists with a decline in priestly and religious vocations and the emptying of churches that are happening in some parts of the world: therefore, this is not a return to the past, it is the emergence of a new paradigm of religiosity, described as being not too institutionalized and increasingly “liquid”, marked by a radical variety of individual paths, even for people who claim to belong to the same denomination. Therefore, during the IS, participants stated that «in a young person’s world that is quite differentiated, there are plenty of signs of religious and spiritual vitality». Dissatisfaction with a purely immanent world vision, as conveyed by consumerism and scientific reductionism, opens the door to the search for life’s meaning through spiritual itineraries of many different kinds. One BC states: «Many young people declare that they are looking for the meaning of life, pursuing ideals, searching for their own personal spirituality and faith, but they rarely turn to the Church». We need to focus on the features of this changed attitude towards religion, in order to interpret its causes and possible outcomes, identifying what opportunities it offers to the proclamation of the Gospel message and what risks or ambiguities it might generate. In many places, this is accompanied by the appeal of traditionalist or fundamentalist proposals in some sectors of the young person’s world: the case of foreign fighters and radicalization at different levels are an example of this. In a completely different direction, we find a remarkable situation that some Eastern European BC have noticed, related to the gradual shift

of spiritual and religious practices from obligations to optional leisure time activities: this highlights the personal choice aspect, but clearly such practices have to compete with many other alternatives.

Chapter V Listening to Young People

64. The concern and care for young people expressed in the DP was reiterated by BC. Their answers to the question «What do young people really ask of the Church in your country?» were broad and multifaceted. In the OLQ, several young people expressed themselves quite freely, trying to communicate their thoughts in an unfiltered way. The experience of the PM was interpreted by the young people along similar lines. BC listened to young people in many different ways. However, attention was usually focused on young people who were active members of ecclesial groups, with the risk of considering them as representatives of the entire youth world. Predictably, the majority of young people who took part in the OLQ were already part of ecclesial circuits. Many repeatedly commented that the best way to listen to young people is by being where they are, sharing their daily experiences. PM participants enthusiastically stated: «It is our hope that the Church and other institutions can learn from the process of this Pre-Synodal Meeting and listen to the voices of the young » (PM, Introduction). Many of the respondents to the OLQ also expressed their gratitude and appreciation for this opportunity.

The Hard Work of Listening

65. As one young man memorably expressed it, «in our contemporary world, time dedicated to listening is never wasted» (OLQ) and the Pre-synodal Meeting showed that listening is the truest and boldest kind of language that young people are vehemently seeking from the Church. We should also acknowledge how hard it is for the Church to really listen to all the young, without exception. Many of them feel that their voice is not considered interesting or useful by the adult world, either in the social or ecclesial domain. One BC states that young people feel that «the Church does not actively listen to the situations young people experience» and that «their opinions are not taken seriously». Instead, it is clear that young people, according to another BC, «are asking the Church to reach out to them to listen to and welcome them, offering dialogue and hospitality». The same young people argue that «in some parts of the world, young people are leaving the Church in large quantities. Understanding why is crucial in moving forward» (PM 7). For sure, among the reasons for this, we find indifference and failure to listen; also, «the Church oftentimes appears as too severe and is often associated with excessive moralism» (PM 1).

Wishing for an “Authentic Church”

66. A large number of young people, mostly from highly secularized areas, are not asking the Church for anything, since they do not see her as a significant interlocutor in their lives. In fact, some of them expressly ask to be left alone, because they feel her presence to be bothersome or even irritating. This request does not stem from uncritical or impulsive scorn, but is deeply rooted in serious and respectable reasons: sexual and economic scandals, on which young people want the Church to «continue to enforce her zero-tolerance stance on sexual abuse within her institutions» (PM 11); the unpreparedness of ordained ministers, who do not know how to adequately grasp young people’s lives and sensibilities; the passive role given to young people within the Christian community; the difficulty the Church has in explaining her doctrinal and ethical stances in contemporary society.

67. Even when they are very critical, basically young people would like the Church to be an institution that shines for her exemplariness, knowledge, co-responsibility and cultural resilience. One BC says that «the young want to see a Church that shares their life situation in the light of the Gospel rather than giving sermons»! In a nutshell, this is what the young had to say: «Today's young people are longing for an authentic Church. We want to say, especially to the hierarchy of the Church, that they should be a transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community» (PM 11).

A "More Relational" Church

68. Many young people believe a renewed ecclesial approach is decisive, especially from the relational standpoint: countless BC state that young people want a «less institutional and more relational» Church, that is able to «welcome people without judging them first», a «friendly and proximate» Church, an ecclesial community that is like «a family where you feel welcomed, listened to, cherished and integrated». Also according to the Pre-synodal Meeting «we need a Church that is welcoming and merciful, which appreciates its roots and patrimony and which loves everyone, even those who are not following the perceived standards» (PM 1).

69. The young people who participate the most in the life of the Church expressed various specific requests. The liturgy is a theme that often comes up: they would like it to be alive and proximate, whereas it often does not lead to «experiencing a sense of community or family as the Body of Christ» (PM 7); they also mention homilies, that many believe are inadequate to accompany them in the discernment of their situation in the light of the Gospel. «Young people are attracted to the joy which should be a hallmark of our faith» (PM 7), but which Christian communities often seem unable to convey.

70. Another request refers to the introduction of a dialogue style inside and outside the Church: young people believe it is necessary to tackle a number of major issues of our time, such as recognizing and enhancing the role of women in the Church and society. Some young people encourage the Church to deepen a cultural interpretation of the faith that allows for a fruitful dialogue with other forms of knowledge and religious traditions: «In a globalized and inter-religious world, the Church needs to not only model but also to elaborate on theological guidelines for peaceful, constructive dialogue with people of other faiths and traditions» (PM 2).

A Community "Committed to Justice"

71. In several parts of the world that are plagued by different kinds of poverty, young people are asking for material help or accompaniment to heal their suffering. But where the Church is seen as an institution that is actively engaged in civil and social promotion, they ask that this prophetic presence might continue with courage and fortitude, despite the climate of violence, oppression and persecution surrounding the life of several Christian communities. Many young people are asking the Church for greater operational pragmatism, touching on various issues: truly siding with the poor, caring about environmental issues, making visible choices of sobriety and transparency, being true and clear but also bold in denouncing evil in a radical way, not only in civil society and the world, but also in the Church herself. «The Church should reinforce initiatives that fight against human trafficking and forced migration, as well as drug-trafficking which is especially important in Latin America» (PM 14).

The Word of Seminarians and Young Men and Women Religious

72. Many seminarians, and young men and women religious in formation, expressed in a variety of ways their views on the Synod's theme, which is a cause of great joy to them. Their indications and provocations guide us in three specific directions.

The first concerns the theme of fraternity: coming from contexts that have been heavily marked by competition and individualism, they are asking for a truly fraternal life, that revolves around shared bonds and affection. They would like the Church to be a "prophecy of fraternity", a home that is able to become their family.

Then there is a request for spirituality, for a Church where prayer and intimacy with God are at the center. In some parts of the world, there is a spontaneous opening to transcendence; in others, dominated by an "exclusive humanism", the Church is asked to be mystical, capable of opening glimpses of transcendence in the lives of men and women. For this reason, some see the liturgy as a moment of prophecy.

Lastly, the request for radicality is still strong, although it is not always supported by personal consistency: apart from a few contexts where the choice of consecrated life and the ordained ministry is related to the search for economic and social security, usually when young people opt for these life forms they consciously choose evangelical radicality, that requires a specific and gradual accompaniment towards the gift of self for God and for our brothers and sisters.

PART II INTERPRETING: FAITH AND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

73. In Part II we are required to deepen some elements and dynamics to be able to adequately interpret the situations described in Part I. Christ's call to live according to his intentions is our reference horizon and, at the same time, a source of healthy restlessness and beneficial crisis: «A faith that does not trouble us is a troubled faith. A faith that does not make us grow is a faith that needs to grow. A faith that does not raise questions is a faith that has to be questioned. A faith that does not rouse us is a faith that needs to be roused. A faith that does not shake us is a faith that needs to be shaken» (Francis, *Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2017)

Chapter I The Blessing of Youth

74. In order to understand the truth about youth, which is not just a contemporary condition, but a specific age in life that is part of our human condition as such, we must provide an anthropological and biblical outlook, since the Word of God gives us the elements to understand and interpret this decisive stage in our existence. Indeed, if the Church is «the true youth of the world», then shedding light on

the typical and universal traits of youth means acquiring valuable elements to help her «rejuvenate her image» (Second Vatican Council, *Address to Young Men and Women*), since the Synod «will also be a call to the Church to rediscover a *renewed youthful dynamism* » (Francis, *Address at the pre-synodal meeting*, 2).

Christ, “a Young Man Among Young People”

75. Youth is an original and exciting stage in life, that Christ himself went through, sanctifying it with his presence. Irenaeus of Lyons helps us shed light on this reality, when he states that «Jesus did not despise or evade any condition of humanity, nor set aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctified every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all through means of Himself - all, I say, who through Him are born again to God - infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to the young, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord» (*Against Heresies*, II,22,4). Therefore, Jesus is “a young man among young people”, and He wants to meet them and walk beside them, as He did with the disciples of Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35). Today, He still wants to offer His entire self so that each young person may have life abundantly (cf. *Jn* 10:10).

The Universal Call to the Joy of Love

76. Answering the OLQ, one young man is certain that «believing in God is a source of love and joy, not sadness!». A recurring topic in the age of youth is joy: «You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth» (*Qo* 11:9; cf. *Wis* 2:6). The imperative of joy dwells in youth in a rather natural way, relying on physical beauty that becomes attention for and attraction to the other. The body in all its glow and fullness becomes the space of love, perceived as the very mystery of being human, bound for eternity because it is imbued with love. This is why love «hopes all things» (*1Cor* 13:7), and all young people are called to become heralds of resurrection (cf. *Mk* 16:6). The entire *Song of Songs* celebrates the love between two young people who look for and desire each other as a real symbol of the concrete love between God and His people, showing how the vocation to joy through love is universal and unstoppable. Many believe the Church needs to revitalize her call to contribute to the joy of young people in a free and disinterested way (cf. *2Cor* 1:24).

Physical Strength, Spiritual Fortitude and the Courage to Take Risks

77. «The glory of young men is their strength» (*Pr* 20:29). Youth is characterized by a naturally proactive attitude towards life: the time of peak physical energy is accompanied by a unique fortitude in facing life’s challenges and in daring to embark on new paths. In the biblical character of Joshua, Moses’ aide since adolescence, these traits clearly emerge at the very moment when he is called to lead God’s people to conquer the promised Land. Many times he is urged to «be strong and courageous», both by Moses (*Dt* 31:7.23) and by God (*Josh* 1:6.7.9). The Church wishes to address these same words to every young person who is about to face life’s challenges and risks, following the indications of the Apostle John: «I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one» (*1Jn* 2:14). In Part I, the analysis of the situation showed how easy it is for young people today to lose the fortitude and courage that is typical of this stage in life, succumbing to fear and discouragement. The Church herself risks losing the enthusiasm that comes from her own call to embrace the risk of faith, withdrawing into false worldly securities. These dynamisms need to be recovered.

Uncertainty, Fear and Hope

78. When they face life, especially in this day and age, young people experience existential contingency and fragmentation. The lack of security generates uncertainty, the proliferation of available options generates confusion, while the presence of hatred and violence fills new generations with fear, reducing the confidence they have in their own resources. How can a young person be a prophet of hope in a world where corruption and injustice hold sway? It is the same situation the prophet Jeremiah found himself in, when confronted with the call to be the prophet of nations, he mentioned his young age to the Lord: «Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth» (*Jer 1:6*). He felt the need to have God near him who, through His grace, would bring a reliable hope into his fragile existence.

On the other hand, youth is the bearer of inexperience and, therefore of justified fear and structural uncertainty in the face of the great tasks life has in store for us. Every young person yearns for company, support, closeness, proximity. Jeremiah calmed down only when God Himself addressed these words to him: «Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you» (*Jer 1:8*). Therefore, many young people are asking for a Church that is a mother and never forgets about them (cf. *Is 49:15-16*).

Falling, Repenting and Welcoming

79. Developing the ability to love remains the beauty and risk of youth, because love, when it is pursued and lived in a chaotic way, can become an unruly passion and a destructive drive that brings only sadness. Evil and sin also dwell in the life of young people and their request to be welcomed and forgiven is a cry we must heed. One of the best-known parables in the Gospel, that tells the story of two sons and brothers, is the parable of the “merciful father”, but it could also be called the “parable of the father who goes out twice” (cf. *Lk 15:11-32*): the first time to welcome his younger son after the time of carelessness and unruliness, and the second time to ask the elder son, whose heart is hardened and numb, to come back inside the house to celebrate and share the joy of his brother’s return. The Father in this parable is the true “adult” figure many young people are looking for in their lives and, unfortunately, do not find. This parable refers to a courageous father, who allows his children to experience the risk of freedom, without imposing constraints that mortify their choices. He is a father whose heart is so big he does not exclude anyone and he wants to reintegrate everyone in his household at the same time. The Church is called to make sure that all the young people she encounters in her path can experience the same fatherly and motherly attitudes.

The Willingness to Listen and the Need for Accompaniment

80. In the DP, the characters of John and Mary effectively portrayed the readiness to listen and the wish to embark on a path of vocational discernment that is not completed in one single moment, but becomes an existential journey that is constantly accompanied by the presence of Jesus, the teacher, model and friend of every young person.

81. Among the biblical calls directly addressed to young persons, we find the call to Samuel (cf. *1Sam 3:1-21*). There, we can see very clearly that the time of youth is the time for listening, but also the time when people are unable to understand the word of life and the Word of God on their own. Compared to adults, the young lack experience: it is adults who should «by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil» (*Heb 5:14*). Therefore, they are supposed to shine mostly for their righteous conscience, which comes from their constant practice of choosing between

good and evil. The accompaniment of younger generations is not an optional element in the task of educating and evangelizing young people, but an ecclesial duty and a right of every young person. Only the cautious and wise presence of Eli allows Samuel to correctly interpret the word that God is addressing to him. In this respect, the dreams of the elders and the prophecies of young people only happen together (cf. *Jl* 3:1), thus confirming the validity of intergenerational alliances.

Maturation of Faith and the Gift of Discernment

82. First and foremost, faith is a gift to be welcomed and its maturation a path to be followed. Of course, first we must reiterate that «being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction» (DC 1; EG 7). This encounter generates a life-changing experience, directing it in the way of dialogue and responsibility. As they grow up, all young people realize that life is bigger than they are, and they do not control everything in their existence; they realize they are who they are thanks to the care they received from others, first of all their parents. They become convinced that, in order to live their lives well, they must take responsibility for other people, replicating those attitudes of care and service that allowed them to grow. Above all, they are called to ask for the gift of discernment, which is not a skill that can be developed on our own, but is primarily a gift we must receive, that must be exercised prudently and wisely in order for it to grow. And a youngster who has received the gift of discernment and knows how to make it bear fruit, is a blessing for other youngsters and for the entire people.

83. Young King Solomon, when he was invited to ask God what he wanted for his decisive role, asked for «an understanding heart» (*1Kings* 3:9). And God's appreciation was soon manifested: «Because you have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word» (*1Kings* 3:11-12).

Actually, all young people are the “rulers” of their existence in some way, but they need to be helped in order to ask for discernment and they need to be accompanied so as to attain to the fullness of the gift of self. The story of young Queen Esther is enlightening in this respect: accompanied and supported by her people's prayers (cf. *Est* 4:16), she gave up her privileges and bravely risked her life to save her people, proving how far youthful bravery and female dedication can go.

Life Plan and Vocational Dynamics

84. During the period of youth, identity is forged. At this time, marked by complexity, fragmentation and uncertainty about the future, forming a life plan is difficult, if not impossible. In this crisis situation, the contribution offered by the Church is often focused on supporting good life choices. In the most fortunate cases, and wherever young people are more receptive, this kind of pastoral care helps them discover their vocation which, at the end of the day, is a term that can be applied only to a few fortunate individuals and it marks the culmination of a project. But does not this way of doing things risk reducing and undermining the full truth of the term “vocation”?

In this respect, it is helpful to recall the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man (cf. *Mt* 19:16-22; *Mk* 10:17-22; *Lk* 10:25-28). There, we see that the Teacher from Nazareth does not endorse the young man's life plan, nor does he suggest how to achieve it; he does not recommend additional commitments, nor does he want to fill the emptiness of the young man who asked him: «What do I still lack?»; at least, he does not want to fill this emptiness by endorsing the young man's ideas for his future. Jesus does not fill his emptiness, but rather asks the young man to empty himself and make room for a new vision that is directed towards self-giving through a new approach to life, generated by the encounter with Him who is «the way, the truth and the life» (*Jn* 14:6). In this way,

through a real loss of direction, Jesus asks the young man to reconfigure his entire life. It is a call to embrace risk, to lose what has already been acquired, to trust. It is a provocation to break with the planning mindset which, if it becomes extreme, leads to narcissism and withdrawal. Jesus invites the young man to step into a mindset of faith, that challenges his life once he follows Christ, preceded and accompanied by an intense loving gaze: «Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me”» (Mk 10:21).

Chapter II

Vocation in the Light of Faith

85. Young people, in the final document of the PM, state: «We seek a Church that helps us find our vocation, in all of its senses» (PM 3). To do so, the meaning of the term “vocation” needs to be clarified. Caring about all young people, without exception, the Synod is asked to shed light in a convincing way on the vocational horizon of human existence as such. The young themselves are asking the Church to help them «find a simple and clear understanding of vocation» (PM 8). From the responses of various BC, and also from many comments made by the young themselves, we understand that the term vocation is generally used to indicate vocations to the ordained ministry and special consecration. One BC argues that «a weak point of pastoral care, in discerning young people’s vocations, is that it limits the notion of vocation only to the choice of the ministerial priesthood or consecrated life».

86. If we just compare this “narrow” vision to the journey of the two past Synods, where it was said that «marriage is a vocation» and that «the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment» (AL 72), it is not difficult to realize that a reductive view of the term “vocation” generates a strong bias amongst young people, who see vocational pastoral care only as an activity whose sole purpose is to “recruit” priests and men and women religious. Starting from this shared ecclesial imagery, there is the need to lay the foundation for a broad “vocational youth pastoral care” that can be meaningful to all young people.

Human Life in the Vocational Horizon

87. The Second Vatican Council clearly recovered mankind’s vocational horizon when it used such terms to express both how all human beings are destined for communion with Christ (cf. LG 3.13; GS 19.32), and the universal call to holiness (cf. LG 39-42), locating individual vocations within this interpretative horizon: vocations to the ordained ministry and consecrated life, as well as lay vocations (cf. LG 31), especially in their spousal form (cf. LG 35; GS 48.49.52). Subsequent magisterial teaching developed along the same lines, recognizing the analogical character of the term “vocation” and the many dimensions that characterize the reality it designates with respect to each personal mission, and to the communion of all people.

Called in Christ

88. When Scripture states that all things have been created through Christ and for Him (cf. Col 1:16), this leads us to interpret the mystery of vocation as a reality that characterizes God’s own creation, thus mysteriously illuminating the existence of every man and woman. Blessed Paul VI

already stated that «every human life is called to some task by God» (PP 15), while Benedict XVI insisted that human beings are created by God as creatures of dialogue: the creating Word «calls each one of us personally, revealing that *life itself is a vocation* from God» (VD 77). In this respect, only a vocational anthropology seems adequate to understand humans in all their truth and fullness. The fact that, during the PM, some young non-believers and members of other religions testified to their wish to discern their vocation in the world and in history was significant. (cf. PM 8).

To Go Out of Our Own Selves

89. Talking about life as a vocation allows us to highlight some elements that are very important for the growth of a young person: it means ruling out the possibility that life is determined by fate or randomness, and also that it is a private good that can be managed on our own. If, in the former case, there is no vocation because there is no understanding of a worthy destination for our lives, in the latter case, if human beings are considered “without connection to others” they are also “without vocation”. Vocational discernment along these lines becomes a journey of reconciliation with our body and self, with others and the world.

Towards the Fullness of Joy and Love

90. The notion of life as a vocation invites human beings to give up the lie of self-creation and the illusion of narcissistic self-realization, to let themselves be involved through history in the plan with which God destines us to one another’s good. Hence, we must promote a renewed vocational culture, that is still linked to the joy of the communion of love that generates life and hope. Indeed, the fullness of joy can only be experienced when we discover we are loved and, consequently, when we are personally called to love others in turn, in the concrete circumstances in which we live (family, work, social and civil engagement).

The Vocation to Follow Jesus

91. The Christological event is the fulfillment of creation because it is the Mystery that moves creation from the very beginning: «The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light [...] Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear» (GS 22). In Jesus, we discover that we are called to go beyond our own selves; as a matter of fact, listening to His word urges us to «put out into the deep» (cf. *Lk* 5:4) and open ourselves to horizons we cannot even fathom, if we rely only on our own strength.

The Baptismal Vocation

92. However, in the New Testament, the call also refers to the invitation for specific people to follow him more closely. The Gospel story of Jesus’ encounter with the first disciples (cf. *Jn* 1:36-39), presented in the DP, is the paradigm of this call. The destination of Jesus’ call is disclosed only when we follow Christ, which is dialogue and relationship with the Master. It cannot stand out clearly from the very beginning, as if it were the outcome of a project we are in charge of and for which we hold

the key, for us to plan all the details. It can be seen through the eyes of faith which, as Pope Francis put it, «“sees” to the extent that it journeys, to the extent that it chooses to enter into the horizons opened up by God’s word» (LF 9).

93. We cannot forget that every vocational path, being deeply rooted in the experience of divine filiation given to us in baptism, (cf. *Rm* 6:4-5; 8:14-16), is a paschal journey, that implies our commitment to self-denial and to losing our life, in order to receive it back renewed. Christ, who calls us to follow him, is He who «for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God» (*Heb* 12:2). Therefore, even when believers realize that their discipleship requires renunciations and the suffering brought by faithfulness, they do not lose heart and they keep choosing the Lord, who went before us to the right hand of the Father and accompanies us with His Spirit.

The Call of the Apostles

94. From among those who follow him, Jesus chooses a few for a special ministry. This is seen very clearly in the vocation of the apostles: He appointed twelve, whom he also named Apostles, that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and have authority to drive out demons (cf. *Mk* 3:14-15; *Lk* 6:13), urging them to tend to his flock (cf. *Jn* 21:15-19); likewise Paul, «a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God» (*Rm* 1:1; cf. *1Cor* 1:1). In the texts that refer to a special call to mission, God’s free and gratuitous designation is clearly highlighted, as well as the choice made from the mother’s womb, the revelation of the mystery of Christ to the chosen person and the task within salvation history. Sometimes this vocation is accompanied by giving a new name to the one called.

95. It is important to underline that particular “calls” can be understood only within the “vocational” landscape of the entire Church. Indeed, the very name *ecclesia* indicates the vocational character of the community of disciples, her identity as an assembly of summoned people (cf. *1Cor* 1:26; PDV 34). In the Church, vocations to a special task are not meant to introduce a privilege, but rather to render visible the grace with which God calls us all to salvation: hence, when Jesus tells Levi the tax-collector «follow me», making him an apostle of the Church (*Mk* 2:14), he proclaims to us all that he did not come «to call the righteous, but sinners» (*Mk* 2:17).

The Vocation of the Church and Vocations in the Church

96. The vocation of the Church has its true harbinger and complete fulfilment in Mary, the young woman who, with her “yes”, made the Son’s incarnation possible and, consequently, established the conditions for every other ecclesial vocation to happen. The “Marian principle” precedes and exceeds any other ministerial, charismatic and juridical principle in the Church, and it supports and accompanies them all.

97. Furthermore, it is not possible to fully understand the meaning of our baptismal vocation if we do not think of it as inherently connected to the Church’s missionary character, which is ultimately directed towards communion with God and among all people. In truth, the different ecclesial vocations are the many multifaceted expressions through which the Church fulfils her call to be a real sign of the Gospel, received in a fraternal community. The various forms in which we can follow Christ express, each in its own way, the mission to bear witness to the Jesus event, in which every man and woman finds salvation.

98. Saint Paul returns to this topic several times in his letters, recalling the image of the Church as a body that is made up of various members, and highlighting how each one is necessary and at the same time in relation to the whole, because only the harmonious unity of all the parts makes the body alive and harmonious. The origin of this communion, according to the Apostle, is in the mystery of the Holy Trinity itself. Actually, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: «There is a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are all kinds of works, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one» (1Cor 12:4-6).

99. Therefore, the different forms of Christian life cannot be conceived or understood autonomously, but only in the reciprocity they generate and in the exchange of gifts they accomplish (cf. CL 55; VC 31). This is the only way the Church can become an integral image of the face of Jesus in the history of mankind. The recent letter *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, on the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts for the life and mission of the Church, provided valuable indications to develop a correct theology of charisms, in order to gratefully welcome and wisely enhance the gifts of grace that the Spirit constantly elicits in the Church for her rejuvenation.

The Different Vocational Paths

100. Finally, the development of a broad vocational perspective invites us to think of vocational discernment in a way that potentially includes everyone because, as Pope Francis says, «to speak of vocational ministry is to affirm that all pastoral action of the Church is oriented, by its very nature, to vocational discernment. [...] Vocational service must be seen as the soul of all evangelization and of all the Church's pastoral ministry» (*Message of the Holy Father to participants in the International Conference "Vocational Ministry and Consecrated Life: Prospects and Hopes"*, 25 November 2017).

The Family

101. The two recent Synods on the family, and the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, provided a rich insight into the vocation of the family in the Church and the irreplaceable contribution families are called to give to the testimony of the Gospel, through mutual love and the generation and education of children. Recovering the vocational implications of this message, and making it understandable to young people within the affective culture they belong to, is very important. Thinking about preparation for marriage and the accompaniment of young couples seem to be the two strategic points on which pastoral energies should be invested.

The Ordained Ministry

102. The Church has always realized that vocations to the ordained ministry are decisive for Christian life and for the salvation of all men and women. This is why she has devoted particular attention to the care, formation and accompaniment of candidates to this state of life. The concern of many Churches over the decline in the number of candidates is undeniable; this requires a renewed reflection on the vocation to the the ordained ministry and on a vocational pastoral care that is able to convey the attractiveness of Jesus' call to become the shepherds of his flock.

Consecrated Life

103. The prophetic testimony of consecrated life also needs to be rediscovered and better presented to young people in its original attractiveness, as an antidote to the “paralysis of normality” and as openness to grace that turns upside-down the world and its ways of thinking. Rekindling the allure of evangelical radicality amongst young generations, so they can rediscover the prophetic value of chastity, poverty and obedience as a harbinger of the Kingdom and the complete fulfilment of their lives, is something that cannot be neglected at a time dominated by consumeristic and commercialistic mindsets.

Profession and Vocation

104. Called to holiness and anointed by the Spirit, Christians learn to look at all life choices through vocational eyes, especially the choice that is central to their state of life, but also the ones that pertain to their professional life. For this reason, some BC hope that the Synod will be able to find ways to help all Christians rediscover the link between profession and vocation in all its fruitfulness for everybody’s life, and to provide young people with career guidance with a vocational perspective.

The Unprecedented Situation of Single People

105. Lastly, some BC wonder what vocational status those people have who choose to remain single without any reference to a particular consecration or marriage. Considering that their number is rising in the Church and in the world, it is important for the Synod to think about this issue.

Chapter III

The Dynamism of Vocational Discernment

The Request for Discernment

106. During the Pre-synodal Meeting, a young man clearly expressed the importance of discernment for our lives: «Today, like thousands of other young people, both believers and non-believers, I have to make choices, especially regarding my future career. However, I am undecided, lost and worried. [...] I feel as if I am facing a wall, when I seek a deep meaning for my life. I think I need some discernment in the face of this emptiness». During those days, his question was repeatedly confirmed, freshly articulated and deepened, highlighting the difficulties young people have: «Many young people, when asked the question “What is the meaning of your life?” do not know how to answer. They do not always make the connection between life and transcendence» (PM 5). Quite often, young people shift between extreme and equally naive approaches: from feeling they are at the mercy of an unavoidable and pre-determined fate, to feeling overwhelmed by an abstract ideal of excellence, in a context of unbridled and violent competition. In this situation, we can recognize an opportunity for the Church, even if young people have a hard time seeing her as being able to help them: «Many young people do not know how to intentionally go about the process of discernment;

this is an opportunity for the Church to accompany them» (PM 9). Pope Francis realized it too: «We must say, on this point, that many ecclesial communities do not know how to do this or they lack the capacity for discernment. It is one of the problems we have, but we should not feel scared» (Francis, *Pre-synodal Meeting*, answer to question n. 2)

Discernment in Plain Language and in Christian Tradition

107. The young people who attended the Pre-synodal Meeting also mentioned how hard it is for them to understand what discernment means, since this term is not part of their vocabulary, even though they experience the need it refers to: «Discerning one's vocation can be a challenge, especially in light of misconceptions about the term. However, young people will rise to the challenge. Discerning one's vocation can be an adventure along the journey of life» (PM 9).

108. Actually, the term discernment can mean many different things, that are not in conflict with each other but are also not the same. In a broader sense, discernment refers to a process in which important decisions are made; a second meaning, that is more typical of Christian tradition, refers to the spiritual dynamics through which individuals, groups or communities try to recognize and accept God's will in their actual situation. Furthermore, as the DP mentioned already, the term applies to a plurality of different practices and situations: «Indeed, one form of discernment is exercised in reading the signs of the times which leads to recognizing the presence and action of the Spirit in history. Moral discernment, instead, distinguishes what is good from what is bad. Still another form, spiritual discernment, aims to recognize temptation so as to reject it and proceed on the path to fullness of life. The overlapping of the various meanings of these forms is evident, and they can never be completely separated one from the other» (DP II, 2).

The Proposal of Vocational Discernment

109. Several different levels come into play also in the specifics of vocational discernment. As Pope Francis' comments at the Pre-synodal Meeting show, there is a level that is common to all men and women: «We all need discernment. This is why this word is included in the title of the Synod, right? And when we feel this emptiness, this restlessness, we must discern» (Francis, *Pre-synodal Meeting*, answer to question n. 2). In this sense, the Synod intends to take care of «all young persons, with no exception» right from the very beginning (DP 2), offering them our willingness to accompany them in the process that will lead them to achieve clarity and truth about themselves, welcoming the gift of life and finding the contribution they are called to give to society and the world. Also, the Holy Father highlighted how the Church bases the proposal of discernment that she extends to all people on a conviction of faith: «God loves each one of us, and addresses a call to each one personally. It is a gift that, when it is discovered, fills us with joy (cf. *Mt 13:44-46*). Be sure: God trusts in you; He loves you and he calls to you. And there will never be any shortcoming on his part, because he is faithful and truly believes in you» (Francis, *Address at the Pre-synodal Meeting*, 2).

110. To young believers, the perspective of discernment acquires a new depth, insofar as it is placed within the dynamics of a personal relationship with the Lord: therefore, they openly strive to discover the possible avenues to answer God's love, by taking part as members of the Church in the mission to proclaim and bear witness to the Good News. Hence, the outlook is much broader and more fundamental than the reductive view whereby, as the responses from many BC show, church

leaders and many of the faithful tend to identify vocational discernment with the path to choose your state in life (marriage, priesthood, consecrated life). Vocational discernment could also refer to the choice of social and political engagement, or a profession.

111. Above all, vocational discernment is not over, once a decision between different alternatives is made, but it extends over time, accompanying the concrete steps we make to implement that decision. In this sense, discernment is also a lifestyle: «It is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. It is a means of spiritual combat for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God's timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow. Often discernment is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, since greatness of spirit is manifested in simple everyday realities» (GE 169). Discernment is a gift and a risk, and this can be frightening.

Recognizing, Interpreting, Choosing

112. As we have seen, **for** the Church the possibility of discernment is based on a conviction of faith: God's Spirit works deep down inside – in the “heart”, the Bible says; in the “conscience”, according to theological tradition – of all persons, whether or not they explicitly profess the Christian faith, through their feelings and wishes, elicited by life events and related to ideas, images and projects. The three “steps” of discernment that Pope Francis indicates in EG 51, echoed by the DP, come from this attention to inner dynamisms: recognizing, interpreting, choosing.

113. Recognizing means “giving a name” to the great quantity of emotions, wishes and feelings that dwell in all of us. They play a fundamental role and should not be hidden or dampened. The Pope mentioned this: «Opening everything is important, feelings must not be masqueraded, or camouflaged. The thoughts that emerge should be [brought] in discernment» (*Pre-synodal Meeting*, answer to question n. 2). A journey of vocational discernment requires great attention to things that emerge in the different experiences each person goes through (family, study, work, friendship, romantic relationships, volunteer work and other engagements, etc.), nowadays increasingly along non linear and progressive paths, with inevitable success and failures: where does a young person feel at home? Where does he or she feel a more intense “satisfaction”? However, this is not enough because life experiences are ambiguous and can be interpreted in different ways: what is the origin of this desire? Is it really pushing me towards the “joy of love”? On the basis of these interpretations, choices can be made that are not merely the result of drives or social pressures, but an exercise of freedom and responsibility.

114. Being an act of human freedom, discernment is exposed to the risk of error. As the DP mentioned, «the human heart, because of its weakness and sin, is normally divided because it is attracted by different and even contrary feelings» (DP II, 4). Hence it is indispensable for discerning persons to continue forming their affectivity, intelligence and style.

115. For those who accept and draw inspiration from it, Christian wisdom offers valuable instruments such as the Word, the teachings of the Church and spiritual accompaniment; these are all aids to interact with the living norm that is Jesus, to get to know him intimately to the point of “having his heart”. Therefore, a true journey of discernment requires a listening and praying attitude, meekness towards our teacher and the willingness to make tough decisions. This is also what the

young people of the Pre-synodal Meeting have discussed: «Spending time in silence, introspection and prayer, as well as reading the Scriptures and deepening self-knowledge are opportunities very few young people exercise. There is a need for a better introduction to these areas. Engaging with faith-based groups, movements, and like-minded communities can also assist young people in their discernment» (PM 9). A fundamental step in this direction is practicing what the tradition calls “examination of conscience”, which actually aims to make people aware of the signs of God’s presence and enables them to recognize his voice in the practicalities of our daily lives. For this reason, Pope Francis recommends this practice to all Christians, and even more so, to young people who are trying to find their way: «I ask all Christians not to omit, in dialogue with the Lord who loves us, a sincere daily “examination of conscience”» (GE 169). Within this dialogue with Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, what one DV wishes for young people can indeed take place: «A formation of their affectivity, that might help them to connect more to good and truth rather than their comforts and interests».

The Role of Our Conscience

116. Conscience plays a central role in discernment. As one DV reminds us, «if there has to be formation (and there has to be!), it can only happen as education to freedom and conscience». While Pope Francis underlines how our conscience «needs to be better incorporated into the Church’s praxis» (AL 303), the answers of the BC show how, in practice, conscience often receives insufficient attention. Its role is not limited to recognizing our mistakes or our sins: taking account of our personal limits and those of our situations, not to mention all the difficulties in finding our way, our conscience helps us to see what gifts we can offer and what contributions we can bring, even if not completely up to the standard of our ideals.

117. Our conscience, as the Second Vatican Council points out, is «the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths» (GS 16). Setting out from this faith perspective, it seems clear how the exercise of our conscience is a universal anthropological value: it challenges every man and woman, not just believers, and all must respond to it. All persons, thanks to their experience of being loved as unique beings within the network of social relations that underpins their lives, discover and receive the call to love, and this challenges their conscience as an imperative that establishes itself as a norm. This enhancement of our conscience is rooted in the contemplation of the Lord’s own *modus operandi*: it is in his own conscience that Jesus, in an intimate dialogue with the Father, makes his decisions, even the hardest and most painful ones, such as the one in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is the true norm of every Christian action and particular vocation.

Facing Reality

118. Young people experience the limits of their freedom and, hence, of their discernment: «Many factors influence the ability of young people to discern their vocations, such as: the Church, cultural differences, demands of work, the digital world, family expectations, mental health and state of mind, noise, peer pressures, political scenarios, society, technology, etc.» (PM 9). But this reality - which, most of all, is a gift and an otherness that flows through us – with the constraints it brings, is the means through which we can find confirmation of what we have realized in our heart of hearts: the principle whereby reality ranks higher than ideas also applies to discernment. In theological terms, every wish, even the most sublime, is called to become embodied in a concrete and consistent choice, that is necessarily limited, opening the door to asceticism, without which there is no path to holiness and to the fullness of life.

119. Engaging in our daily lives can be stimulating, especially when circumstances mandate a kind of “suspension” or “slowing down” of our progress towards our goals. This is what young people are going through in many countries, either due to a lack of real opportunities to make good use of their skills, or the long time it takes for them to become established in their career. These situations can become very fruitful, when they force individuals to go through a phase of healthy “disenchantment” and they realize that no professional achievement or existential goal can ever quench the thirst for life, fullness and eternity they carry in their heart. This generates the drive to engage in a deeper search for authenticity and vocation. One of the problems of our time is that circumstances often lead to a postponement of this phase, placing it at a time when people have already made binding decisions, for example from the affective standpoint, or have defined their lifestyle and made commitments – including financial ones – from which it is not easy to backtrack.

Chapter IV The Art of Accompanying

120. The entire tradition of spirituality insists on the fundamental importance of accompaniment, particularly in the vocational discernment process. The young people of the PM expressed this need repeatedly, underlining in particular the importance of the testimony and the humanity of their mentors. Many BC also underscored how young people are asking church leaders to be willing to provide this service, and highlight how often the latter have a hard time ensuring this.

“Accompaniment” Can Be Said in Many Ways

121. «All young people, without exception, have the right to be guided in life’s journey» (DP III, 2). Vocational accompaniment is a process that is able to unleash freedom, as well as the capacity to give and to integrate the various dimensions of life within a horizon of meaning. For this reason, a true accompaniment will strive to present vocation not as a pre-determined fate, a task to be carried out, a ready-made script, to be accepted by discovering how to implement it effectively. God takes seriously the freedom He has given to human beings, and responding to his call is a commitment that requires work, imagination, audacity and willingness to make progress also by trial and error.

122. The replies we received show that some BC envisage accompaniment in “broad” terms (also including occasional meetings, good advice, moments of dialogue on different topics); to others, it is something that is a lot more specific and falls within the scope of “Christian coaching”. Those who accompany the young might be men and women, religious and lay persons, couples; the community also plays a decisive role. Therefore, the accompaniment of young people by the Church takes on many different direct and indirect forms, weaves together a multiplicity of dimensions and makes use of manifold instruments, depending on the context where it takes place and the degree of ecclesial and faith involvement of those who are being accompanied.

Spiritual Accompaniment

123. Several BC see personal spiritual accompaniment as the preferred, if not the only, place for vocational discernment. It is an opportunity to learn to recognize, interpret and choose in a faith perspective, listening to what the Spirit suggests in our everyday lives (cf. EG 169-174). In the personal relationship of accompaniment, it is important to realize the difference between masculine and feminine approaches, both for mentors and for those who are accompanied. In this respect, the richness of the tradition that speaks about spiritual fatherhood and motherhood needs to be deepened and preserved.

124. Spiritual accompaniment has specific traits that differentiate it from other forms of personal accompaniment such as counseling, coaching, mentoring, tutoring, etc. However, there are also relations and connections between them. To avoid losing sight of the unity of the person and the integral character of the accompaniment relationship, we need to explore the complementarity between spiritual accompaniment in the strict sense and other forms of closeness which, in our daily lives, might involve individuals who can help young people discern and contribute to the formation of their conscience and their freedom.

Psychological Accompaniment

125. As Pope Francis taught us, «spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights drawn from the human sciences. At the same time, it transcends them » (GE 170). In particular, it is good to point out what differentiates spiritual accompaniment from psychological accompaniment or psychotherapy which, if it is open to transcendence, can prove to be fundamental for a path of integration and growth. The latter kind of accompaniment is focused on the resources, limits and evolution of the person in fulfilling his/her wishes. Instead, spiritual accompaniment is aimed more specifically at triggering an intimate dialogue between the person and God in prayer, starting from the Gospel and the entire Scripture, in order to find the most personal way to respond to God's call. A careful pedagogy will allow for the integration of the psychological dimension into spiritual accompaniment: not just listening and empathy, but also discernment in interacting with the Word; not just trust, but also struggling to realize that the joy of the Gospel reawakens the loftiness of our desires; not just dreams, but actual steps through life's difficulties.

Accompaniment and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

126. The charism of spiritual accompaniment is not necessarily tied to the ordained ministry. In our ancient tradition, spiritual fathers and mothers were lay people, often monks, but not clerics. The practice whereby accompaniment is now among the roles assigned to priests risks confining it within a dialogue that often overlaps with the celebration of the sacrament of penance. Despite their closeness, ministers of reconciliation and spiritual mentors have different purposes, methods and languages. Vocational accompaniment *stricto sensu* is not properly the "matter" of the sacrament of reconciliation, which is the forgiveness of sins; however, the encounter with God's mercy in the sacrament is indispensable to make progress in this journey. We should also recognize that, in the relationship between accompaniment and sacrament, the various spiritual traditions have developed different sensitivities.

Family, Formative and Social Accompaniment

127. The contexts in which ordinary life unfolds provide many opportunities for a closeness that can accompany our journey of growth, in a specifically spiritual or more broadly human sense. There are instances when this kind of accompaniment falls within the institutional tasks of those who provide it, and others in which it is based on the willingness, capacity and commitment of the individuals who are involved.

Several BC mention the indispensable role families play in vocational discernment, especially when parents are inspiring role models of faith and dedication: parents are always the first witnesses, and even more so in places where there is a shortage of ordained ministers. However, the opposite can also happen, when families overemphasize the importance of economic or professional success, and this ultimately hinders the possibility for a rigorous journey of vocational discernment. Sometimes, the breakdown of families leads to young people's disillusionment regarding the possibility to plan the future with long-term hope.

Accompaniment, also under different names, is at the center of attention of many education systems, both at school and university level. Before being a task that is assigned to specific individuals, it is a basic pedagogical attitude and a mindset that pervade the entire educational community. Tutoring within vocational training, to help young people start their career, is also valuable. As several BC point out, these kinds of accompaniments are «the most important conduit through which schools, universities and other educational institutions contribute to young people's vocational discernment», in addition to being an opportunity to stimulate a critical approach to reality starting from a Christian perspective and listening to God's voice.

Lastly, there are several contexts, roles and professions in which adults who get in contact with young people, perhaps due to specific issues, can provide an accompaniment that favors their human maturity or the solution of problem situations: we could think about the role of sports coaches, people who have education responsibilities or work in specific kinds of institutions (prisons, shelters of various kinds, counseling offices or clinics) or professions (physicians, psychologists, educators, etc.). Albeit within the confines of their responsibilities, also as professionals, we must admit that these forms of accompaniment can have a spiritual significance, and play a role in the process of vocational discernment.

Accompaniment in Reading the Signs of the Times

128. Young people are challenged by the social reality they face which often elicits powerful emotions: their interpretation requires accompaniment and can become the means to identify the signs of the times that the Spirit brings to the attention of young people and the Church. The rage of young people in the face of rampant corruption, growing structural inequality, contempt for human dignity, human rights violations, discrimination against women and minorities, organized violence, and injustice does not seem to be taken into due account, if we look at the responses given by the BC. There seems to be a lack of space to discuss these issues in Christian communities. Also, in many parts of the world, young people find themselves in the midst of violence, either as perpetrators or victims, and they easily fall prey to manipulation by adults. Unscrupulous religious and political leaders know how to exploit young people's idealistic ambitions for their own gain. In other contexts, religious persecution, fanaticism and political violence are wrenching the hope for a peaceful and prosperous future from the hearts of young people. These too are frontiers in which the Church's prophetic capacity for accompaniment must play a role.

Accompaniment in Everyday Life and in Ecclesial Communities

129. Lastly, there is also a daily accompaniment, often silent but no less important, that is provided by people who interpret their lives in a fully human way through their testimony. Equally fundamental, also in vocational terms, is the accompaniment provided by the Christian community as a whole which, through its network of relations, proposes a lifestyle and stands alongside those who journey towards their personal form of holiness. As one DV states, «the individual aspect of accompaniment in discernment can be fruitful only if it is part of a theological, fraternal and fruitful Christian experience. From the community, too, comes the desire for self-giving, which is the precondition for properly discerning the specific ways it should be lived».

The Qualities of Mentors

130. Mentors are called to respect the mystery that all persons carry in themselves and trust the Lord who is already at work in them. They are invited to realize they are a model that can influence others through what they are, rather than for what they do or suggest. The deep affective interaction that is created in the space of spiritual accompaniment – the fact that tradition talks about spiritual fatherhood and motherhood is no coincidence, as a profound generative relationship – requires a sound formation on the part of mentors, and the willingness to work, first of all, on themselves spiritually and, to some extent, also psychologically. Only in this way will they be able to truly serve, listen and discern, and avoid the most frequent risks related to their role: displacing those they accompany in the search and responsibility of choices, denying or removing the emergence of sexual issues and, lastly, crossing boundaries and becoming inappropriately and destructively involved with the people they are helping in their spiritual journey, with the potential for actual abuse and dependency. When this happens, in addition to the injuries caused in the accompanied persons, a climate of fear and mistrust starts spreading, that discourages the practice of accompaniment.

131. A certain number of BC realize that accompaniment is a demanding service, when it comes to the personal qualities of those who do it: «Young people are asking for [...] effective and reliable mentors, who are filled with faith; imitators of Christ who live a truly happy life promoting a relationship with God and the Church». Pope Francis mentioned how mentors must be able to inspire trust and be wise persons, «who are not scared of anything, who know how to listen and are endowed with the Lord's gift of saying the right word at the right time» (*Pre-synodal Meeting*, answer to question n. 2).

132. The young people of the Pre-synodal Meeting accurately detail the profile of the mentor: «a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; is a confidant without judgement; actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; is deeply loving and self-aware; acknowledges their limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey» (PM 10). For young people, it is particularly important that mentors recognize their own humanity and fallibility: «Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, the devastation may impact young people's abilities to continue to engage with the Church» (PM 10). They also add that «mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person's process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so effectively. Mentors should believe wholeheartedly in a young person's ability to participate in the life of the Church. They should nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see

the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and religious, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation» (PM 10).

The Accompaniment of Seminarians and Young Consecrated Persons

133. «Personal accompaniment is an indispensable instrument of formation» (RFIS 44) of seminarians, but the same can easily apply to men and women religious in formation. First of all, it is a service for vocational discernment and charism authentication: both individuals and the Church need to verify the choices made. To this end, it is essential that mentors preserve a real space for freedom in themselves: giving trust means relinquishing covert forms of control; discovering that formation can be interrupted and helping people discover alternative paths cannot be excluded *a priori*, nor considered a failure, even in situations where there is a shortage of ordained ministers and consecrated persons. At the same time, this accompaniment will contribute to the human and Christian maturity of those who are in formation and become a real formative investment, aimed at creating a pool of men and women, who have the qualities needed to accompany others to discover their vocation and follow it. Accompaniment is learnt first of all by accepting to be accompanied.

134. The experience of formators shows that candidates for the ordained ministry and consecrated life are young people of our time and share the typical traits of their peers' culture and approach to the world, starting from the pervasiveness of social media and digital communication. Accompaniment will have to focus on deepening their personal spiritual life, as well as their apostolic impetus, fostering the integration of hard work, disappointments and dryness; if psychological difficulties emerge, a specific accompaniment, in addition to spiritual accompaniment, will be extremely helpful. At the same time, spiritual accompaniment will strive to prevent candidates from wasting time, helping them become rooted in the - albeit temporary - stage they are going through, and not live waiting for the time when formation will be over. The encounter with the Lord takes place in the present time, also for people who live in a house of formation.

135. A challenge that our time increasingly gives rise to is the integration of differences. Especially in formative contexts that gather people coming from different countries and cultures, young people will have to be accompanied to deal with intercultural dialogue, preparing for what will be required by society at the end of their formation. If, on the one hand, young people are keen to meet with other cultures, on the other hand they have a hard time dealing with differences, since they come from societies that employ very powerful immunization tools against diversities, even trying to deny, standardize or devalue them.

136. Accompaniment will be crucial also to adequately take into account people's backgrounds, which nowadays are increasingly diversified in terms of admission age, education level, prior formation, prior professional and affective experiences, church background (parishes, associations, movements, etc.). Accompaniment is a key tool to allow for a truly personalized approach to formative paths, which young people seem to appreciate, whereas they consider standardized proposals mortifying. This might also apply to specific didactic accompaniment during their studies.

PART III
CHOOSING:
PATHS OF PASTORAL AND MISSIONARY CONVERSION

137. Based on the context interpretation elements that emerged in Part II, now we need to focus on identifying the most appropriate perspective, style and instruments to enable the Church to fulfill her mission towards young people: to help them encounter the Lord, feel loved by Him and respond to His call to the joy of love. In this dynamics of discernment the Church herself, while committing to accompany all the young, will be able to recover a renewed and joyful apostolic impetus, through a path of pastoral and missionary conversion.

Chapter I An Integral Perspective

Discernment as the Style of an Outgoing Church

138. Pope Francis, as he met with young people at the beginning of the PM, declared that the Synod is «also a call to the Church, to rediscover a *renewed youthful dynamism*. [...] In the Church too we must learn new forms of presence and closeness» (*Address to the Pre-synodal Meeting*, 3). Very clearly, one BC argued that «young people are asking the Church for a monumental change of attitude, direction and practice». Another BC, considering the paths of renewal that are at work in its own territory, wrote: «The true question behind these attempts relates more in general to the shape of the Church that we are seeking and want to present: the expression “outgoing Church” appropriately identifies the general problem, but we are still looking for useful operational indications on how to do this». This requires «a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform» (EG 30) and to honestly and deeply listen to young people who are fully entitled to participate in the *sensus fidei fidelium*.

139. In this framework, “choosing” does not mean giving answers to problems once and for all, but rather identifying actual steps to increase the capacity to engage in discernment processes for our mission, as an ecclesial community. Moreover, we cannot expect our offer of accompaniment towards vocational discernment to be credible to the young people we address, unless we show that we are able to practice discernment in the ordinary life of the Church, making it the *modus operandi* of our community before applying it to their situation. Just like young people themselves, many BC expressed their difficulty in finding their way through a complex world for which they do not have a map. In this situation, the Synod itself is an exercise to enhance the capacity for discernment that is evoked in its theme.

God’s People in a Fragmented World

140. The synodal journey, being a “path we walk together”, includes an urgent invitation to rediscover the richness of the identity of “the people of God”, which defines the Church as a prophetic sign of communion in a world that is often riven by division and discord. The state of this people «is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us (cf. *Jn* 13:34). Its end is the kingdom of God» (LG 9). In its historical actuality, the people of God has many faces, because it «is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture» (EG 115). Within it, the Holy Spirit «brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony» (EG 117). This dynamic identity impels the Church towards the world and makes her missionary and outgoing; she is not haunted by the concern of «being the center» (EG 49), but of succeeding, with humility, to be leaven even beyond

her “borders”, knowing she has something to give and something to receive in the framework of exchanging gifts.

Within this dynamic, the Church will have to opt for dialogue as her style and method, fostering an awareness of the existence of bonds and connections in a complex reality - which it would be reductive to see as being made of fragments - as well as the tension towards unity that, without being absorbed into uniformity, allows for the convergence of all its parts, preserving their individual distinctiveness and the richness they have together as a whole (cf. EG 236). No vocation, especially within the Church, can be placed outside this outgoing dynamism of dialogue, and any true effort towards accompaniment of vocational discernment will have to be measured against this horizon, devoting special attention to the poorest and most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

A Generative Church

141. This dynamism, whereby we go out of ourselves to give our life and work unsparingly so that everyone, individually and collectively, may encounter the joy of love, also characterizes the way the Church exercises the authority entrusted to her, in a way that is truly generative and therefore creates communion. According to some analyses, etymologically speaking, authoritativeness is the capacity to make all creatures grow (*augeo*, in Latin, hence *auctor* and *auctoritas*) in the originality that the Creator conceived and wished for them. Exercising authority means taking on the responsibility to foster development and set freedom free, rather than exercising control that holds people down and keeps them captive.

142. Consequently, the Church “is brought into being” with young people, by allowing them to be true protagonists without telling them “it has always been done this way”. This perspective, which determines a pastoral style and also a way of internal organisation for the institution, is perfectly in tune with the request for authenticity that young people are addressing to the Church. They expect to be accompanied not by an unbending judge, nor by a fearful and hyperprotective parent who generates dependence, but by someone who is not afraid of his weakness and is able to make the treasure it holds within, like an earthen vessel, shine (cf. 2Cor 4:7). Otherwise, they will ultimately turn elsewhere, especially at a time when there is no shortage of alternatives (cf. PM 1.7.10).

143. In order to be generative, accompaniment for vocational discernment cannot but embrace an integral perspective. In reality, vocation is never a principle of alienation, but rather a hub that integrates all the dimensions of the person, and makes them fruitful: from natural talents to personality with its resources and limits, from the deepest passions to the skills acquired through studying, from experiences of success to the failures that every personal story has, from the capacity to establish a relationship and love someone to taking on responsibilities in a people or society. For this reason, the service of accompaniment is measured by a series of elements that only appear to be unrelated or unspiritual, and cannot work without an alliance between formative agents.

Chapter II

Deep into the Fabric of our Daily Lives

144. The call to joy and fullness of life is always placed within a cultural context of social relations. Young people want to be accompanied, formed and be protagonists when they face the circumstances of their daily lives. For this reason the Church is called to «go out, see, call» (DP III, 1.3), i.e. invest time to learn about - and deal with - the constraints and opportunities of the various social and cultural contexts, so that the call to the joy of love might resound in a comprehensible way. At the same time, social and interpersonal relationships and the dynamics of everyday life (friendship, affectivity, relationship with time and money, etc.) favor the rise of wishes, ideas, emotions

and feelings that a path of accompaniment will help young people recognize and interpret. An integral perspective must take account of the connections between the domains and contexts where the life of young people unfolds, the need for conversion of pastoral care practices and mentors' formation requirements.

145. In particular, experiencing and encountering fragilities in our own selves, in other people, in a group, society or culture is as exhausting as it is valuable. To young people, this can be the opportunity to discover hidden resources, and to raise new questions also for vocational purposes, pushing them to abandon the constant search for small certainties. By accompanying these paths, the Church will discover new frontiers and new resources to fulfill her mission.

Accompaniment in Schools and Universities

146. Practically all BC underline the importance that schools, universities and educational institutions of different kinds have in accompanying young people in their search for a personal life plan, and for the development of societies. In several regions they are the main - if not the only - places without explicit ecclesial character, where many young people come into contact with the Church. In some instances, they even become an alternative to parishes, that many young people neither know nor frequent. The young people of the Pre-synodal Meeting also underline the importance of the Church's engagement in these contexts: «Resources are not wasted when they are put into these areas as these are the places in which many young people spend most of their time and where they often engage with people of varied socioeconomic backgrounds» (PM 13). In particular, more attention is requested for the great number of young people who drop out of school or have no access to it.

The Need for an Integral Outlook and Formation

147. In many schools and universities, including Catholic institutions, education and formation are geared towards purely utilitarian goals, emphasizing the application of acquired knowledge in the labor market, rather than personal growth. Instead, we need to place technical and scientific know-how in an integral perspective, whose reference horizon is the "ecological culture" (cf. LS 111). Also, we need to reconcile intellect and desire, reason and affectivity; we need to form responsible citizens, who are able to deal with the complexity of our contemporary world and engage in dialogue with diversity; we need to help them integrate the spiritual dimension in study and cultural engagement; we need to enable them to discern not only personal paths of meaning, but also trajectories of common good for the societies they belong to.

148. This integral notion of education requires a systemic conversion, that involves all members of educating communities, as well as the material, economic and institutional structures they rely on. Instructors, professors, tutors and all the professionals who are involved in educational pathways, in particular those who work in abandoned and disadvantaged areas, provide a valuable service for which the Church is grateful. A renewed investment in their integral formation is necessary, to facilitate the rediscovery and reappropriation of what a true vocation is: they are called not only to convey contents, but also to be witnesses to human maturity, by initiating generative dynamics of spiritual fatherhood and motherhood that are able to make young people the subjects and protagonists of their own adventure.

The Specificity and Richness of Catholic Schools and Universities

149. Many BC worldwide express their appreciation for Catholic schools and universities. Their goal, as Pope Francis said, is not to proselytize, but «to bring young people and children forward in human values in all realities, and one such reality is transcendence» (*Address to participants in the World Congress on “Educating Today and Tomorrow. A Renewing Passion”,* 21 November 2015). This perspective directs them to work with other local educational agencies and, at the same time, shows how in free and open societies, in which different identities need to engage in dialogue, closed ideologies make no sense.

150. In order to be faithful to their mission, these institutions must verify whether students have actually received the values presented to them and they must promote a culture of continuous evaluation and self-evaluation. Beyond abstract statements, we have to ask ourselves to what extent our schools help young people see their studies as a responsibility for the world’s problems, for the needs of the poorest and for the care of the environment. For Catholic universities – Pope Francis was saying this to Portuguese universities – it is not enough to analyze and describe reality; they need to create «spaces for real research, debates that generate alternatives for contemporary problems» and «include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in their research. Catholic schools and universities are invited to show in practice what an inclusive and integral pedagogy is all about» (*Audience with the Portuguese Catholic University,* 26 October 2017).

151. In particular, for ecclesiastical universities, faculties and institutes – and by the same token also for all Catholic schools and universities – it is important to consider certain inspiring criteria: the spiritual, intellectual and existential contemplation of the *kerygma*; an all-encompassing dialogue; interdisciplinarity exercised with wisdom and creativity; the urgent need for “networking” (cf. VG 4).

The Economy, Work and our Common Home

Searching for New Development Models

152. Accompaniment towards full human maturity includes caring for our common home. This also requires the Church and her institutions to embrace the perspective of sustainability and promote consistent lifestyles, in addition to countering currently prevailing reductionisms (technocratic paradigm, idolatry of profit, etc.). *Laudato Si’* invites us to trust that ecological conversion is possible. To generate a dynamism of lasting change, this must involve not only individual choices, but also communal and social choices, including lobbying our political leaders. This is why the contribution of young people is indispensable, as one African BC states: «Several church leaders recognize the dynamism of young people in our country, their responsible involvement in the Church and social development policies». To promote sustainability, young people must be invited to dedicate their intellectual resources to it, in the various subjects they are studying, and direct their ensuing professional choices accordingly.

153. The specific contribution that the Church can give to the development of a spirituality that is able to recognize the value of small gestures, and inspire choices based on a different rationale than the throwaway culture, is crucial. As Pope Francis reminds us, «all Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment» (LS 214).

Work and Technological Innovation

154. The processes of digital technological innovation and penetration in the manufacturing world are generating a situation that is globally known as “Industry 4.0”, that is also impacting the labor market. Christian communities are invited to think more about these issues in their educational work and in the accompaniment of young people. In a scenario that is marked by constant change, by the impossibility to identify now the skill sets that will be needed tomorrow and by the risk that people who are unable to adjust could be left out, training and accompaniment stand out as areas of responsibility to ensure that all young people can express themselves and no one is left behind or considered useless. The goal is to make sure that the development of professional skills, and the capacity to give meaning to one’s own work and defend the right of all to a decent job, are able to keep up with technological innovation. Young generations are the bearers of an approach to reality that can bring important contributions to the humanization of the labor market: collaborative style, a culture where differences are respected and embraced, teamwork, achieving a balance between work and other dimensions of life.

Working Together to Create Jobs for All

155. The promotion of a new economic model requires favoring the development of alternatives, like the ones that sprout spontaneously in the peripheries and in the groups that are bearing the consequences of the throwaway culture, but are preserving values and practices of solidarity that have been lost elsewhere. To support these experiences, allowing for job creation especially for young people, and in contexts where youth unemployment is higher, resources must be found. As some of the remarks we received show, in some countries people are asking the Church to find ways to participate in this search by creative use of her own substantial cultural and immovable assets, enhancing them with business initiatives and projects run by young people, so that they can become “generative” in social terms, beyond mere economic returns.

Inside the Texture of Youth Culture

Formation for Active Citizenship and Politics

156. Some BC mention young people’s sensitivity regarding social ethics issues (freedom, justice, peace, ecology, economics, politics), and this needs to be accompanied, supported and encouraged. The commandment of love has an inherently social value, that includes the preferential option for the poor and the commitment to build a less corrupt and fairer society. Social and political engagement are a true vocation, at least for some people, whose maturation needs to be accompanied also from the spiritual standpoint. Anyhow, vocational discernment cannot focus only on looking for one’s own place in the world, without creatively considering the specific contribution to the common good we are all called to give.

157. Through their social engagement, many young people wonder about, and (re)discover, an interest in the Christian faith. Furthermore, their engagement for justice and with the poor is an occasion for encounter and dialogue with non-believers and people who profess other faiths. Many

BC are introducing, or are looking for, new ways to form young people for civil, social and political engagement, in particular by stimulating young people to participate, take responsibility and engage in dialogue with their peers. The importance of some elements stands out: enhancing young people's professional skills and academic programs, providing them with opportunities to be protagonists; offering them actual experiences of service and contact with the least of our brothers and sisters and with social environments different from their own, including experiences in other countries and in care for the environment and nature; providing elements for context interpretation and evaluation, starting from a better understanding of the social doctrine of the Church – the value of which is also underlined by the PM (cf. PM 3) – and of integral ecology; favoring the growth of a spirituality of justice, highlighting the help provided by the Bible to interpret social dynamics; supporting pathways to change lifestyles, that focus on the importance of daily actions, without losing sight of structural and institutional dimensions.

158. Also, young people are usually very sensitive to the fight against corruption and to the issue of discrimination. In particular, the PM strongly states that «the Church can play a vital role in ensuring that these young people are not marginalized but feel accepted» (PM 5), indicating the promotion of the dignity of women as the first area of engagement. Increasingly multicultural societies, characterized by migration and the presence of ethnic, cultural or religious minorities, are asking for the introduction of pathways that help fight bias and overcome the different forms of racial or caste discrimination.

159. Again, regarding social and civil engagement, the pre-synodal journey also underlined several situations we should focus on. The first one is related to young people who serve in the armed forces or in law enforcement, who must be helped to take ownership of certain values and to integrate the dimension of service to the population that is implicit in their role, especially in particular circumstances (peace missions, natural disasters, etc.). Secondly, the situation of young people who engage in experiences of full-time service, that is given different names around the world (civil service, gap year, year of volunteer social work, etc.); as the PM underlines, this is often a favorable time for discernment about the future (cf. PM 15). We must avoid the risk of considering young people who engage in these experiences as cheap labor, who should do the work that no one else can, or wants to do.

Learning to Inhabit the Digital World

160. Several BC, as well as the PM, acknowledge the need to strongly tackle the issue of accompanying young people towards an open-eyed use of digital technology. The PM suggested a way: «First, by engaging in a dialogue with young people, the Church should deepen her understanding of technology so as to assist us in discerning its usage. Moreover, the Church should view technology – particularly the internet – as a fertile place for the New Evangelization. [...] Second, the Church should address the widespread crisis of pornography, including online child abuse, as well as cyber-bullying and the toll these take on our humanity» (PM 4).

161. Many BC realize the Internet's potential as an instrument for pastoral contact and vocational guidance, in particular in those places where, for various reasons, the Church has problems reaching young people through other means. In this respect, the skill of digital natives must be enhanced also within the Church. The notion whereby social media and the digital universe are not just tools to be

used in pastoral care, nor do they represent a virtual reality in contrast with the real one, and are actually a living place with their own culture to be evangelized, has not been completely accepted yet. Suffice to think about videogames, which are a major challenge for society and the Church in some countries, since they foster a questionable vision of human beings and the world among young people, which encourages a relational style marked by violence.

Music between Interiority and the Affirmation of Identity

162. Of all artistic languages, music is particularly connected to the dimension of listening and interiority. Its impact on the emotional sphere can provide an opportunity for the formation in discernment. Furthermore, the choice of *genres* and musicians is one of the elements that define young people's identity, especially their social identity. A space is opened for musical production that can help develop spirituality. Also, we need to cherish singing and music in our communities' lives and journeys of faith. Some young people are attracted by the quality of music of different Christian traditions (such as Gregorian and Orthodox monastic chant, or gospel choirs). Sometimes, though, productions that emulate more commercial contemporary musical languages do not favor recollection and inner listening. Some BC argue that the offerings of other denominations and religions seem to be more attractive to young people, even Catholics, because of their simpler and more immediate language, thanks to «lively and high-quality music».

163. Particular attention should also be given to major music events: opportunities to rediscover the truly festive and socializing value of music should be promoted, starting from productions that young people themselves see as being high-quality. WYD, and major national or regional events, can provide an alternative way to look at such gatherings, integrating music in a program of ecclesial encounter among the young.

Sports and Competition

164. Considering how influential sports are, several BC suggest the need to enhance them for educational and pastoral care purposes. The care and discipline of our body, team dynamics that highlight cooperation, the value of fairplay and respecting rules, the importance of a spirit of sacrifice, generosity, sense of belonging, passion, creativity, make sports a promising educational opportunity to walk along a path of personal unification. Success and failure trigger emotional dynamics that can become a training ground for discernment. In order for this to happen, young people must be offered experiences of healthy competition, that sidestep the desire for success at all costs, and that allow for the effort of training to turn into an occasion for inner growth. Therefore, we need sports clubs – in particular those associated with the Church – that aim to be true all-around educating communities, and not mere facilities that provide services. This is why it is so important to foster the awareness of the educational role of coaches, technical staff and managers, by taking care of their lifelong formation. Beyond the purely competitive realm, it would be good to think about new configurations of educational places that might contribute to strengthening mutual recognition, our social fabric and communal bonds, especially in intercultural contexts.

Friendship and Peer Accompaniment

165. It is important to recognize peer groups as instruments of emancipation from family contexts, for identity consolidation and for the development of relational skills. Opportunities for growth in friendship are most important, during shared leisure time and vacations, and also on occasions that allow young people to become mentors for their peers or younger children, discovering the beauty of responsibility and the satisfaction that comes from serving. Bonds of communality, the sharing of ideas, the ease of identifying and communicating with others, are the basic reasons for the success of peer education initiatives and the “learning communities” they give rise to. In particular, they are useful when they relate to issues on which the words of adults could sound more distant and less credible (sexuality, addiction prevention, etc.) and, therefore, less effective in bringing about behavioral changes.

Closeness and Support in Situations of Discomfort and Marginalization Disability and Sickness

166. In the lives of many young people, pain marks their bodies and souls in a way that is unforeseeable and incomprehensible. Sometimes psychiatric, sensory and physical illnesses and impairments can quash their hopes and turn affectivity and sexuality into suffering. As a young disabled man said in his pre-synodal contribution, «you are never prepared enough to live with a disability: it prompts you to ask questions about your own life, and wonder about your finiteness». The young people who experience these situations are also called to discover how to express the call to joy and mission – «how can you bring the joy of the Gospel when suffering is a daily occurrence?» – and to discover their inner strength: «I might be entitled to cry, but fighting on and loving are my duties». These young people are relying on their peers’ help, but they in turn teach their friends to deal with their limits, helping them grow in their humanity. Movements and communities that know how to integrate young people affected by disease or disabilities are particularly beneficial, by supporting their families and enhancing the contribution they can give to other young people and to everyone. The creativity with which communities animated by the joy of the Gospel can be an alternative to discomfort is inexhaustible. For example, in some contexts, especially in Africa, innovative paths to integrate young HIV or AIDS patients into youth pastoral care are flourishing.

Addictions and Other Fragilities

167. The use of drugs, alcohol and other consciousness-altering substances, just like other old and new addictions, enslave young people and threaten their lives. Some of them, who are plunged in these situations of discomfort, can stumble upon a good opportunity to start again, also thanks to the help they can receive in institutions such as foster homes, or educational and rehabilitation communities. They need to be accompanied to recognize their mistakes and discern what different steps they need to make, in addition to being supported to deal with reintegration in a social context that often tends to stigmatize and isolate them. The work of some ecclesial institutions on this front is noteworthy and deserves to be supported by all Christian communities, which must overcome the temptation to withdraw in themselves. The formation of professionals and volunteers who work in these facilities is extremely important, also from the spiritual standpoint. However, this work cannot exempt us from promoting a culture of prevention and from taking a stance as Church in the fight against drug traffickers and whoever profits from addiction mechanisms.

With Young Detainees

168. The rehabilitation of young detainees requires their involvement in customized projects by stimulating, through educational action, the rereading of past experiences, the acknowledgement of past mistakes, the reconciliation with trauma they suffered in the past and the acquisition of social and job skills for their reintegration. The spiritual and religious dimensions can play a very important role and the Church is grateful to all those who work to make her present in these contexts (prison chaplains, volunteers, etc.), and provide accompaniment to inmates. Also, they are asking the Synod to find ways of involving and giving hope to young inmates. Lastly, we should not neglect the importance of human and professional formation, and accompaniment, for the people who work in the prison system (wardens, psychologists, educators, etc.), who must deal with situations that can be extremely complex and tough at times.

In Situations of War and Violence

169. There are many young people in the world who live in situations of war or armed conflict of varying intensity. Some are forced or cajoled into joining paramilitary groups or armed gangs, whereas some young women are raped and abused. Those who survive often suffer from various psychological and social consequences. Generally speaking, growing up in contexts of great violence is an obstacle to personal maturity, and this requires specific accompaniment and educational efforts, especially to rebuild relational skills and overcome past trauma. These elements must be taken into account also in paths of vocational discernment, because the call to joy is addressed also to these young people. Paths of reconciliation at national or local level are equally important, since they provide a context in which the lives of young people who have suffered violence, even brutal violence, can recover and offer valuable energies to overcome division, rancor and revenge.

Young Migrants and the Culture of Hospitality

170. The constant increase in the number of migrants and refugees, and in particular the plight of victims of human trafficking and exploitation, demand that their dignity and capacity for action are given some form of legal protection and, at the same time, integration pathways are promoted in the host countries. This is why the initiatives undertaken by many ecclesial bodies, and the involvement of the entire Christian community, are so important. The accompaniment of first and second generation young migrants to find their way towards joy and the possibility to contribute to the development of society is a peculiar challenge in terms of accompaniment for vocational discernment, since it must account for the dimension of interculturality. With great care and attention, pathways of accompaniment for mixed couples must be provided from the cultural and also religious standpoint, and also for former migrants who feel the call to the ministerial priesthood or religious life. In contexts where different cultures are found within the Christian community, all pastoral care, including the care of the young, is urged to avoid forms of isolation and promote true occasions for encounter.

Facing Death

171. Unfortunately, the death of young people is not an infrequent experience, and the same applies to young people who commit murder. In this field, the motherhood of the Church and her capacity of listening and accompaniment are decisive. Sometimes death is the end result of the failure of a world, a society and a culture that deceives, exploits and, lastly, discards young people; in other instances, it is the traumatic encounter with the limits of human life through the experience of sickness and the mystery of pain; there is also the shocking experience of youth suicides, that generates wounds that are difficult to heal in many people; in other situations, the death of young people because of their faith, which are true martyrdoms, becomes a prophetic and fruitful testimony of holiness. In any case death, and especially the death of young people, is a source of ultimate questions for us all. If, for the Church, this experience is always a renewed opportunity to address the death and resurrection of Jesus, some BC wonder how the death of young people can actually become a reason for proclamation and invitation to conversion for all.

Accompaniment and Proclamation

172. People who work in the many social, educational and pastoral domains where accompaniment takes place, testify to how the image of the Creator is indelibly present in all the young, and the Spirit speaks to each one of them, even when they are not able or willing to recognize Him. The Church is called to contribute to God's work, by introducing paths that help young people to see life as a gift and to fight against the throwaway culture and the culture of death. This engagement is an integral part of the Church's mission of proclamation: «The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity» (EG 180). For this reason, the Church cannot accept to be just an NGO or a charitable agency: her members must openly confess the name of Jesus (cf. EN 22), making their work an eloquent sign of His love that shares, accompanies and forgives.

173. All accompaniment is a way to introduce the call to joy and can thus become the appropriate place to proclaim the good news of Easter and foster the encounter with the risen Christ: a *kerygma* that «expresses God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance» (EG 165). At the same time, every service of accompaniment is an opportunity to grow in faith, for those who provide it and for the community they belong to. For this reason, the main requirement for a good mentor is to have tasted "the joy of love" firsthand, which unmasks the fakeness of mundane gratifications and fills the heart with the wish to communicate it to others.

174. This evangelical restlessness preserves us from the temptation to blame young people for their distance from the Church or complain about it when, instead, we should speak - as some BC do - of a "Church that is distant from young people" and is called to embark on paths of conversion, without blaming others for her lack of educational impetus and apostolic timidity. Overcoming the "Jonah Syndrome" still remains, in many respects, a goal to be attained (cf. GE 134). When the prophet was sent to proclaim God's mercy to the inhabitants of Nineveh, he fled because his heart did not share the intention that animates God's heart. The real issue that Jonah's predicament highlights is that of the evangelization of evangelizers and of the Christian quality of the community of believers, since only an evangelized community is able to evangelize.

An Evangelized and Evangelizing Community

An Evangelical Vision of Christian Community

175. During the IS, the point was made that communal experiences are still essential for young people: if, on the one hand, they are “allergic to institutions”, it is equally true that they are also looking for meaningful relationships within “true communities” and personal contact with “shining and consistent witnesses” (cf. PM 5.1.10). Several BC expressed the wish that the Synod reiterate the open and inclusive nature of the Church, which is called to accompany young people in the framework of guaranteeing both the integral character of the proclamation and its step-by-step presentation, thus respecting the pace of maturation of their freedom, which is an actual historical and daily event. Following the example of Jesus, «the first and greatest evangelizer» (EN 9; EG 12), the community of believers is also called to go out and meet young people where they are, rekindling their hearts and walking by their side (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35).

176. The risk of becoming enclosed in an elitist and judgemental group was already a major temptation in the circle of Jesus’ disciples. For this reason, the Lord praises the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman who, although she did not belong to the chosen people, manifested her great faith (cf. *Mt* 15:22-28); he harshly reproaches the disciples who wanted fire to rain on the Samaritans who do not welcome his passing (cf. *Lk* 9:51-55); he declares that belonging to the chosen people and compliance with the law do not automatically ensure salvation (cf. *Lk* 18:10-14); he shows that the experience of distance can be the premise to a renewed communion, and that life in the house of the Father can be an experience that makes people unable to love (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32). Therefore, while Peter denies his beloved Master thrice and Judas betrays him, the Roman centurion is the first to recognize him as the Son of God (cf. *Mk* 15:39). The Christian community is called to abandon the misplaced belief of “seeing” with their own eyes (cf. *Jn* 9:41) and judging with different criteria from those that originate from God.

177. As the DP already mentioned, «in contrast with situations in the past, the Church needs to grow accustomed to the fact that the ways of approaching the faith are less standardized, and therefore she must become more attentive to the individuality of each person» (DP III, 4). Hence, Christian communities are based on different levels of membership, they gratefully recognize each member’s tiny steps forward and they try to enhance the seed of grace that is present in everyone, offering respect, friendship and accompaniment to all, since «a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties» (EG 44; AL 305). Young people themselves, with their fragmented life experiences and uncertain paths of faith, help the Church acquire her natural polyhedral shape (cf. EG 236).

A Family Experience of the Church

178. One of the most fruitful outcomes of the renewed pastoral attention to the family that has emerged over the last few years has been the rediscovery of the Church’s family-oriented nature. The statement that the Church and parishes are a «family of families» (cf. AL 87.202) is powerful and guides us in understanding her form. This image refers to relational styles, where the family becomes the matrix for the Church’s own experience; to formative models of a spiritual nature that involve affections, generate ties and convert the heart; to educational pathways that engage people in the difficult and exciting art of accompanying young generations and families themselves; to the manner of celebrations, because in the liturgy the style of a Church that is summoned by God to be His family is manifested. Many BC would like to overcome the difficulties in living meaningful relationships in Christian communities and ask the Synod to provide concrete elements in this direction. One BC

states that «in the midst of their noisy and chaotic lives, many young people are asking the Church to be a spiritual home». Helping young people unify their lives, constantly threatened by uncertainty, fragmentation and fragility, is decisive nowadays. To many young people who live in fragile or broken families, it is important to perceive the Church as a true family that is able to “adopt” them as her own children.

Pastoral Care for Younger Generations

179. Many BC have clearly felt the intimate connection between evangelization and education, that has been effectively developed by many male and female Institutes of consecrated life that, for centuries, have pursued this twofold goal and have provided the entire Church with a fruitful experience of youth pastoral care that is characterized by a major focus on educational pathways. Several replies from BC warn that various Christian communities, and many pastors, are lacking in educational sensitivity. One BC states that, in many situations, «young people are not close to the hearts of many Bishops, priests and religious». Instead, when a community of believers is aware of its educational task and becomes passionate about it, it is able to release spiritual and material powers that generate a true “educational love”, whereby unexpected energy and passion are dedicated to young generations.

180. Oratories and similar pastoral activities deserve special mention; there, the Church proactively offers an experience that, in various contexts, as one BC puts it, is «the specific care of a Christian community for young generations. Its instruments are extremely varied and involve the creativity of an educational community that knows how to serve, has an outward-looking view of reality and knows how to rely on the Holy Spirit to act in a prophetic way». Where oratories are present, young generations are not forgotten and take on a central and active role in Christian communities. Some BC are expecting the Synod to relaunch this experience.

The Family, A Key Player in Education

181. Regarding the connection between youth pastoral care and families, it will be important for the Synod to explore Chapter VII of *Amoris Laetitia*, dedicated to the education of children, which deserves greater pastoral attention. Obviously, «the family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom » (AL 274). Young people themselves, during the Pre-synodal Meeting, clearly stated that amongst the places that help them develop their personality, families stand out (cf. PM 1). Various BC realized that investing energies to form good families does not mean taking anything away from the care of young people. Therefore, the preference and engagement for young people is called to open itself decisively to the pastoral care of families.

182. Many BC are asking the Synod to explore the indispensable role of families as pastoral agents, who actively take part in their children’s accompaniment and vocational discernment. Many others are asking for help to develop the accompaniment of young people during the period of betrothal, when they are preparing for marriage and also after the celebration of the sacrament. Data provided by BC reveal a conflicting landscape when it comes to the role of families in relation to the Synod’s theme. In the most secularized countries, generally speaking, as one BC puts it, «most Catholic families are not “actively” or “intentionally” involved in their children’s vocational discernment, and some are actively against it». Instead, in other contexts where the communal dimension of faith is more lively, families play a dynamic and proactive role.

Listening and Dialogue with the Lord

183. Many BC, in presenting their “best practices”, emphasized listening and dialogue with God: retreat days, spiritual exercises, times to unplug from our daily routine, national and diocesan pilgrimages, shared experiences of prayer. Shrines, centers of spirituality and houses for Spiritual Exercises, that are more keen on welcoming and accompanying young people, are particularly popular in many parts of the world. One BC states: «We know that success does not come from us but from God, and this is why we try to show young people that prayer is a lever that changes the world». At a time of confusion, many young people realize that only prayer, silence and contemplation provide the right “horizon of transcendence” in which they can make true choices. They feel they can take truthful stances only before God and state that «silence is where we can hear the voice of God and discern His will for us» (PM 15).

184. In prayer, which sometimes can be an experience of “spiritual combat” (cf. GE 159-165), we finetune our sensitivity to the Spirit, learn the ability to understand the signs of the times and draw strength to take action to make the Gospel become incarnate again today. When we take care of our spiritual life, we savor faith as a joyful personal relationship with Jesus and a gift for which we should be grateful to Him. It is not by chance that contemplative life is admired and valued by young people. Hence, it is obvious that the spiritual quality of community life provides great opportunities to bring young people closer to faith and to the Church, and to accompany them in their vocational discernment.

At the School of God’s Word

185. The pastoral experiences with the greatest evangelizing and educational impact, presented by many BC, put at the center interaction with the power of the Word of God, in relation to vocational discernment: *Lectio divina*, schools of the Word, biblical catecheses, insight into the lives of the young people found in the Bible, using digital instruments to facilitate access to the Word of God: these are all successful practices with the young. For many BC, the renewal of pastoral care has to have a biblical dimension, and this is why they are asking the Synod for reflection and proposals. In areas where other Churches or Christian communities are present, various BC highlight the Bible’s ecumenical value, that can lead to significant convergences and shared pastoral projects.

186. Benedict XVI, as one of the fruits of the Synod on the Word of God, already recommended to the entire Church to increase the “biblical apostolate”, not alongside other forms of pastoral work, but as *a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work*» (VD 73). After having stated that, «Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path» (Ps 119:105), the psalmist wonders: «How shall the young remain sinless? By obeying your word» (Ps 119:9).

The Enjoyment and Beauty of the Liturgy

187. One BC argues that young people «do not come to Church to find something they can get elsewhere, but are looking for a true and even radical religious experience». Many answers to the questionnaire show that young people are sensitive to the quality of the liturgy. In a provocative way, the PM states that «Christians profess a living God, but some attend Masses or belong to communities which seem dead» (PM 7). Regarding the language and quality of homilies, one BC points out that «young people do not feel in tune with the Church», and adds: «It seems as if we do not understand young people’s vocabulary and, therefore, also their needs». Valuable indications on this point can be found in EG 135-144.

188. Considering that «faith itself possesses a sacramental structure» (LF 40), some BC are asking that the genetic bond between faith, sacraments and liturgy be developed further in planning pathways for youth pastoral care, starting from the centrality of the Eucharist, «which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life» (LG 11) and «the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel» (PO 5). Various BC observe that, wherever the liturgy and the *ars celebrandi* are well crafted, there is always a significant presence of active and engaged young people. Considering that young people are more sensitive to experiences rather than concepts, and to relationships rather than notions, some BC mention that eucharistic celebrations and other ceremonies – which are often considered as points of arrival – can provide a place and opportunity for a renewed initial proclamation to young people. BC in some countries testify to the effectiveness of the “pastoral care of altar servers”, for young people to savor the spirit of the liturgy; however, we must also think about how to provide an adequate liturgical formation for all young people.

189. The theme of popular piety is also worth mentioning which, in various contexts, provides young people with a preferred access to faith, both because it is linked to local culture and traditions, and also because it enhances the language of our body and affections, which are elements that sometimes have a hard time finding their way into the liturgy.

Nourishing Faith through Catechesis

190. Setting out from the Synod theme, several BC wondered about the catechetical paths that are in place in Christian communities. Catechesis does not always enjoy a good reputation among young people, because it reminds many of them of a «a compulsory and unchosen path in their childhood» (OLQ). Bearing in mind the necessary and natural continuity with the pastoral care of adolescents and young adults, some BC are asking to reconsider the overall forms of catechetical offerings, reviewing their validity for new generations.

191. One DV invites us to avoid the opposition between experience- and content-based catechesis, reminding us that faith experience is already an inquiring openness to truth and that the journey to internalize faith contents leads to a vital encounter with Christ. In this reciprocal dynamic, the ecclesial community plays an essential role of mediation.

192. Some BC, and young people themselves, recommend following the “path of beauty” in the catechesis, by relying on the Church’s immense artistic and cultural heritage, on genuine contact with God’s creation and on the appeal of the Church’s liturgy in all its forms and rites. There are some successful experiences of catechesis with young people. Usually, they are presented as experiential journeys of living encounter with Christ, that becomes a source of dynamic unity between the truth of the Gospel and one’s own life experience. In this way, the conditions are established for the development of a powerful faith, that leads to missionary engagement.

193. In some contexts, catechesis takes place in schools and therefore the teaching of religion is very important for young people’s vocational growth. All this is an invitation to the Synod to think about the relationship between schools and Christian communities as educational alliances.

Accompanying Young People Towards the Free Gift of Self

194. Many experiences presented in the final part of the DP questionnaire, refer to practices in which young people are accompanied within the framework of a “faith in action”, that is achieved in the service of charity. A Church that serves is a mature Church that attracts young people, because it testifies to her vocation to imitate Christ who «though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor» (2Cor 8,9). In the responses of many BC, the connection that was evoked in various DP paragraphs between experience of selfless service and vocational discernment was well understood and developed. Young people themselves mention that «years of service within movements and charities give young people an experience of mission and a space to discern» (PM 15). The OLQ includes many testimonies of young people who have rediscovered their life of faith thanks to experiences of service and in contact with the “Church that serves”. On the other hand, the Church will be able to renew her dynamisms of service by addressing the demands of young people who are pushing for a transparent, disinterested style. In a nutshell, one DV calls for the promotion of a renewed “culture of gratuitousness”.

195. To many young people, “international volunteer work” is a way to reconcile their sensitivity to solidarity with their wish to travel and discover other cultures and unknown worlds: it is also an opportunity of encounter and collaboration with young people who are distant from the Church or non-believers. “Missionary volunteer work”, cherished and developed in many countries and by several male and female institutes of consecrated life, is a particular gift that the Church can offer to all young people: preparing and accompanying a missionary experience, as well as thinking about its vocational implications, is a perfect occasion for young people’s vocational discernment.

An Open and Welcoming Community for All

196. The Pre-synodal Meeting was attended not only by young Catholics, but also by young people from other Christian denominations and even by non-believers. This was a sign that young people received with gratitude, because it showed them the face of a welcoming and inclusive Church, that is able to recognize the richness and contribution that can come from everyone for the good of all. Knowing that true faith cannot generate an arrogant attitude towards other people, the Lord’s disciples are called to appreciate all the germs of good that are found in every person and in every situation. The humility of faith helps the community of believers to let themselves be instructed also by people of different status and culture, in a framework of mutual benefit where we give and receive.

197. For example, during the IS some experts pointed out how mass migration can become an opportunity for intercultural dialogue and for the renewal of Christian communities that are at risk of becoming too inward-looking. Some LGBT youths, through various contributions that were received by the General Secretariat of the Synod, wish to «benefit from greater closeness» and experience greater care by the Church, while some BC ask themselves what to suggest «to young people who decide to create homosexual instead of heterosexual couples and, above all, would like to be close to the Church».

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, which in some countries appears to be a real priority for young people, begins and thrives in a climate of mutual esteem and natural openness on the part of a community that participates with «gentleness and reverence, with a clear conscience» (1Pt 3:16). Also, dialogue with non-believers and the secular world in general is decisive for young people in certain contexts, especially in the academic and cultural domain, where sometimes they feel discriminated against because of their faith: initiatives like the lecture series for non-believers entitled “la Cattedra dei non credenti” and the “Courtyard of the Gentiles” are very interesting to young generations, because they help them integrate their faith in the world they live in, and also to acquire an open method of dialogue where different views are fruitfully discussed.

Chapter IV The Animation and Organization of Pastoral Care

198. In order to accompany young people in their vocational discernment, not only are competent persons needed, but also adequate animation structures that are not just effective and efficient, but are also attractive and radiant due to the relational style and fraternal dynamics they generate. Some BC feel the need for an “institutional conversion”. While respecting and integrating our legitimate differences, we recognize communion as the preferred way for the mission, without which it would be impossible to both educate and evangelize. Therefore, verifying not only “what” we are doing for young people, but also “how” we are doing it, is becoming increasingly important.

Youth Protagonism

199. One young man spoke for many others when he replied as follows to the OLQ: «We want to be involved, appreciated, feel co-responsible for what is being done». As baptized persons, young people too are called to be “missionary disciples”, and great strides have been made in this direction (cf. EG 106). In the wake of the Council document *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Saint John Paul II stated that young people «must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the Church: in fact, young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as *leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society*» (CL 46). To many BC, this is the crucial point of youth pastoral care: moving with courage from pastoral care “for young people” to pastoral care “with young people”.

Benedict XVI often urged the young to be the protagonists of the mission: «Dear young people, you are the first missionaries among your contemporaries!» (*Message for the 28th World Youth Day 2013*, 18 October 2012), since «the best way to evangelize a young person is to get to him/her through another young person» (OLQ). Preferred domains for youth protagonism will have to be identified. Some BC decry the situation of “clericalism” as an insurmountable problem at times: one BC states that «many of our young people believe that the Church consists only of the ordained ministers and consecrated persons who represent her». Eradicating this vision is still a goal that many BC hope to reach, thanks to a clear stance taken by the Synod on this point.

The Church in the Local Communities

200. The entire people of God is an agent of the Christian mission (cf. EG 120) and this work unfolds with different responsibilities and at various animation levels.

The successor of Peter constantly manifests his preference for young people, which is something they recognize and appreciate. His being the center of the visible unity of the Church, and his universal media impact, place him in a leadership position that recognizes and encourages the contribution of all charisms and institutions at the service of young generations.

Many BC provide a central service dedicated to youth pastoral care, but the preferred agent is still the particular Church, over which the Bishop presides and which he animates with his co-workers, fostering synergies and enhancing positive experiences of communion among all those who work for the good of young people. While many BC state that high quality services are being provided in this pastoral domain, in some parts of the world there is a lot of improvisation and little organization.

From the standpoint of local communities, the parish – the Church in the midst of homes – is the customary place for pastoral care and its validity has been clearly reiterated in our age (cf. EG 28). One young man states in the OLQ that «wherever priests are free from financial and organizational duties, they are able focus on pastoral and sacramental work that affects people’s lives». Some BC mention the vitality of parishes, but others believe they do not seem to be adequate places for young people, who turn to different Church experiences that are more in tune with their mobility, life places and spiritual search.

The Contribution of Consecrated Life

201. A large number of BC express their heartfelt gratitude for the many dedicated consecrated persons in their local area who know how to “educate by evangelizing and evangelize by educating” in many forms and with different styles. Nowadays, consecrated persons are going through a challenging phase: in some countries, especially in the South, there is an expansion and vitality that bodes well for the future; in more secularized areas, there is a remarkable drop in numbers and also an identity crisis, caused by the fact that contemporary society seems to have no more need for consecrated persons. Some BC mention that consecrated life is a specific place where the “feminine genius” can be expressed. At times, there is an ecclesial inability to recognize, encourage and give space to this unique creativity that is so necessary nowadays, and to refrain from the instrumental use of the various charisms: this implies a bold and necessary “cultural conversion” on the part of the Church.

202. Believing that young people are a real resource for the “rejuvenation” of ecclesial dynamisms, the USG wonders: «Are we truly sensitive to young people? Do we understand their needs and expectations? Can we understand their need to have meaningful experiences? Are we able to bridge the distance that separates us from their world?». Wherever listening, hospitality and testimony are offered to young people in a creative and dynamic way, fruitful connections and friendships develop. The USG would like to see the establishment of a “Permanent Observer” on young people at the universal Church level.

Associations and Movements

203. Many young people live and rediscover their faith through their determined and active membership in movements and associations that provide them with an intense fraternal life, challenging journeys of spirituality, experiences of service, adequate space for accompaniment and competent people for discernment. This is why their presence is usually appreciated. When the Church has a hard time maintaining a visible and a meaningful presence, movements preserve a vital dynamism and play an important role; they are a positive presence also in other places: their communal style and spirit of prayer, the enhancement of the Word of God and the service to the poorest, their joyful membership and the re-evaluation of the bodily and emotional spheres, their active involvement and the push towards protagonism are some of the undoubtedly interesting elements that explain their great success among young people. Some BC, while recognizing the fruitfulness of this situation, are asking the Synod to give some thought to it and provide concrete guidance to overcome the temptation some movements and associations have to become self-referential, since it is necessary «to ensure that these associations actively participate in the Church’s overall pastoral efforts» (EG 105). Along these lines, it would be appropriate to enhance the criteria provided by IE 18.

Civil, Social and Religious Networking and Collaboration

204. The Church is called to decisively engage with all the people who have the responsibility to educate the young in the civil and social domain. The current concern about the “educational emergency” is shared by both the Church and civil society and requires joint efforts in order to restore an alliance in the adult world. “Networking” is one of the key activities that needs to be developed in the third millennium. In a world in which the Church is increasingly realizing that she is not the only agent in society and that she is a “minority with a contribution to make”, the art of collaboration must be learned, as well as the ability to develop relationships for the sake of a common goal. Far from thinking that engaging in dialogue with various social and civil entities means losing our identity, some BC argue that the capacity to join forces and plan paths of renewal with others helps the Church acquire a true “outgoing” dynamism.

205. Not only at civil and social level, but also in the ecumenical and interreligious domain, some BC show that pursuing shared goals in various fields – e.g., human rights, environmental protection, opposition to any kind of violence and abuse against children, respect for religious freedom – helps the various players open up, get to know each other, appreciate each other and work together.

Pastoral Planning

206. Many BC complain about disorganization, improvisation and repetitiveness across the board. During the PM, participants said that «sometimes, in the Church, it is hard to overcome the logic of “it has always been done this way”» (PM 1). Sometimes the unpreparedness of some pastors is highlighted, who do not feel they are up to the complicated challenges of our time and thus risk retreating into obsolete ecclesiological, liturgical and cultural views. One BC states that «often the mindset to plan pathways is not there» and, to many others, it would be useful to find out how to accompany Dioceses in this field since nowadays, as one BC argues, «the need for greater coordination, dialogue, planning and also study is emerging, in relation to youth vocational pastoral care». Other BC hint at a kind of conflict between operational planning and spiritual discernment. As a matter of fact, a good pastoral project should be the ripe fruit of a true journey of discernment in the Spirit, that brings all to go deeper. Each member of the community is called to grow in his or her listening capacity and in the art of joining forces for planning to become a transformative process for all members.

The Relationship Between Extraordinary Events and Everyday Life

207. Several BC shared their thoughts on the relationship between certain “major events” of youth pastoral care – WYD first and foremost, but also international, continental, national and diocesan youth rallies – and the ordinary life of faith of young people and Christian communities. WYD is greatly appreciated because, as one BC puts it, «it provides excellent opportunities for pilgrimages, cultural exchanges and the forging of friendships in local and international contexts». A number of BC, however, are calling for WYD to be reassessed and relaunched: some think that it is an excessively elitist experience, others would like it to be more interactive, open and based on dialogue.

208. During the PM, young people asked themselves how to «bridge the gap between larger Church events and the parish » (PM 14). Although major events play a remarkable role for many young people, often times it is hard to funnel the enthusiasm that comes from participating in such initiatives into our everyday life. Major events risk becoming occasions to escape our ordinary life

of faith. One BC states, on this point, that «international events can become part of ordinary youth pastoral care, and not just be unique events, if the relationship between such events becomes clearer and the underlying themes are translated into reflections and practices in our personal and communal everyday life». Some BC warn about the illusion whereby extraordinary events might provide a solution for young people's journey of faith and Christian life: in this respect, attention to virtuous processes, to educational pathways and faith itineraries appear to be quite necessary. Because, as one BC puts it, «the best way to proclaim the Gospel in our time and age is to experience it every day in a simple and wise manner», thus showing that it is the salt, light and leaven of each day.

Towards an Integrated Pastoral Care

209. One BC, along with many others, made the following statement on the relationship between youth and vocational pastoral care: «Even though there have been significant experiences in this field, there is a strong need to give a specific structure to youth and vocational pastoral care. Furthermore, we need to work together with family, educational, cultural and social pastoral care in order to build a personalized life plan for every baptized person». A true search for greater coordination, synergy and integration between different pastoral care domains, that share the goal of helping young people achieve «the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ» (*Eph 4:13*), is emerging everywhere. Faced with a proliferation of «offices» that leads to planning and operational fragmentation, difficulty in clarifying respective responsibilities and managing different relational levels, the idea of an «integrated pastoral care», that is focused on the centrality of recipients, to some BC seems to be a direction to be confirmed and enhanced.

210. To many, the linchpin to achieve this integrated unity is the vocational horizon of existence, since «the vocational dimension of youth pastoral care is not something that should be suggested only at the end of the whole process or to a group that is particularly sensitive to a specific vocational call, but it must be proposed constantly throughout the whole process of evangelization and of education in the faith of adolescents and of young people» (Francis, *Message to the participants in the International Congress «Vocational Pastoral and Consecrated Life: Horizons and Hopes»*, 25 November 2017).

Seminaries and Houses of Formation

211. Young candidates for the ordained ministry and consecrated life live in the same way as other young people: they share the same resources and fragilities as their peers, depending on the Continent and country they live in. Therefore, it is necessary to offer appropriate indications for the various local situations. Generally speaking, regarding vocational discernment, some BC identify two major problems: narcissism, whereby individuals only worry about their needs, and the tendency of viewing vocation only as self-fulfillment. Both problems share a common root, which is a potentially pathological self-centeredness. Two dangers that also affect formation pathways are *individualism*, that is centered on the autonomous individual, and excludes the recognition of, gratitude for and cooperation with God's action; and *inwardness*, that encloses the person in a virtual world and fake interiority, where the need to deal with others and the community is excluded (cf. DP and GE 35-62). We need to devise formative pathways that are able to unleash the generosity of young people in formation, making them increasingly aware that they are at the service of the people of God. Quality formation teams must be ensured, that are able to interact with the actual requirements of contemporary young people and with their need for spirituality and radicality. The way time, space and activities are organized in houses of formation should make a true experience of common and fraternal life possible.

CONCLUSION

The Universal Vocation to Holiness

212. The concise and unifying hallmark of Christian life is holiness, because «the Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life» (LG 40). Holiness encompasses every other dimension of believers' lives and of ecclesial communion from a qualitative and global standpoint, brought to fullness according to each person's talents and possibilities. For this reason, Saint John Paul II pointed to holiness at the beginning of the third millennium as the «high standard of ordinary Christian living» (NMI 31). References to this theme in GE provide an insight into holiness in our contemporary world, and remind us all of the will of our Lord Jesus who «wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence» (GE 1). Of course, everything plays out in the practice of our everyday life: «The powerful witness of the saints is revealed in their lives, shaped by the Beatitudes and the criterion of the final judgement. Jesus' words are few and straightforward, yet practical and valid for everyone, for Christianity is meant above all to be put into practice» (GE 109).

Youth, A Time for Holiness

213. We believe that «holiness is the most attractive face of the Church» (GE 9) and before we can suggest it to young people, we are called to experience it as witnesses, thus becoming a «likeable» community, as the Acts of the Apostles shows us on various occasions (cf. GE 93). Accompanying young people on the ways of holiness becomes relevant only if we are consistent in the first place. St. Ambrose used to say that «every age is mature for Christ» (*De Virginitate*, 40), then this must also be true for youth! In the holiness of many young people, the Church recognizes God's grace that is prior to the stories of each individual and accompanies them, as well as the educational value of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, the fruitfulness of shared paths in faith and love, and the prophetic energy of these «champions», who often sealed their being disciples of Christ and missionaries of the Gospel with their blood. If it is true, as many young people stated during the Pre-synodal Meeting, that a true testimony is the language that is in highest demand, the life of young saints is the true word of the Church, and the invitation to embrace a holy life is the most necessary call for young people today. A true spiritual dynamism and a fruitful pedagogy of holiness do not disappoint young people's deepest ambitions: i.e. their need for life, love, expansion, joy, freedom, future and also for mercy and reconciliation. To many BC, presenting holiness as a horizon of meaning that is accessible to all young people and achievable in our ordinary life is still a great challenge.

Young Saints and Saints' Youth

214. Jesus invites every disciple to give their entire lives, without expecting any human advantage or benefit. Saints welcome this demanding request and meekly and humbly start following the crucified and risen Christ. The Church gazes at the sky of holiness and sees an increasingly large and bright constellation of young men and women, adolescents and young saints and blessed who, ever since the time of the first Christian communities, have endured until our time. When the Church invokes them as our patrons, she indicates them to young people as references for their existence. Various BC are asking to highlight the value of youth holiness for education purposes, and young people themselves admit that they «are more receptive to a «literature of life» than an abstract theological discourse» (PM, *Part II, Introduction*). Since young people say that «the stories

of the Saints are still relevant to us» (PM 15), then it is important to present them in a way that is appropriate to their age and situation.

A special place belongs to the Mother of our Lord, who lived as the first disciple of her beloved Son and is a model of holiness for all believers. In her capacity to treasure and ponder the Word in her heart (cf. *Lk 2:19-51*), Mary is a mother and teacher of discernment for the entire Church.

It is also worth mentioning that, alongside “young Saints”, we also need to present “Saints’ youth” to young people. Actually, all Saints lived through their youth and it would be useful to show young people today how Saints lived that time in their lives. In this way, many difficult and hard situations young people go through could be accounted for, where God is always present and mysteriously active nonetheless. Showing that His grace is at work through the winding paths of a holiness that is built patiently and grows in time, through many unexpected ways, can help all young people, without exception, to cherish the hope of a holiness that is always attainable.

PRAYER FOR THE SYNOD

Lord Jesus,

in journeying towards the Synod,

your Church turns her attention to all the young people in the world.

We pray that they might boldly

take charge of their lives,

aim for the most beautiful and profound things of life

and always keep their hearts unencumbered.

Accompanied by wise and generous guides,

help them respond to the call

you make to each of them,

to realize a proper plan of life

and achieve happiness.

Keep their hearts open to dreaming great dreams

and make them concerned for the good of others.

Like the Beloved Disciple,

may they stand at the foot of the Cross,

to receive your Mother as a gift from You.

May they be witnesses to your Resurrection

and be aware that you are at their side

as they joyously proclaim you as Lord.

Amen.

(Pope Francis)