

Contribution from the Youth Commission of the Council of the European Bishops' Conferences meeting in Santiago de Compostela (19-22 Sep. 2024) for the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2-27 Oct. 2024).

During the work, which dealt with the theme “Strong young people rejoicing in Hope, Witnesses of Christ in Europe today,” the participants in the meeting, together with a qualified group of young people representing the Catholic Churches of Europe, turned their eyes to the upcoming Assembly of the Synod of Bishops with the desire to contribute to the work by giving voice to the commitment and hopes of the youth throughout Europe. Accepting the Holy Father's invitation to the whole Church in the Jubilee Bull of Indiction, we feel encouraged to walk with young people and share their search for meaning, spirituality and truth. We are certain that the Jubilee will “inspire the Church to make greater efforts to reach out to them,” as Pope Francis states: “With renewed passion, let us demonstrate care and concern for adolescents, students and young couples, the rising generation. Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!” (*Spes non confundit*, no. 12).

Having experienced how rich and fruitful the contribution of young people has been, we believe it is important that all the work done before and during the 2018 Synod, which addressed the theme “*Youth, faith and vocational discernment*” along with the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* (Loreto, 25 March 2019), be taken up and enhanced, in order to recognise and promote young people as the protagonists in the life of the Church and in the development of society, as called for by Pope Francis in the Message for the 5th anniversary of the Exhortation: “Today, once again, I ask you: make your voices heard! Proclaim, not so much in words but by your life and your heart, the truth that Christ is alive! And in this way, help the whole Church to get up and set out ever anew to bring his message to the entire world.” (25 March 2024).

It is a lively hope that in the work of the Synod of Bishops adequate attention will be given to the reality of young people repeatedly mentioned in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The references to young people that we find when talking about Christian initiation (n. 26), mutual caring relationships between generations (n. 55), digital innovations (nos. 56; 85) and presence in participatory bodies (n. 93) constitute important indications that deserve to be deepened and relaunched in a Church with a synodal face. Space must be made for young people, their dynamism and their ability to fight against injustice and discrimination. More than talking with young people about God, it is necessary to facilitate an experience of God, to live the Faith and to witness it, with deep and engaging experiences, such as WYD and so many other pastoral proposals, ordinary and extraordinary, experiences that are flourishing in across Europe today.

Starting from the outline of the *Instrumentum Laboris* which, after recalling the foundations of synodality, identifies three areas - relationships, paths and places - we propose some reflections with the desire to contribute to the work of the Synod and to encourage a broader reflection on the world of youth.

Foundations of synodality

- Young people feel the need to create a more united world; a world of peace and justice. With their enthusiasm and courage, they can make an extraordinary contribution to the growth of synodality in the Church and throughout society. To achieve an experience of greater synodality, different religious sensitivities and traditions must be valued in Europe by breathing with the two lungs: western and eastern;
- In a logic of equality, reciprocity and complementarity, special attention should be given to young men and women (Cf. no. 16). This will result in a great contribution that will help the whole ecclesial community grow in participation and co-responsibility, especially where innovative and creative thinking is needed;
- With their skills and sensitivity, young people can help the whole community to develop a true “*culture of synodality*” (as called for in No. 20) that goes beyond the perimeter of the ecclesial community so as to be the leaven of civil life itself;

Concerning relationships

- On the educational level, it is necessary to place young people in a network of positive and constructive relationships, where they can be helped to grow thanks to a real union between family, school, parish, and the various and particular other forms of social formation. Effective education and the dimension of working life also call for particular attention today.
- Many factors today contribute to make the new generations fragile, both mentally and psychologically. It is important to care for relationships, to offer spiritual direction and, when necessary, qualified psychological support. This is also important in the accompaniment of young people in their vocational discernment;
- By making room for young people, new avenues of evangelisation can be explored, also thanks in part to the positive experiences of the catechumenate of children, youth, and adults that have been initiated in many countries;
- Young people's sensitivity to different languages, art and communication can be of great help in renewing the liturgical experience and restoring the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, including by promoting the wealth of charisms and ministries present in the ecclesial community with the goal of a true exchange of gifts;

Concerning the pathways

- The desire for formation to face the challenges of the present time is strong on the part of young people. This needs to be an integral formation that, both in content and in language, can intercept the sensitivity of the new generations. There is a need to encourage young people to make challenging choices in their formation and faith journey, avoiding discouraging them as adults and pastors may sometimes do;

- An ecclesial community that knows how to look to the future will not be able to make a serious pastoral discernment without the unique contribution of young believers, because within the people of God they are the bearers of a distinctive and important *sensus fidei*;
- The inclusion of young people in processes of ecclesial discernment as well as in participatory and decision-making bodies is essential. Their aptitude for dialogue, as well as their enthusiasm and joy, makes young people the most effective promoters of encounter and interaction also in the field of ecumenism, interreligious dialogue as well as with non-believers;

Concerning the places

- In light of the profound changes we are witnessing in terms of migration and socio-economic scenarios, young people constitute one of the most implicated groups. At the same time, with their values and ideals, they are the architects of visions and processes that can generate new social and cultural arrangements, especially in the face of the environmental crisis, toward which they show particular concern;
- As humanity measures itself against the new digital developments and Artificial Intelligence, the contribution of the young – digital natives – appears crucial, also from an intergenerational perspective. Although they are not without risks and uncertainties, especially for mental health. These are real world realities, which offer great opportunities for witnessing the Faith;
- There are many areas and places that are habitual spaces of life or expression for young people (within music, art, entertainment, sports, digital culture, leisure, volunteer work...). In all these spheres, young people, in harmonious collaboration with the whole Church body, can carry out an important missionary activity.

Grateful for the attention, we assure our spiritual closeness and prayers as we ask for the intercession of the Patron Saints of Europe that the Holy Spirit will enlighten and guide the work of the synodal Assembly.