

**LISTEN, DISCERN, ACCOMPANY,
CHANGE**



70 pages from young people all over the world addressed to the Synod Fathers, whom Pope Francis has asked to reflect on their duty—which is not an optional one—to accompany all youth without exclusion

toward the joy of love, rediscovering on the way how the Church can be guide, light, sun and leaven in today's world. The *Work Instrument* of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (3-28 October 2018) on the theme: "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" was presented to the public by the Vatican Press Office on 19 June 2018.¹

Two teams assisted the Synod's Special Secretaries, Fr. Rossano Sala, sdb, and Father Giacomo Costa, sj, in the collection of data. The responses of the young people to the questionnaire were carefully examined and a transcription of the answers to its free questions filled more than 10 thousand pages!

Renato Cursi, Secretary of the Youth Ministry Dicastery for the Salesians, who coordinated the collection of data from the questionnaires sent in by young people around the world in the first phase of preparation for the Synod, noted that "the data sketch out a profile of young people who do not fall into the standard categories, prejudices and stereotypes that often depict them as 'big babies who are empty and insignificant.' Answers to the questionnaire paint a picture of young people who are insecure, misunderstood and wary, but at the same time thirsty and exigent. They are insecure because they do not feel welcomed by adults, who do not understand what is important to them. They want at their side adults who are authentic and capable of healthy relationships. They want close Christian communities—a coherent Church that is near to them, that welcomes them without judging them, that is

involved and in dialogue with the world regarding 'hot topics' such as homosexuality, same-sex marriage, the role of women, etc. Contemporary young people want to be not only protagonists but participants in life."

The *Work Instrument*,² drawn up according to the discernment method (the essence of the Synod itself and at the same time the work method of its members), is offered as a work tool not only to the bishops who will participate in the Assembly but also to everyone who is sincerely concerned about contemporary youth. The document is divided into three parts, each distinguished by a particular verb:

- *to recognize*: that is, "to participate in God's gaze upon reality, observing the way in which God speaks to us through this";
- *to interpret*: "It is necessary to examine things in depth so as to move toward a biblical and anthropological, theological and ecclesiological, pedagogical and spiritual, level. Good ideas illuminate, clarify, untie knots, help untangle the skein, overcome confusion and resolve fragmentation, accompanying an integral and symphonic vision";
- *to choose*: "to make courageous and far-sighted decisions in light of the path taken; to complete the journey through shared choices that help us in our journey of pastoral and missionary conversion."



The first part of the document takes a broad look at the differences and many commonalities among young people around the world, turning a "magnifying glass" on three specific areas:

¹ The text of the Press Conference of 19 June 2018 can be found on:
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/19/0457/00986.html#sala>
or else downloaded in pdf from:
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/19/0457/00986.pdf>.

² The text of the *Work Instrument* can be downloaded in pdf from:
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/19/0458/00978.pdf>
or else can be consulted on:
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/19/0458/00978.pdf>.

Toward the Synod on Young People

- *the poorest and most abandoned young people*, who are continually rejected by a world that understands itself starting from the paradigm of rejection, of “buy, use, and discard”;
- *the six “anthropological and cultural challenges”* that the Church is called to face today in her pastoral commitment to young people: the anthropological affects of the digital world, which imposes a different understanding of time, space and human relationships; the new understanding of the body, of affectivity and of sexuality; the advent of new cognitive paradigms that convey a different approach to the truth; generalized institutional disappointment in both the civil and the ecclesial spheres; the paralysis in decision-making that imprisons the younger generations in limited and limiting paths; and finally, the nostalgia and spiritual search of young people, who appear less “religious” but more open to authentic experiences of transcendence;
- *listening to what young people want, namely: consistency, authenticity, spirituality; a renewed relational capacity and dynamics of prophetic welcome; and what they are asking for: a vibrant and lively liturgy; disinterested commitment to justice in the world.*

The *Work Instrument* is disturbing in that it calls many things into question, pointing out paths of pastoral conversion so as to define the face of a Church that is regenerative toward youth; that makes discernment its habitual mode of procedure and unmistakable style; that examines itself in the light of the daily lives of young people; that chooses to be where they are, and that above all is very careful not to blame young people for their distance from the Church, as some Episcopal Conferences do, but instead to speak about “a Church that is distant from young people,” a Church that is called to “embark on paths of conversion, without blaming others for her lack of educational impetus and apostolic timidity” (n. 174).

In his letter convoking the Synod on Young People, Pope Francis said he wanted to listen to them because “young people tell the Church how to speak about Jesus today.” Thus on the operative level, the *Work Instrument* urges action that coalesces around certain words:



- *discernment*, as the theme of the Synod and as its method of facing situations—not a sociological analysis of them but with the gaze of a disciple, seeking to identify the footsteps and traces of the Lord’s passing. We must let ourselves be questioned by the restlessness of young people, even when they call into question the praxes of the Church or when their questions concern complex issues like sexuality.
- *accompaniment*: parents, psychologists, teachers, formators, coaches and basically the whole Christian community are all called to accompany youth. Young people themselves suggest the qualities that should characterize persons who provide accompaniment, in order that this service might be effective, starting with the fact that these guides should have come to grips with their own weaknesses and are witnesses to trust and hope, not severe judges or persons who try to impose preconceived models on others.
- *change*: to make choices for change within a horizon of spiritual vitality, from the perspective of being a Church that “goes forth,” unconcerned about being the center; to rethink the vocational picture in its globality since one of the greatest weaknesses of pastoral work today lies in interpreting the word “vocation” too restrictively, that is, applying it only to a call to the priesthood and/or the consecrated life. Instead, to start afresh from educative and pastoral action that prompts the Christian community to re-examine the organization and guidance of its pastoral work to the point of undergoing an “institutional conversion” concerning the way of living and working together.

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