

Presentation of the Preparatory Document of the Synod on “Youth, faith and vocational discernment”

13.01.2017

This morning in the Holy See Press Office a conference was held to present the Preparatory Document for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to be held in October 2018 on the theme “Youth, faith and vocational discernment”. The speakers were Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri and Bishop Fabio Fabene, respectively secretary general and under-secretary of the Synod of Bishops, and the young university students Elvis Do Ceu Nicolaia Do Rosario and Federica Ceci.

“With his words, the Pope wishes to provide a three-dimensional human and ecclesial motivation for the next Synod on youth, ranging from 16 to 29 years of age, aware that youth needs to be adapted to different local circumstances, as shown by the *Preparatory Document*”.

“The document is sent to the Councils of the Hierarchies of the Catholic Oriental Churches, the Episcopal Conferences, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superior Generals, and ‘begins the Synod’s phase of consultation of the entire People of God’, to gather information on the current condition of the young in the variegated contexts in which they live, so as to be able to carry out an adequate discernment with a view to the drafting of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, and is in continuation with the journey the Church is already taking under the guidance of the Magisterium of Pope Francis”, said the cardinal. “The centrality of joy and love, underlined several times in the text, clearly links to *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*. There are also references to *Laudato Si*’, *Lumen Fidei* and the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI”.

“The document is divided into three parts. The first urges listening to reality. The second highlights the importance of discernment in the light of faith in order to make life choices that truly correspond to the will of God and to the good of the person. The third focuses on the pastoral action of the ecclesial community. The evangelical image of the ‘beloved disciple’ introduces the three parts as a brief presentation of the journey”.

“The first chapter, entitled ‘*Young people in today’s world*’, provides useful elements for contextualising the situation of the young in today’s world, considering that the outline provided needs to be adapted to the specific circumstances of each region. The second chapter, the heart of the document, is entitled ‘*Faith, discernment, vocation*’. ... This path is inspired by the three verbs already used in *Evangelii Gaudium*, 51: recognizing (what happens in our inner world), interpreting (what is recognized) and choosing (as the ‘exercise of authentic human freedom and personal responsibility’). It should be clarified that the term ‘vocation’ is to be understood in a broad sense, and relates to the vast range of possibilities of realising one’s life in the joy of love and in the fullness deriving from the gift of oneself to God and to others. It is about finding the concrete form in which this full realisation can take place, ‘through a series of choices, which find expression in the states of life (marriage, ordained ministry, consecrated life, etc.), professions, forms of social and civil commitment, lifestyle, the management of time and money, etc.’. The third chapter, entitled ‘Pastoral Action’, emphasizes the importance for the Church of accompanying young people in welcoming the joy of the Gospel, ‘especially in these times of uncertainty, volatility and insecurity’”.

“Attention is focused on people, places and the tools for this accompaniment. The subjects of pastoral action are the young themselves, both as protagonists and as receivers. The Church asks them to ‘help her in identifying the most effective ways to announce the Good News today’. The places of pastoral action are daily life, activities for the young, the World Youth Days, diocesan events, parishes, oratories, universities, Catholic schools, voluntary work, social activities, centres of spirituality, missionary experiences, pilgrimages, and popular piety. The text also touches on the digital world, which opens up unprecedented opportunities, but also new dangers. The tools

are languages (favouring the most expressive for the young), education, prayer, silence and contemplation”.

“The Questionnaire which follows is an integral part of the document, rather than a simple appendix. This too is divided into three parts. The first relates to the gathering of statistical data. The second is composed of questions. The novelty is constituted by the fact that, along with the general questions proposed to everyone indiscriminately (fifteen in number), there are three specific questions for each geographical area, to which a response is requested only for those who belong to the specified continent. The third part relates to the sharing of practices, according to methods that are clearly expressed. The aim of this third part, also a novelty, is to enrich all the Church by bringing awareness of experiences, often of great interest, that take place in the different regions of the world, so that they may be of help to all”.

“The elements that emerge from the answers will serve for the drafting of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the document handed to the Synod fathers prior to the Assembly”, concluded Cardinal Baldisseri.

Bishop Fabio Fabene illustrated the initiatives planned by the General Secretariat of the Synod, to accompany and support the examination of the *Preparatory Document* in the particular Churches in the five continents.

“Firstly”, he observed, “it is important to involve the young in the preparatory stage of the Synod Assembly because the next Synod wishes not only to ask how to accompany the young in discerning their choice in life in the light of the Gospel, but also to listen to the desires, plans and dreams that the young have for their life, as well as the difficulties they encounter in realizing their plan in the service of society, in which they ask to be active agents”.

In this context, the General Secretariat of the Synod will provide a website to consult the young via a questionnaire on their expectations and their life. “The questions will relate to all young people because, as affirmed in the *Preparatory Document*, God’s plan regards all the young of our time, and they all have the right to be accompanied without exclusion. The answers to the questionnaire will provide the basis for the drafting of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, along with the contributions that will be received from interested bodies. Via the website, young people will also be able to follow the various phases of the preparation of the Synod and the Pope’s interventions regarding the young, and will be able to share reflections and experiences on the theme of the Synod”.

“In the days leading to the next Palm Sunday, from 5 to 8 April, the General Secretariat will participate in the international meeting on the theme ‘From Krakow to Panama: the Synod journeying with the young’, organized by the dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, as always in the period between one WYD and another. On this occasion, the *Preparatory Document* and the dynamic of consultation in the particular Churches will be presented to the heads of Youth Pastoral Care of the Episcopal Conferences. On the night of 7 April, in the Sala Sinopoli of the “Parco della Musica” Auditorium in Rome, there will be a concert by GEN Rosso e Verde, to which all the young will be invited and which will feature interventions from young people from all over the world. The location was not chosen by chance: it is hoped it will be a ‘bridge’ for dialogue between young believers and all their peers. On Saturday 8 April, there will be a prayer vigil in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in preparation for the WYD Mass, which this year will be celebrated in the dioceses. The Liberian Basilica was chosen to emphasize the Marian aspect of the journey towards the 2019 WYD in Panama, as emerges from the themes proposed for the next three years by the aforementioned competent dicastery”.

“In accordance with the first part of the *Preparatory Document*, ‘Young People in today’s world’, it is hoped that a reflection will be promoted on the situation of youth in the contemporary world. Therefore a study seminar is planned for the month of September, to which specialists will be invited from various countries, but which will be open to all those who wish to participate”.

The university students Elvis Do Ceu from Cabo Verde, and the Italian Federica Ceci, both reside in the “San Tommaso Moro” parish in Rome, which as Ceci explained, includes Rome’s “La Sapienza” University, the largest in Europe. As a result, a large number of young people participate in the life of the parish; not only university students, many of whom are foreign, but also many young workers who frequent the area.

“At the moment at which the *Preparatory Document* of the upcoming Synod is presented to all the Churches of the world, we are convinced that the bishops will listen to the young people in their dioceses, even those who live farthest from the ecclesial world but who strongly desire attention and meaningful answers. We are sure that they will be able to ‘waste time’ with us, the young, not only to speak but also to listen to what we have to say, with the aim of constructing together a younger, fresher Church open to comparison and encounter”, they said.

“In addition, as young people who experience every day in our situation the beauty and the freedom of being Christians, we want to speak to the hearts of our peers all over the world, urging them not to close themselves away but instead to welcome the opportunities that the Church offers us with the upcoming Synod assembly”.

“Finally, we wish to launch an appeal to the media: we ask you to dedicate greater space to the world of the young, casting light on many of the positive aspects and not only the elements of weakness and turbulence. Help us, with the instruments you have at your disposal, to become agents not only of a future yet to come, but also and above all a present that already calls to us today to build the civilization of love”.