

# VOICE + VISION

*National Summit for Ministries  
with Youth and Young Adults*

## Pre-Conference Papers



## Young People and the Universal Call to Mission, Holiness, and Apostolate as Missionary Disciples

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Over the last two decades and intensifying greatly this past year, the Church in the United States continues to grapple with scandals involving clergy sexual abuse and financial impropriety as well as issues associated with leadership that is lacking in transparency and accountability. Trust of some Church leaders has become difficult, if not almost impossible, particularly in ministry with young people. Many have called for greater co-responsibility in the Church, but what does this really mean in a hierarchical body? Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* offers an indication of a way forward that is done through youth and young adult ministry. He states:

Youth ministry has to be synodal; it should involve a “journeying together” that values “the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church’s members, through a process of co-responsibility... Motivated by this spirit, we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people and women, consecrated persons, as well as groups, associations and movements. No one should be excluded or exclude themselves.”<sup>1</sup>

The basis of this understanding is not new. It comes directly from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity). Three major and interconnected themes lead to the development of an understanding of co-responsibility in the Church – mission, holiness, and apostolate. All three could have the modifier “catholic” or “universal” placed in front of them. The first two are mentioned so often that sometimes they have lost the power of their meaning. The third, while discussed prior and after the Second Vatican Council and emphasized in the teachings of St. John Paul II, particularly in *Christifideles Laici*, has somewhat fallen out of use but seems to be making a bit of a return, especially among young Catholics.

Mission is rooted in the teaching that the People of God are sharers in the mission of Christ as priest, prophet, and king.<sup>2</sup> Mission is not done alone, it is done in and through the Church, the People of God. The Church goes forth not simply as an institution, but each and every baptized (and particularly baptized and confirmed) person. The Word of God and the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, provide us with what we need, particularly the Mass, from which we are dismissed at the end by being told “Go.”<sup>3</sup> Go do what? Live the mission of Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Christ is Alive (Christus Vivit)*, March 25, 2019, §206 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html)

<sup>2</sup> See Pope Paul VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on The Church (Lumen Gentium)*, November 21, 1964, chapter 2, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) and Pope Paul VI, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem)*, November 18, 1965, §2, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651118\\_apostolicam-actuositatem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), 18.

and his Church, be apostles, or as Pope Francis teaches in *Evangelii Gaudium*, missionary disciples – followers of Christ who are sent into the world.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries', but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples.'<sup>4</sup>

The "encounter with the love of God in Christ Jesus" that transforms one's life is at the center of growth in holiness. Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* clearly articulates this *metanoia* or conversion of heart to Christ: "Being 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."<sup>5</sup> People learn how to live lives of holiness through the example and witness of others, including the communion of saints. The community of faith, the Church, is called to accompany, especially young people, in deepening holiness, particularly in daily life. In *Gaudete et Exultate*, Pope Francis offers some clear guidance:

We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

"Bearing witness" is the apostolate of the baptized. In fact, "through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself ... that they may witness Christ throughout the world."<sup>7</sup> Christ, in and through his Church, therefore, sends forth the baptized as apostles or missionary disciples accompanied by the Holy Spirit to continue his work until he comes again.

An apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. 'For the charity of Christ impels us' (2 Cor. 5:14).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, November 24, 2013 §120, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*, December 25, 2005, §1, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html)

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Rejoice and Be Glad (Gaudete et Exultate)*, March 19, 2018, §14, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20180319\\_gaudete-et-exultate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html)

<sup>7</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, §3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, §6.

Youth and young adult ministries need to review every action, program, and formative experience in light of how it accompanies young people into deeper living of the universal call to mission, holiness, and apostolate so that they can live more fully as apostles or missionary disciples of Christ. One place to start is with programs. Are they forming missionary disciples who are co-responsible for the mission of Christ and the Church or are they simply about how many people come? Pope Francis reminds us of the goal: “Filled with the love of Christ, young people are called to be witnesses of the Gospel wherever they find themselves, by the way they live.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Christus Vivit*, §175.