
WYD: “To invest in young people is to invest in the future of the Church”

“To invest in young people is to invest in the future of the Church. It is about encouraging vocations, and it effectively means the initiation of remote preparation for the families of tomorrow. It is, therefore, a vital task for every local Church and not simply one more activity”: this is the underlying theme of the Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of WYD in the Particular Churches, published on Wednesday by the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life. *“We must have the courage to involve young people and entrust active roles to them. We should include youth from the various pastoral groups present in the diocese as well as those who do not belong to any community, youth group, association or movement”*, is the final appeal, for everyone must feel “specially invited”, including young people who may be looking for their place in the Church and who have not yet found it. The “diocesan/eparchial WYD should be fully experienced as **a moment of celebration for young people and with young people**”, is the declared purpose of the document, so as to “ensure that the younger generations feel that they are at the centre of the Church’s attention and pastoral concern.” “Some young people cannot take part in the international WYDs”, held every three years, “because of their studies, work or financial difficulties.” “It would therefore be good for each particular Church to offer them the possibility, even if at a local level, of a personal experience of a festival of faith’ that can be a powerful occasion for witnessing, communion and prayer similar to the international events. Those global WYDs have profoundly touched the lives of very many young people in every part of the world.” Moreover, when World Youth Day is celebrated at the local level, “it serves to raise awareness among the ecclesial community as a whole ? laity, priests, consecrated persons, families, adults and the elderly – of their mission to transmit the faith to the younger generations.”

“Indeed, young people want to be involved and appreciated, and to feel that they are co-protagonists in the life and mission of the Church”,

reads the text that cites the Synod of Bishops on Young People, with the reminder that the WYD celebrated in each particular Church “has great significance and value, not only for the young people who live in that particular region, but for the entire local ecclesial community.” *The diocesan WYD – which, at the behest of the Pope, starting in 2021 will be held on the Sunday of the Solemnity of Christ the King - “should be part of a broader pastoral journey of which WYD is only one stage.”* It is no coincidence that the Holy Father recommends that “Youth ministry has to be synodal; it should involve journeying together.” **The WYD is first of all “a fest of faith” and a “missionary experience.”** “Missions can be organised in which young people are encouraged to visit people in their homes carrying a message of hope, a word of comfort or simply being willing to listen”, is among the document’s proposals. Moreover, “young people can be harnessed to allow them to lead occasions of public evangelisation with songs, prayer and testimonies. They can go to streets and squares in the city where their peers meet, because young people are the best evangelisers of young people.” “Activities in which young people have an experience of voluntary work, freely given service and self-giving “are also to be encouraged, as on the Sunday before the Solemnity of Christ the King, when the Church – at the behest of Pope Francis - celebrates World Day of the Poor. At the international and local level alike, the WYD can be “an opportunity for vocational discernment” and a “call to holiness,” for it refers to a moment in life marked by demanding choices that “give a decisive direction to a young person’s whole life.”

“The young people of WYD are therefore a pilgrim people. They are not vagabonds who move around aimlessly.”

This is one of the constitutive dimensions of WYD, which, since its inception, “has been a pilgrimage through space and time. Pilgrims have travelled from different cities, countries and continents to the place chosen for the meeting with the Pope and the other young people. The pilgrimage through time has gone from one generation of young people to the next cohort who ‘pick up the baton’, and this has profoundly marked the past thirty-five years in the life of the Church.” The diocesan/eparchial celebration of WYD can propose specific ways for young people to have real pilgrimage experiences. All this is of vital importance at the present time because many young people risk isolating themselves in virtual unreal worlds, far from the dusty roads and streets of the world”, where the desired goal is not reached “with a simple click”, but with “the tenacity and perseverance of body and soul. The hope expressed by the Holy See is for the WYD to be “an experience of universal fraternity”, namely *“an opportunity for young people to meet that is not restricted to just young Catholics.” In order to build a “youth ministry capable of being inclusive, with room for all kinds of young people, to show that we are a Church with open doors.”*

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