

# Arise! Ministry with Young Adults in a Time of Innovation

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*¡Levántate! Pastoral con jóvenes adultos en un tiempo de innovación*

**December 9, 2020.** "Arise and Commit to Changing the World" (extended version)

## Keynote Presentation

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### 1. Introduction: Consciousness, Creativity, and Confidence

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to be with you in this wonderful encounter. I apologize for not speaking directly in English, but I feel more comfortable speaking in Spanish, and you will surely understand me better with the translation than if I try to express myself with my poor English. On the other hand, I know that the American Church is increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic, and there are so many Spanish-speaking Catholics that you must serve as well. Consider my contribution, then, as part of that multicultural environment in which you are immersed.

I am Brazilian, from Rio de Janeiro; and a Schoenstatt priest for almost 20 years. For 16 years, my main work was ministry with young people and, a little over three and a half years ago, I was called by Pope Francis to work in the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, the body of the Holy See also responsible for **service to young people**. In this sense, we are responsible, among other things, for World Youth Day and the accompaniment of ministry with young people throughout the world. That is why I am very happy to participate, for the first time, in a meeting of the Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

I bring greetings of our Prefect, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, an Irishman American and the former Bishop of Dallas, who carries the American Church in his heart.

This meeting invites us to take, with **consciousness, creativity, and confidence**, the ministry you carry out with young adults (young people from ages 18 to 30s). These words have three "C's in English: *consciousness* (or awareness and responsibility), *creativity*, and *confidence* (or trust).

It is time to renew our **consciousness** or awareness of having received from God a mission, a responsibility that is of vital importance to the present and future of the Church and society. Only then can you change the world. Being a pastoral agent in the service of young adults is much more than a "job" or a "choice of surrender or survival," but a vocation, a calling from God. We are not ecclesiastical officials; we are pastors and missionary disciples. The extensive program of this meeting shows that you are taking your mission and your ministry very seriously and consciously.

This meeting also invites us to **creativity** because the originality of the time we live in forces us to "reinvent ourselves," to seek new methods and new forms, and forces us to "innovate," as you are doing – for example – in this totally virtual encounter, which allows, among other things, the ability for me to participate with you at this time.

And **confidence** or trust because our innovative effort is moved, not by simple human plans, but by the grace of God. Only in Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is it possible to innovate and reach the hearts of young adults to change the world in this crucial and difficult time in history.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the current social situation in the United States (and around the world) **severely affected our pastoral work**, and especially the work with young adults. Many universities spent many months – and many still – closed, classes are online, contact is fundamentally virtual, pastoral and liturgical spaces are physically inaccessible. Parishes and young adult ministries have very limited schedules and activities. Many young adults are out of work and suffer the consequences of social isolation, which has clear consequences for their ecclesial participation.

Discouragement and lack of hope can dominate the hearts of young adults, but also their ministers. We all wonder – and this is the main objective of this meeting – what we can do to reach young adults, to listen to them, and to address their needs in the midst of this social and religious crisis, to provide them with the encounter with Christ and His Church.

## **2. "Arise!" The Pope's providential message to young people**

Despite the whole situation of the pandemic, and right in the midst of it, we are invited to draw inspiration from the Synod of Bishops on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment," from Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* and from his message for WYD 2020. The answer to the question of "**what should we do?**" was advanced. "**Arise!**," the Pope had already told us before this health crisis.

We are challenged to "arise" and face this crucial moment in history. "**Arise! Ministry with Young Adults in a Time of Innovation.**" It's the central theme that moves through these days of encounter.

As you know, "**Arise!**" is Pope Francis' **central message** for the upcoming World Youth Days.

**2020:** "Young man, I say to you, arise." (Lk 7:14)

**2021:** "Stand up. I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen!" (cf. Acts 26:16).

**2022** (transferred by 2023): "Mary arose and went with haste." (Lk 1:39)

I would like to draw attention to the fact that these slogans were chosen and announced long before the pandemic (in June 2019). Even the Pope's message for WYD 2020 was written **before the pandemic** and published on March 5, 2020, just days before Italy decreed lockdown and restrictive measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

However, this "Arise!" and the whole message of the Holy Father are absolutely providential. It is the right word for the time of the pandemic and for the post-pandemic. We cannot say that it was a "coincidence" because there are no coincidences for God. It's a real providence! I usually call it "*God-cidence*."

This is the message that the world, especially young adults, needs to hear at this time.

On the path of life, "every time we reach an important milestone," the Pope says in his message, "we are challenged by God and by life to make a new beginning. As young people, you are experts in this!"<sup>1</sup> The **pandemic** is not only an important milestone, but a true "**watershed moment**."

In his most recent book, the Pope affirms that "from this crisis, we can get better or worse. We can go back or create something new. Right now, what we need is the opportunity to change, to make room for that new thing, we need to emerge."<sup>2</sup> He means that, after the pandemic the world will no longer be the same, we will no longer be the same. That's why we're talking about "new reality." The question is whether we will be better or worse. We can't and shouldn't go back to what it was before! This is why we need to "arise," to dare to change, to seize that opportunity, and to look to the future with hope.

This "arise!" must involve creativity, innovation, and "thinking outside the box" to provide adequate pastoral ministry to young adults, who must change the world after the pandemic. Already in *Christus Vivit*, as a result of two years of synodal process, the Holy Father stated that young people "make us see the need for **new styles and new strategies**" (ChV 204). Also quoted in his message for WYD 2020 – which seems to be written with young people in pandemic times in mind: "If you have lost inner vitality, your dreams, your enthusiasm, your optimism, and your generosity, Jesus stands before you as once he stood before the dead son of the widow, and with all the power of his resurrection he urges you: 'Young man, I say to you, arise!' (Lk 7:14)" (ChV 20)

Before we go any further, I would like to emphasize that not only was the Pope's message for WYD fitting, but **the whole synodal path was absolutely providential**. We must think *that never before* in history has the universal Church been so intensely dedicated to young people. It (the universal Church) has never heard so much (from young people) or made such a conscious effort for discerning its mission with young people. The Final Document of the Synod in 2018 and the exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, are the ripe fruit of a long synodal journey, which has not yet ended. **In the midst of the implementation** of the Synod, the coronavirus crisis exploded. With a providential gaze we can say that the Synod on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment" – that the whole synodal path – **was a preparation for this crisis**. If God allowed us to make that path with the young, **we cannot let the crisis make us forget the way**.

In his message for WYD 2020, Pope Francis expressed a wish: "I sincerely hope that the journey bringing us to Lisbon will coincide with a great effort on the part of the entire Church to implement these two documents (that is, the Final Document of the Synod and *Christus Vivit*) and to let them guide the mission of those engaged in the pastoral care of young people."<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Arise because Christ lives and wants you to live! The impulses of *Christus Vivit***

The whole Synod, according to the new Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, have three phases: preparation, realization, and implementation. Working in our dicastery, I had the grace to closely accompany the entire path of the Synod 2018. I was also a Synod Father. In this third phase, that of the implementation of

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. "Message for XXXV World Youth Day," 05 April 2020. In:

[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200211\\_messaggio-giovani\\_2020.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco_20200211_messaggio-giovani_2020.html)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis. *Soñemos juntos: el camino a un futuro mejor. Conversaciones con Austen Ivereigh*. Nueva York et al.: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 4. (Version in English: *Let Us Dream: the path to a better future. Pope Francis in conversation with Austen Ivereigh*. New York et al.: Simon & Schuster, 2020)

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis. "Message for XXXV World Youth Day."

the Synod, to which we are now dedicated, I would like to invite you to **take on the challenges** that Pope Francis proposes to us in the necessary process of **pastoral innovation with young adults**, emphasizing what *Christus Vivit* impels us to do. In fact, I believe that the Synod providentially **gives us the line** of where we should innovate in a post-COVID time.

A few weeks ago, at a meeting for ministries with young people in the Cone-South region of CELAM, I tried to summarize the pastoral implications or challenges of *Christus Vivit* in six areas:<sup>4</sup>

1. A ministry of accompaniment
2. A ministry of the living encounter with Christ and with a young Church
3. A ministry of young adult protagonism: synodal, popular, missionary, and prophetic
4. A ministry with young people in a vocational key
5. A ministry attentive to intergenerational dialogue
6. A ministry of young saints

I do not have here the possibility to develop all these elements, but later I will refer to at least two of them: *accompaniment* and *young adult protagonism*. I would also recommend that you keep in mind the "Ten Points of No Return," highlighted in a recent article by Fr. Rossano Sala, Special Secretary of the 2018 Synod, published in the digital journal *Religions*.<sup>5</sup> We have different ways of presenting synthesis, but I think they are simply different ways of highlighting the same contents.

According to Fr. Sala, who knew, like no other, the synodal path "from within," it is no longer possible to think about pastoral care with youth and young adults without regard to these elements, both individually and together, because they are **the result of a discernment that involved the universal Church** for more than three years. He concludes: "To not start out afresh from here would mean betraying the Church and, in some respects, placing oneself outside of her."<sup>6</sup> The ten points are as follows:

1. *Presence*: The existence of young people is an appeal from God
2. *Frailty*: The young need tenderness and want reconciliation
3. *Searching*: Young people showed they were always open and available
4. *Discernment*: We are all called to examine ourselves
5. *Proclamation*: We are called to share the joy of the gospel
6. *Spirituality*: Young people need to be accompanied towards a solid friendship with Jesus
7. *Family*: Let's move towards a Church with a familiar face and style
8. *Voluntary Work*: The royal way of charity and responsible service
9. *Vocation*: Young people are loved personally and called by God by name
10. *Synodality*: A new and exciting path for the Catholic Church

Fr. Sala explains why the word "**accompaniment**" does not appear among these points: "I am convinced that accompaniment is the theme that runs through the entire synodal journey. That is why I think that each of the ten points (...) speaks about accompaniment from a different point of view."<sup>7</sup> This was also

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. <http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/es/news/2020/le-sfide-pastorali-della-christus-vivit.html>

<sup>5</sup> Rossana Sala. "Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People – Ten Points of No Return." *Religions* 2020, 11(6), 313. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/6/313/htm>

<sup>6</sup> Rosanna Sala. "Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People," 8.

<sup>7</sup> Rosanna Sala. "Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People," 2-3.

the Pope's choice in *Christus Vivit*, because the whole exhortation deals, in different ways, with this crucial theme for the Church today. "Accompaniment is the key word that sums things up and urges us to a new ecclesial style of closeness to younger generations."<sup>8</sup>

In my opinion, **these ten points** (and the whole synodal process), the result of a broad reflection of the universal Church a little before the COVID-19 pandemic, **are the compass** for our pastoral work with young people and young adults in post-pandemic times. Especially since, as Fr. Sala says, "these ten points offer us *an innovative style of Church*, one that keeps together the integrity of the Christian proclamation and the gradual nature of its proposal."<sup>9</sup> They do not reflect an "old style," but rather a "new" and "innovative" style, which is precisely what we are looking for in these meeting days.

#### **4. Arise to walk together! Missionary synodality for future change**

Just to live that newly indicated "innovative" style, I have no doubt that we must seek the answers for the future on the **path made "together," synodally, with young people**. They are the ones who should help us to give answers to the present and future of the post-pandemic. We don't have the answers to future change yet. Personally, I must admit that I have no "easy recipes" to offer you in this reflection. Conversely, not being a young man anymore, I realize that I need to ask *them*, put myself in a *listening* attitude, and let *them* enlighten *me* in this hour of bewilderment, but also filled with hope and commitment for the future.

The young adults "awakened the synodality of the Church" – it was said so many times on the synodal path – and it is *they* now that must "wake *us* up" and help *us* to "arise" as a Church and as a society. We must innovate in our ministries: dreaming, risking, changing the world, becoming what we are as missionary disciples who are passionate about Jesus. How to do this is contained (enclosed), like a sprout, in the experiences we have had and in the results of our synodal paths. The concrete way of doing this in the post-pandemic period is a search we have ahead of us, and we must do this search together, both young adults and older adults, "journeying together."

A few weeks ago, in a meeting with the pastoral leaders of ministries with young people from each of the Episcopal Conferences and main ecclesial movements around the world, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, who was present at the Synod in 2018 as an expert and is a consultant to the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, stated that the COVID crisis highlights the **urgency of synodality**, a concept that was underlined during the Synod 2018 and in *Christus Vivit*. The new Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Mario Grech, states that the "Synodal Church" is a "prophecy for the third millennium", and the pandemic is a *kairós* (a time of grace) to live this synodality, which is a valuable resource to go beyond the pandemic.<sup>10</sup>

It is no coincidence that the Pope has chosen *synodality* as the subject of the next Synod (in 2022).<sup>11</sup> And the importance of this topic was evident during the Synod on young people (in 2018). I recall that "**missionary synodality**" was a great **surprise** during the Synod, not foreseen in the preparatory work (the

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<sup>8</sup> Rosanna Sala. "Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People," 3.

<sup>9</sup> Rosanna Sala. "Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People," 8.

<sup>10</sup> Mario Grech. "A synodal Church: a way of being ecclesial and a prophecy for the third millennium." In:

<http://www.synod.va/content/synod/es/actualidad/una-iglesia-sinodal--un-modo-de-ser-ecclesial-y-una-profecia-para.html>

<sup>11</sup> The theme of the next meeting of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled for October 2022 in Rome, has already been announced: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission."

"overflow" the Pope would say). In his new book, the Pope devotes a large part reflecting on synodality,<sup>12</sup> as a service not only to the Church but to all humanity, "often engaged in crippling disagreements."<sup>13</sup> The objective of synodality is not so much to "forge an agreement, but to recognize, value, and reconcile differences on a higher level where each one can maintain the best of themselves."<sup>14</sup>

**Ministry with young people "has to be synodal"**, says the Pope explains in *Christus Vivit*. "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 (...) In this way, by learning from one another, we can better reflect that wonderful multi-faceted reality that Christ's Church is meant to be. She will be able to attract young people, for her unity is not monolithic, but rather a network of varied gifts that the Spirit ceaselessly pours out upon her, renewing her and lifting her up from her poverty." (ChV 206-207)

I was glad to see that the Church of the United States took this invitation of the Pope to "journey together" seriously. Your "*Journeying Together*" program<sup>15</sup> has initiated an **important and deeply synodal process** of dialogue and encounter focused on the pastoral work with youth and young adults involving each and every one of the different cultural families present in your country.

I was also impressed with the **ethnic and cultural diversity** that is so present in the United States (I was very aware of the Hispanic-Latino community, but not all of these groups including African Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders, European Americans, Native Americans and Alaska Natives, migrants, refugees, and people on the move). And not just this. The **seriousness** with which the Church reflects on pastoral care with each of these groups is admirable in a synodal process of dialogue and integration. I congratulate you and encourage you to continue along this path, which will certainly be very fruitful for the future of the American Church and society.

Francis invites us to embrace a "polyhedric" (or "multifaceted") vision of the Church, "reflecting the confluence of all partialities", each preserving its originality (EG 236). Such a Church is harder to handle, but it is much richer. And so is the Church of the United States, so is the American **people**,<sup>16</sup> tremendously rich for their enormous diversity. I believe that your response to the crisis must come from a greater awareness of belonging to the American people and, at the same time, to your cultures of origin. As Francis says: "To get better out of this crisis we need to regain the knowledge that we have a common destiny as a people. The pandemic reminds us that no one is saved alone."<sup>17</sup>

As you are certainly facing in the experience of "Journeying Together", a **synodal Church** walks with young people in at least two ways that I would like to highlight here: it **accompanies** them in all their needs and gives room as **protagonists** who can commit themselves to a missional way to the change of the world.

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<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis. *Soñemos juntos*, 84-97.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis. *Soñemos juntos*, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> [www.usccb.org/journey2020/](http://www.usccb.org/journey2020/)

<sup>16</sup> It is worth deepening the concept of "people" in the Pope's thinking. He himself explains it well in his book: Pope Francis. *Soñemos juntos*, 101-111.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis. *Let Us Dream*, 111.

I would like to begin with the theme of **accompaniment**, which I consider to be the *fundamental attitude* of pastoral care with youth and young adults. In the reflections of the synodal process, the importance of accompanying young adults was *one of the most present topics*, which always appeared linked to the themes of listening and discernment. Empathetic listening does not abandon the young adult in his or her quest but accompanies them in the process of discerning God's will. This accompaniment is an expression of a **Mother Church**, a home for young people, a manifestation of the universal motherhood of the Church (cf. Final Document Synod 2018, 138).

The accompaniment is an unconditional "being together" but respecting the freedom of the young adult. The family is clearly the first accompanying space, which unfortunately, by various factors, does not always manage to fulfill its mission well. Complementing the family, the Christian community, and, in particular, ministry with young people "can present the ideal of life in Christ" (ChV 242), a pastoral care understood in a vocational key (cf. Final Document Synod 2018, 139-140).

In the Synod, **the cry of the young people** was felt, the young people themselves screamed for accompaniment, **a dedicated accompaniment** by older adults or other more experienced young people there. For the Church, it is "an opportunity, (...) a sacred joy and responsibility to accompany young people on their journey of faith and discernment" (Final Synod Document 2018, 9). In fact, the Pope wants a **ministry of processes** (not of acts or rules), a ministry that knows how to accompany and shows us how to advance a broad approach for each case (because every young person is unique and original) which involves **listening, accompaniment, and discernment**. In other words, the first stage of the process is *listening*, but listening without accompaniment generates disappointment; and *accompaniment* without discernment creates bewilderment. Each phase (step) is important.

I leave you, therefore, with an invitation or a provocation. **If we had to choose one point** from which to start, or reinforce, or a point from which we can "pull up the tablecloth," so that pastoral care with young adults can truly "get up," "rise up," and "resurge" (as meant by the famous "Arise!"), **I would suggest that we put all our strength in accompaniment**: with good formation for those who accompany, giving it time and energy – human, financial and spiritual – so that we can have better conditions of listening, accompanying, and helping young adults in the art of discerning God's will for their lives.

I have read some American surveys conducted at the time of the pandemic and these **statistics** say, very clearly, that young people feel excluded. One in three young people feels *completely alone* most of the time, or that about 40% have *no one to talk to and feel left out*.<sup>18</sup> NPR (National Public Radio) recently published a story titled "Why some young people fear social isolation more than COVID-19."<sup>19</sup> So, we see that we are working more often with young adults who belong to a generation that tends to live in **solitude and isolation**.

In addition, as Francis recalls: "At the Synod, many pointed to the **shortage of qualified people devoted to accompaniment**. Belief in the theological and pastoral value of listening entails rethinking and renewing the ways that priestly ministry is ordinarily exercised and reviewing its priorities. The Synod also

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<sup>18</sup> Josh Packard. "The risks of going out and the risks of staying in for young people." In: *Springtide National Research Results*, July 15, 2020. [www.springtideresearch.org/two-covid-threats/](http://www.springtideresearch.org/two-covid-threats/)

<sup>19</sup> Yuki Noguchi. "Why some young people fear social isolation more than COVID-19." In NPR, July 4, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/07/04/885546281/why-some-young-people-fear-social-isolation-more-than-covid-19>

recognized the need to train consecrated persons and laypeople, male and female, to accompany young people. The charism of listening that the Holy Spirit calls forth within the communities might also receive institutional recognition as a form of ecclesial service." (ChV 244) The Pope also invites special attention to the accompaniment of "young men and women showing leadership potential" (ChV 245) because of the protagonism and influence they can exert on other young people.

A second point that I would like to highlight in this missionary synodal style is the fact that what must mark our post-pandemic time is **young adult protagonism**. To give young people space. In accompanying young people, the Church should not hesitate to give them space for protagonism and leadership so that they can become the **agents of the change we need**.

In *Christus Vivit*, the Pope speaks a lot of this. He entrusts young people with the path **to seek a better world**, a deep yearning for the hearts of so many young people. A better world is what should arise after the pandemic. *Christus Vivit* #174 appears to have been written as the Pope watched demonstrations by young adults in the streets, which multiplied in recent months (including here in the United States), protesting racism, cultural discrimination, economic inequality, health issues, and other concerns.

Pope Francis responded to this, saying "**I want to encourage you in this effort**, because I know that your young hearts want to build a better world. I have been following news reports of the many young people throughout the world who have taken to the streets to express their desire for a more just and fraternal society. Young people taking to the streets! The young want to be protagonists of change. Please don't leave it to others be the protagonists of change." (ChV 174) With these words, I would like to encourage you to seek, in a missionary spirit, the answers to the post-COVID moment with young adults. They are the "**protagonists of change**."

As Francis reminds them throughout paragraph 174 of *Christus Vivit*:

"You are the ones who hold the key to the future! Continue to fight apathy and to offer a Christian response to the social and political troubles emerging in different parts of the world. I ask you to build the future, to work for a better world. Dear young people, please, do not be bystanders in life. Get involved! Jesus was not a bystander. He got involved. Don't stand aloof, but immerse yourselves in the reality of life, as Jesus did. Above all, in one way or another, fight for the common good, serve the poor, be protagonists of the revolution of charity and service, capable of resisting the pathologies of consumerism and superficial individualism." (ChV 174)

Young people will be able to do better than we can do. Let us place all our **trust** in the young, let us **walk** with them (because they expect and need our company and life experiences) and let us **learn** from them. For example: young adults are "digital natives" who know better than most of us how **modern technology and cultural and social media** can be used to reach other young people and know the right language and understanding of their own generation.

## **5. Arise, Mother Church, to meet the young adults!**

Allow me a moment to share some results of my doctorate at the University of Dayton in Ohio, on the **mariology of Pope Francis and its implications for his vision of the Church**. I am convinced that Jorge



Mario Bergoglio's relationship with the Virgin Mary fundamentally marks his understanding of the Church. "I dream of a Church that is a mother and shepherdess," he told his fellow Jesuit, Fr. Antonio Spadaro, in a famous interview.<sup>20</sup> In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis clearly said that "the Church is a mother with an open heart" (EG 46-49) and emphasized the value of **pastoral motherhood** of all God's people, which has clear consequences for ecclesial action.

In an interview I gave for my doctoral thesis (on June 9, 2015), as I did two interviews directly with him, he explained: "Sometimes, when I talk about a field hospital, the image that comes to mind the most is that of an orphanage. Soldiers and boys die saying 'mom, mom' ... They call their mother, don't they? So, it's the Mother Church that goes to that orphanage in a field hospital."

I cannot dwell too much on this explanation, but I would like to underline the importance that Francis attaches to a **Church that is Mother**, which is a key to reading in understanding his *pontificate*. A Mother Church is a Church with *Marian, feminine, and maternal* attitudes: a Church that is merciful, welcoming, tender, and strong all at the same time (as a mother would be), not "dogmatic," but inclusive, acting in a world that is "a field hospital". A missionary Church, with a "Marian style of evangelization" (cf. EG 288), which has the revolutionary strength of tenderness, humility, and affection, which comes out of her way to encounter those outside, on the margins, and the most vulnerable.

This is why the Pope explains to Fr. Spadaro: "I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up."<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, the proposal for a **new ecclesial paradigm** based on that analogy of "the field hospital" is very suitable for working with today's young adults, as Paul Jarzembowski recently demonstrated in an article for the journal *Religions*. The pandemic intensified so many problems that young adults live today, such as loneliness, difficulties, relationships, physical and mental illness, difficult economic situations, unemployment, racial and cultural injustices, and so on.

Our pastoral service cannot be limited to "marketing strategies" to attract young people to the Church, nor to a "catechesis" that educates them only in the doctrines of the Church, but rather as a ministry that goes out in search of the wounded on the peripheries of society, to enter the "battle" that young adults must face every day, to offer "first aid" through a "pastoral care marked by dynamic accompaniment."<sup>22</sup>

"These crises were evident well before the advent of the pandemic, but COVID-19 (and its resulting recession and cultural anxieties) have only hastened these issues in the lives of young adults. Effective

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<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis. "Interview by Antonio Spadaro." *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in Spanish language, Year XLV, n. 39 (2,333), 27 September 2013. Also in: [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html)

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis. "Interview by Antonio Spadaro."

<sup>22</sup> "Adopting the paradigm of the 'field hospital' requires ministry leaders to begin an engagement with young adults with responsive pastoral action. The painful issues that younger generations face are not wounds that can wait to be healed. Just as a field medic on the battlefield must instantly spring into action to tend to wounded soldiers, so too must church ministers engage in this pastoral activity posthaste." (Paul Jarzembowski. "Mobilizing the Field Hospital: Pastoral Care as a Paradigm for Ministry with Young Adults." *Religions* 2020, 11 (11), 617, 8-9. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/11/617/htm>)

ministry means tending both the temporal and spiritual wounds, recognizing the symbiotic link between these areas of concern and the comprehensive well-being of young adults.”<sup>23</sup> This is precisely what Pope Francis expects of our pastoral actions.

This “field hospital” requires a “new ecclesiological imagination,” as Dr. Tracey Lamont points out, in another recent article in the same journal.<sup>24</sup> She draws the consequences of a more **synodal Church**, as Pope Francis wishes, based on a style of *ministry rooted in dialogue, listening, and accompaniment*, which today’s young adults so desperately need.

The “new evangelization” of the baptized away from the Church, proclaimed by St. John Paul II, often did not create “new” forms, limiting himself to evangelizing “again” with the usual methods. In order to reverse the current trend of ecclesial disaffiliation and to address the real needs of young adults we need the “kenotic ecclesiology” of Pope Francis, a humble and off-center Church (not centered on itself), capable of going out into the world to find young people where they are, at the crossroads of life, listening to their stories, without the pretense of indoctrinating them, without proselytizing them, but to “journey together” with them. Qualified ministers, with a new style and a new ecclesiological vision that, in a “reciprocal, careful, and respectful dialogue,” will help them to root themselves in a human community and a community of faith, whose sense of belonging is marked by human relations, not programs.

As Dr. Lamont suggests: “An ecclesiological imagination, then, is a way of being church, a posture that sees in every moment an opportunity to see and experience glimpses of God. It is a radical worldview open to wonder, to be surprised by just how compassionate and loving God is. (...) If we can envision ministry with young adults through an ecclesiological imagination, we actively go forth and, through the invitation to dialogue, search for the ways in which God’s abundance shines in the lives of others and in the world.”<sup>25</sup>

Pope Francis would say that this **missionary Church** not only “welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open,” but also “finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent.”<sup>26</sup> For in a Mother Church, “ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor,”<sup>27</sup> explains the Pope. “The structural and organizational reforms are secondary — that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night, into the darkness, but without getting lost.”<sup>28</sup>

In other words, how can we be innovative in the face of resistance, polarization, division, economic constraints, and insecurities so strongly present today in the Church and society? Following the paradigm of the “field hospital,” with an ecclesiological imagination, our challenge is a to adopt maternal attitudes of a missionary *mistica*: to be open and merciful, accompanying the struggles of young adults, their loneliness, their economic problems, their affective disappointments, their frustrations, and political polarizations,

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Jarzembowski. “Mobilizing the Field Hospital,” 9.

<sup>24</sup> Tracey Lamont. “Ministry with Young Adults: Toward a New Ecclesiological Imagination.” *Religions* 2020, 11 (11), 570. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/11/570/htm>

<sup>25</sup> Tracey Lamont. “Ministry with Young Adults,” 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis. “Interview by Antonio Spadaro.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

touching their wounds and taking care of them with the grace of God and the action of the Spirit. And all this is not “from us to them,” but rather as a “double-track path” with the young people themselves, synodally accompanying us, as we, at the same time, encourage their protagonism.

**This form of ministry is multifaceted and unpredictable.** It cannot be conceived, therefore,

“within a complete, perfect, rational and manageable scheme, but starting from a dynamic that is always open to the action of the Holy Spirit who is the authentic protagonist of the Church's pastoral mission. Moreover, as we know, the Spirit of the Lord surprises us every time: He does not create unity by homogenizing us but urges us to integrate our differences and thus enter into that mystery of communion which is God himself.”<sup>29</sup>

This again is from an article that was written by Fr. Rossano Sala in the same series, in the same journal. It's the importance of being open to the action of the Holy Spirit – it is not easy that type of ministry. We are open to the action of the Holy Spirit because we cannot find unity by homogenizing.

## **6. Conclusion: Arise and transcend! And then you'll raise the world!**

By way of conclusion, we may ask ourselves, as the Pope does at the end of his book, *Let's Dream Together*: “Now what do I have to do?”

His answer is expressed very synthetically in two concepts, “**de-center yourself and transcend**” and the image of “**the pilgrim**”. As pilgrims in the midst of the labyrinth of life at this historic moment, the Spirit of God invites us to leave ourselves, transcend to the heights and to others, a double transcendence towards the heaven and towards others; giving our best so that our people may have life.<sup>30</sup>

The Pope said: “Young man, arise, and commit yourself to change the world!” As pastoral leaders working with young adults, our mission is to listen to those young people, to accompany them, and to provide them with spaces and opportunities so that they can be the protagonists of change. The **journey** we face at the present moment is to build a future of **missionary synodality**. Providentially, the Synod of Young People happened at just the right time, that is, it was envisioned by God for this particular moment in history!

The young people awakened the synodality of the Church so that the Church could respond synodally to the challenges of a post-pandemic time. In times of crisis, **we are all together in the same canoe** (said a young adult at the Synod, which the Pope repeated in *Christus Vivit*). We are in the same boat and the “exit,” that is, overcoming the storm and arriving at a safe port, **can only be synodal**.

We still have a long way to go. The good news is we want it and we're going to do it – together!

The young people awakened the synodality of the Church so that the Church could respond in a synodal way – with and perhaps even guided *by* young adults – to the challenges of this time.

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<sup>29</sup> Rossano Sala. “Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People,” 9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Pope Francis. *Soñemos juntos*, 139-142.

**“Young man, I say to you, arise!”** It is the theme of WYD 2020.<sup>31</sup> **“Stand up! I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen!”** It will be the theme of WYD 2021. These phrases are very suitable for the period in which we are living. As we have seen, the Church and society are greatly affected at this time, as activities, sacraments, and encounters are reduced to a minimum.

Our Prefect, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, at a recent international meeting for ministry with young people, said a phrase that struck me very much: “Young people have to take the Church out of the catacombs after the pandemic.” That’s why it’s time to say, “Arise, young adults!” “Arise, ministers!” “Arise, Church!” “Arise, world!” We begin a **new moment** in the life of the world. What will be different? How will the world be different? What will change in the Church? That is up to us and especially dependent on young adults who are the “now of God” (ChV 64), and who are called to live in this moment in a spirit of missionary synodality. So: Arise and transcend! And then we can help the world to arise!

“‘Arise!’ is also an invitation to **‘dream’, to ‘take a risk’, to be ‘committed to changing the world’,** to rekindle your hopes and aspirations, and to contemplate the heavens, the stars and the world around you.”<sup>32</sup> This was the Pope’s invitation in his message for WYD 2020.

This encounter we are experiencing must be a framework, a new beginning to dream, to risk, to innovate pastoral care with young adults across the United States. From this meeting “many young people will stop looking bored and weary”, says the Pope, “and let their faces come alive and be more beautiful than any virtual reality.”<sup>33</sup> He says it in his message to us this year. It is now in our hands, with the grace of God, that **the world may return to life, to come out of the catacombs.** Christ lives and wants us to live, especially in this time and place. “Journeying together,” we lift each other up, and that is how we will help the world to arise!

Pope Francis told us, “In the heart of the Church, Mary shines forth. She is the supreme model for a youthful Church that seeks to follow Christ with enthusiasm and docility. While still very young, she accepted the message of the angel, yet she was not afraid to ask questions (cf. Lk 1:34). With open heart and soul, she replied, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord’ (Lk 1:38).” (ChV 43)

The theme of World Youth Day Lisbon 2023 reminds us that, after giving her “yes” to God, **“Mary arose and left with haste”** (Lk 1:39). May she teach us to “arise!” with missionary enthusiasm and to depart, with haste and with an awareness of our mission, with creativity, and confidence, towards that future time, which the Lord entrusts to today’s young adults, who are the “now of God.”

Thank you for your attention – and have a wonderful encounter (event).

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<sup>31</sup> I take this opportunity to comment that beginning next year, the Holy Father wants to give a new impetus to the diocesan and regional celebrations of the local World Youth Days. The Dicastery will give some instructions on this in the coming weeks.

<sup>32</sup> Pope Francis. “Message for XXXV World Youth Day.”

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.