

## First Preparatory Meeting for WYD Seoul 2027 – 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2024, Rome

H. Exc. Msgr. Peter Chung Soon-taick, Archbishop of Seoul

### [Opening]

안녕하세요? Good afternoon.

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about "Korea"? Is it the rich tapestry of Korean cuisine, or the vibrant rhythms of K-pop?

As we gather here today, I wish to shift our focus from the captivating charm of popular culture towards a more profound pilgrimage awaiting us in the heart of Korea. While it is true that the world may often associate Korea with K-drama and K-pop, I urge you to set aside such distractions. Because in 2027, Korea will unveil a spectacle more profound than any mere entertainment—a gathering that will resonate with the essence of our faith, akin to the encounter on the road to Emmaus where we will meet Jesus, and from there, journey forth to share the transformative message with the world.

Now, let's recall the story of how Jesus called Philip and Nathanael, a narrative that mirrors the journey of faith and discovery awaiting us in Korea.

Opening video (7' 26") Jesus calls Nathaniel and Philip

### [Concerns of young people today]

What do you think? I hope it helped you see South Korea a little differently.

I came here today to invite you to the 2027 World Youth Day in Seoul.

When the decision was made for Seoul to host WYD, I wondered.

"Are our young people happy right now?"

Unemployment, low wages, endless competition, polarization and inequality, hatred, war, terrorism, the climate crisis!

Young people from various continents and cultures all struggle with various issues.

They are connected to others 24 hours a day through social media and are more materially affluent than ever before,

but our young people today just don't seem that happy.

Why do our precious youth, whose only job is to love, be loved, and dream of a better world and future, have to live in this reality?

As a member of the generation that created the current situation, my heart breaks for you.

### **[Starting point of WYD Seoul 2027]**

What role should the Church play in young people's lives?

Do we have answers to their concerns?

WYD Seoul 2027 starts with these questions.

Now, I'm sure many of you in this room are wondering "how" we're getting ready for World Youth Day.

But before we think about the "how," we need to think about the "what" and the "why."

That is the fundamental question we sought to answer.

And in the process of meeting directly with young people, I had the thought that *this* is what World Youth Day is all about: connecting, understanding, and finding answers together.

World Youth Day is not just an event or a festival.

It's a pilgrimage, a time to share our stories, work through our concerns together, and find answers in our faith.

That is why we're focusing on four keywords as we prepare for WYD in Seoul.

### **[Encounter, pastoral, pilgrimage, mission]**

First, World Youth Day is an encounter.

It is an encounter between the young people and the Pope, and through this successor of the Apostle Peter, the universal church.

We will prepare for WYD so that young people from around the world can experience a church that is the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Second, World Youth Day is pastoral.

It is an effort of the Church to listen to and address the needs and concerns of young people.

It is also a way to communicate the love we have for them and our care for them.

In fact, the entire process of preparing for WYD is also a pastoral process, a process of

encountering God in each of our lives.

We will prepare so that when you visit Seoul in 2027, you can have a deeper experience of the love of the Church.

Third, World Youth Day is a pilgrimage.

We do not call you "participants" when you join WYD, but "pilgrims."

It is not just a festival. It is a journey to proclaim the gospel, a missionary journey in which the church reveals the gospel of Jesus Christ together with the young people.

We will prepare a very special pilgrimage for you as you set out from your own diverse environments, respond to the Pope's invitation, experience the love of the Lord, proclaim the Gospel, and then return to your homes a changed person.

Finally, World Youth Day is a mission.

Through WYD, young pilgrims take up the cross of salvation and go forth to proclaim the gospel.

They lead the way, and the church community follows.

In this evangelical procession, we see the cross of Jesus leading the whole church through young people.

The young people at WYD Seoul 2027 will learn about God's sacrificial love as proclaimed through Jesus Christ and share that love with each another.

Thus transformed, they will return to their own lives to witness to the Gospel among their neighbors.

### **[Why Korea?]**

Korea is not a Catholic country.

As you can see, more than half the country has no religious beliefs.

Protestantism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Won Buddhism, Confucianism, even Cheondoism...

It's a country with many different cultures and many different religions.

Up until now, World Youth Day has always been held in Christian countries.

But WYD Seoul 2027 will be the first to be held in a non-Christian culture, in Asia.

Why did our Holy Father make such an unconventional decision?

### **[What it means for Korea to host]**

Pope Francis said, "WYD Seoul 2027 is a sign of the Church's universality and is a beautiful sign of how we can unite, even if we come from different places."

This beautiful sign of unity is urgently needed by the youth of the world as they struggle to live with the reality of division and conflict.

WYD in Seoul will be a special opportunity to reflect on how people of various faiths and cultures can live together and how we can experience and witness to the Gospel in such a reality.

In Korea, the only divided country on earth, we will also be able to think deeply on the true reconciliation and peace that humanity needs and how to achieve it.

Above all, the Catholic Church in Korea, which began with the dreams of young people and was defended by the martyrdom of countless youth, will show you how to live out your hope amid suffering.

### **[The Church's love for young people, World Youth Day]**

In the hustle and bustle of today, sometimes it can feel like the Lord is far away.

But the Body of Christ always loves its young people.

We consider each and every one of you,  
and we care about you.

World Youth Day is one way we work to show this.

A month after it was decided that Seoul would host WYD, I met Pope Francis in Mongolia.

He urged me again to prepare well for 2027.

WYD Seoul is the reply of the Catholic Church in Korea to our Holy Father.

It will also be a message to the universal church, which is currently facing many challenges.

To all you lovely young people, I say:

In Seoul in 2027, you will experience the love of the Church.

We at the Archdiocese of Seoul will be with you throughout the entire preparation process.

Inspired by the courage of the faith of the Korean martyrs, we will dream big and rise above the difficulties of our current reality.

That is how we will prepare for your extraordinary pilgrimage.

### **[Specific Action 1. Events and publicity]**

As the WYD in Seoul will be the first World Youth Day held in a non-Christian country and is a large-scale international event involving hundreds of thousands of people, the interest and cooperation of all Koreans, not just Catholics, is essential for its success.

The Archdiocese of Seoul will promote WYD to our fellow citizens through a kick-off ceremony in August of this year,

and we will continue to cultivate a spirit of cooperation for the event.

We will also organize a meeting with ambassadors for WYD at Myeongdong to ask for their assistance in the preparation.

This November, we will be journeying to meet the protagonists of this event, the young people. With the cross and icon of World Youth Day, we will travel across Korea and Asia to meet and hear your stories.

Through this process, we will create a WYD that is truly centered on youth.

### **[Specific Action 2. Secure budget]**

We are in the process of creating a budget for the successful execution of WYD.

Once it is finalized, we will consult with the Holy See to make it as efficient as possible.

We are working on securing the budget in three ways:

support from the Korean government

voluntary donations

and money from the Seoul Archdiocese's own budget.

We have already met with the Korean government, the mayor of Seoul, and leading politicians to seek their cooperation and assurances of their support.

In addition, working with the Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea, we are planning to conduct large-scale fundraising to support WYD starting this year.

All this is to say that WYD Seoul 2027 will be open to every young person in the world if they wish to participate.

### **[Specific Action 3. Solidarity with overseas dioceses]**

For some young people, Korea is a distant country.

For others, Catholicism is far away.

That is why we are going to visit them directly.

We've organized a special team of priests who oversee the formation of seminarians and will send them to smaller dioceses around the world that have been marginalized.

They will meet with the young people, see with their own eyes the reality of those young people's situations, and hear their stories.

Then they will invite them to join our pilgrimage.

The preparation process for World Youth Day in Seoul isn't just about organizing an event—it's about actively standing in solidarity with dioceses worldwide and inviting them to be part of our

journey, all in the spirit of synodality.

#### **[Specific Action 4. Praying together]**

We are overjoyed to be hosting the 2027 World Youth Day in Seoul.

However, along with the great joy, we feel the weight of the responsibility.

Therefore, we must beseech help from our Lord.

We ask that the whole process of preparation will be a pilgrimage of unity for the whole world, and WYD Seoul 2027 will be a place of love and joy.

We've already started praying for WYD in the Archdiocese of Seoul with a campaign to pray one billion decades of the rosary for its success.

I'd like to invite everyone in this room to join us in our preparation of prayer.

#### **[Introduction of Bishop Lee]**

By the way, in addition to sufficient funds and prayers, we're also assembling a wonderful team to bring WYD Seoul 2027 to life. I'm excited to introduce someone who is playing a crucial role in this effort. Please join me in welcoming His Excellency Bishop Paul Kyung-sang Lee, the Episcopal Coordinator General of the World Youth Day Local Organizing Committee. Bishop Lee is the driving force behind our preparations, and we're thrilled to have his leadership and dedication guiding us every step of the way. (Bishop Lee, please say hi to everyone in the room.)

#### **[Creating a vision for WYD]**

As we near the end, it's clear that:

The Church needs change now.

The number of young Catholics is declining worldwide.

How can we rejuvenate our church?

How can we be a church that young people come back to, not a church they leave?

How can our young people find hope and courage in the Church and transform their lives?

When you come to Seoul in 2027, you will personally encounter God on this pilgrimage to a synodal church, experience the youthfulness of the church, and encounter the young Jesus.

You will realize that you are the agents of change in the church.

#### **[A reminder]**

In fact, the pilgrimage to WYD Seoul 2027 has already begun.

Back in Krakow in 2016, Pope Francis said, "We will meet in Panama in 2019 after two diocesan steps."

While the international World Youth Days held every three to four years are important, let's not forget the annual diocesan WYD.

Let's do our best to have a great diocesan WYD this year, a wonderful celebration of the Jubilee in 2025, another diocesan WYD in 2026, and finally, let's meet in Seoul, South Korea in 2027.

Please join us for an inspiring synodal pilgrimage as the people of God walk together on the path that you, the young people, have led.

Ending video (4' 02") Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus

### **[Closing remarks]**

In times of despair, fear, and sadness, it's hard to recognize Jesus walking right beside us.

Perhaps we are too busy mourning to notice the peace and hope already there.

Just as the disciples who encountered the Risen Jesus were transformed and restored to faith, we too can find peace and reconciliation. We can find hope.

World Youth Day Seoul 2027 will ignite a fire in our hearts, transforming us.

I believe you will encounter Jesus in Korea, and your hearts will burn with faith.

Then, you will return home renewed and transformed.

I invite you all to join us in Korea to start a new pilgrimage of faith together.

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