



International Youth Ministry Congress 2024

Synodal youth ministry: new leadership styles and strategies

Thursday 23 May 2024, 8:45 am

Words of greeting and introduction

Cardinal Kevin Farrell

Prefect of the *Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life*

Directors of National Youth Ministry Services,
Leaders of movements, associations and communities,
Dear young people,

I would like to welcome you all to the International Youth Ministry Congress, which has as its theme: “*synodal youth ministry: new leadership styles and strategies.*”

This Congress is taking place at the ‘crossroads’ (or ‘intersection’), so to speak, of three significant appointments for the evangelisation of young people.

First of all, at present we find ourselves in the period between World Youth Day in Lisbon and the next World Youth Day in Seoul in 2027. Several months have passed since the world youth gathering in Portugal, and we still have vivid memories of it that awaken our gratitude and enthusiasm. That is why now is the right time to undertake an evaluation and to reap the benefits by listening to experiences and

sharing opinions and suggestions. It is also time to start looking towards the next World Youth Day -- towards the East, to the land of Korea, a nation enriched by the heroic witness of so many martyrs.

A second significant event is the Jubilee of 2025. At the heart of the Holy Year, from 28 July to 3 August, we will have the Youth Jubilee. The Holy Father has summoned young people to Rome from all over the world, urging them to become ‘*pilgrims of hope*’.

Lastly, this Congress is taking place in the year that marks the fifth anniversary of the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*. This gives us an opportunity to emphasise once again some fundamental aspects of youth pastoral work, including *youth leadership, synodality, faith education and spiritual accompaniment*.

So, these are the events we have experienced and those we have ahead of us. We stand between the past that has come and gone and the future that awaits us, and we take advantage of both. This is what the Holy Father invites us to do when he writes in *Christus Vivit*:

“To revisit the past in order to learn from history [...]. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands.” (ChV, 199).

A look at history in order to learn from it also brings us back to the synodal experience with young people we had in 2018, both in the pre-synod and in the ordinary session of the Synod of Bishops that year on the theme “*Young people, faith and vocational discernment*”. On that occasion, the contribution of young people was central in the drafting of the Exhortation *Christus Vivit*.

Many remember that time spent with young people being like a “flame” (cf. Final Document 120). We want that to be reinvigorated during this Congress in order to “*warm hearts*” and to be able to go forward with new energy in our pastoral work at the service of young people. We know that we could have many good ideas, but if the “flame” is missing from our hearts, it is difficult to attract young people, to get them involved and to give them a chance to take an active role!

So many beautiful initiatives have come out of the 2018 Synod! We thank all of you who have allowed yourselves to be inflamed by the enthusiasm of young people. Since the Synod, you have given life to many initiatives with the youth ministry teams in your countries and dioceses. Together with young people, you have found new forms of communication; you have put listening structures in place for them and opened up ways for them to participate; you have created programmes of faith education, accompaniment and evangelisation in both the digital and the non-digital spheres; you have encouraged participation in diocesan and international WYDs.

Thank you for all that you have done and are doing! We also thank you because you have shared with us -- via the questionnaire -- so many of these initiatives from which others can also learn and draw inspiration.

The 2018 Synod also heralded a new style of working and listening that set an example for us all; starting with young people, it extended to the whole Church. The *Final Document of the Synod* said that “The participation of the young helped to ‘reawaken’ synodality, which is a constitutive element of the Church” (FD 121). We are experiencing this “awakening of synodality” at various levels with the current Synod on Synodality, a long journey that has involved the whole Church and will have its final stage this coming October.

We would all like our Congress that begins today to be part of this “synodal climate” that we are experiencing and which, in due course, will certainly bear good fruit.

More than an academic congress, it has been conceived as a synodal experience of listening and sharing in the light of spiritual discernment.

The Holy Father often suggests that we use the method of ‘spiritual conversation’ in our meetings. For many of us, this is new. It is a method we have yet to learn. It is not, in fact, about putting together various points of view, or having a debate, or finding the right mechanisms to arrive at a large majority on the decisions to be taken. Instead, it is about a real prayer experience. A form of ‘collective prayer’, we might say, that helps the inspirations of the Spirit to emerge. The Holy Spirit does not only speak to individuals separately, but also inspires collective desires, shared projects and common aspirations. These come from the Spirit who then creates consensus around them in a listening community.

So, I am inviting you to adopt this spiritual perspective, to allow yourselves to be inspired by God and also to allow yourselves to be ‘awakened’ by the Holy Spirit speaking through the voice of young people and operating in them.

You know that two delegates from each country have been invited here: the youth ministry director or another person in charge, and a young person. The Congress will therefore be a golden opportunity to “*learn from each other*”. Perhaps it will give us the chance to discover new *young leaders* capable of opening up new horizons of hope in the years to come.

It is precisely young people who can be the main agents of renewal so that the Church can ‘unblock’ itself and become young again (cf. ChV, 34). The Holy Father states in *Christus Vivit*: “Let us ask the Lord to free the Church from those who would make it grow old, encase it in the past, hold it back or keep it at a standstill” (ChV, 35).

So, let us be open to young people and also open to the future with hope! A great task is entrusted to them. The Holy Father describes it in forceful words, and with these words I end my speech; the Pope says:

“Dear young people, make the most of these years of your youth. Don’t observe life from a balcony. [...] Let yourselves be heard! Cast out the fears that paralyze you so that you don’t become mummified youth. Live! Give yourselves over to the best of life! Open the door of the cage, go out and fly! Please, don’t take early retirement” (ChV 143).

I wish you all the best in your journey together.