

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHRISTUS VIVIT- "YOUTH MINISTRY"

Summary *authored by Andrea Torielli*

The Pope explains that youth ministry has been affected by social and cultural changes and *“young people frequently fail to find in our usual programmes a response to their concerns, their needs, their problems and issues”* (202). The young people themselves *“are agents of youth ministry. Certainly they need to be helped and guided, but at the same time left free to develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity”*. We need to help young people to *“use their insight, ingenuity and knowledge to address the issues and concerns of other young people in their own language”* (203).

Youth ministry needs to be flexible, and it is necessary to invite *“young people to events or occasions that provide an opportunity not only for learning, but also for conversing, celebrating, singing, listening to real stories and experiencing a shared encounter with the living God”* (204).

Youth ministry has to be synodal, that is, capable of shaping a *“journey together”* and this involves two broad lines of action: the first is outreach, the second is growth. For the first, Pope Francis trusts in the ability of young people themselves to *“find appealing ways to come together”*. *“They only have to be encouraged and given the freedom to be enthused”*. What is most important, though, *“is that each young person can be daring enough to sow the seed of the message on that fertile terrain that is the heart of another young person”* (210). Priority should be given to *“the language of closeness, the language of generous, relational and existential love that touches the heart”*. Young people need to be approached *“with the grammar of love, not by being preached at”* (211).

As far as growth is concerned, Pope Francis warns against proposing to young people touched by an intense experience of God *“meetings of ‘formation’ in which only doctrinal and moral questions are dealt with... The result is that many young people get bored, they lose the fire of their encounter with Christ and the joy of following Him”* (212).

Any educational project or path of growth for young people *“must certainly include formation in Christian doctrine and morality”*, that must be centred on the kerygma, *“the foundational experience of encounter with God through Jesus’ death and resurrection”*, and on *“growth in fraternal love, community life and service”* (213).

Therefore, *“youth ministry should always include occasions for renewing and deepening our personal experience of the love of God and the living Christ”* (214). It should help young people *“to live as brothers and sisters, to help one another, to build community, to be of service to others, to be close to the poor”* (215).

Church institutions should therefore provide *“suitable environments”*, *“places young people can make their own, where they can come and go freely, feel welcome and readily meet other young people, whether at times of difficulty and frustration, or of joy and celebration”* (218).

Pope Francis then describes *“Youth Ministry in educational institutions”*, affirming that schools are in *“urgent need of self-criticism”*. He recalls that *“some Catholic schools seem to be structured only for the sake of self-preservation... A school that becomes a ‘bunker’, protecting its students from errors ‘from without’ is a caricature of this tendency”*. When young people leave, they feel *“an insurmountable disconnect between what they were taught and the world in which they live”*, while *“one of the greatest joys that any educator can have is to see a student turn into a strong, well-integrated person”* (221).

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Summary Continued... *authored by Andrea Tornielli*

We cannot separate spiritual from cultural formation... *“This, then, is your great challenge: to respond to the crippling refrains of cultural consumerism with thoughtful and firm decisions, with research, knowledge and sharing”* (223). Among the areas of **“pastoral development”**, the Pope indicates the *“importance of the arts”* (226), the *“potential of sports”* (227), and *“care for the environment”* (228).

There is a need for **“popular youth ministry”**, *“broader and more flexible, which stimulates those natural guides and charisms which the Holy Spirit has already sown among young people, in the different places in which young people concretely move. It tries to avoid imposing obstacles, rules, controls and obligatory structures on these young believers who are natural leaders in their neighbourhoods and in other settings. We need only to accompany and encourage them”* (230). By focusing on a *“pure and perfect youth ministry, marked by abstract ideas, protected from the world and free of every flaw, we can turn the Gospel into a dull, meaningless and unattractive proposition. Such a youth ministry ends up completely removed from the world of young people and suited only to an elite Christian youth that sees itself as different, while living in an empty and unproductive isolation”* (232).

Pope Francis invites us to be a *“Church with open doors. Nor does one have to accept fully all the teachings of the Church to take part in certain of our activities for young people* (234). Room should also be made for *“all those who have other visions of life, who belong to other religions or who distance themselves from religion altogether”* (235). The icon for this approach is offered to us by the Gospel episode of the disciples at Emmaus: Jesus questions them, listens to them patiently, helps them to recognize what they are living, to interpret in the light of Scripture what they have lived, accepts to stay with them, enters their night. It is they themselves who choose to resume without delay the journey in the opposite direction (237).

“Always missionaries”. For young people to become missionaries there is no need to make *“a long journey”*. *“A young person who makes a pilgrimage to ask Our Lady for help, and invites a friend or companion along, by that single gesture is being a good missionary”* (239). *“Youth ministry is always missionary”* (240). Young people need to have their freedom respected, *“yet they also need to be accompanied”*. The family should be the first place of accompaniment (242), and then the community. *“All should regard young people with understanding, appreciation and affection, and avoid constantly judging them or demanding of them a perfection beyond their years”* (243). There is a lack of experienced people dedicated to accompaniment (244) and *“some young women feel that there is a lack of leading female role models within the Church”* (245). The same young people *“described to us”* the qualities they hope to find in a mentor: *“being a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; someone who is a confidant without judgement. Similarly, someone who actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; someone deeply loving and self-aware; someone who recognizes his or her limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey. An especially important quality in mentors is the acknowledgement of their own humanity – the fact that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners”* (246). They should know how to *“walk alongside them”*, respecting their freedom.

"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." In this way, by learning from one another, we can better reflect that wonderful multifaceted 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." (Christus Vivit, Paragraphs 206 - 207)

Thoughts for your own reflection submitted by Wes Moga

"Young people themselves are agents of youth ministry." (209)

Are our young people actively involved in such things as making decisions about plans for youth ministry in our parish, creating programs, and leading others in liturgical ministries, prayer, and worship?

Suggestion: Establish a Youth Committee made up of both adult and youth volunteers who meet once or twice a year to discuss the effectiveness of your youth ministry efforts, and identify/brainstorm/dream new methods and approaches for outreach and growth for youth ministry in your parish

"The Synod called for the development of 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." (234)

Would we classify our current youth ministry as being "elitist" (including a limited number of methods of outreach and growth strategies and activities that resonate only with a select few) or "popular" (including a wide variety of methods of outreach and growth, such as contemplative prayer, Christian service, the arts, sports, and time spent in nature, that tries to offer something for everyone)?

What is one idea for a new approach to outreach or growth that we feel our young people would respond to?

The community has an important role in the accompaniment of young people; it should feel collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging and challenging them." (243)

Do young people experience our parish as a place of welcome, acceptance, and accompaniment? Why or why not? What are we doing well? What could we be doing better?

What are we currently doing in our parish to help form and develop those that work directly with our youth, and our parish as a whole, into a community that accompanies young people? What might be new ideas for how we could begin to, or continue in, formation in accompaniment?

Suggestion: "Called to Accompany" program on FORMED.org