

Talking Points on the Synod Preparatory/Consultation Process

USCCB President's Presentation, General Assembly, November 2017

His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston

- Brother Bishops, thank you for this opportunity to update you on our efforts to assist the Holy See's preparations for the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the topic of "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment." 100 dioceses, 25 Catholic organizations, and several of our own USCCB standing committees submitted responses to the questionnaire in preparation for the Synod. Thank you for all these efforts.
- In late October this year, I submitted your reports, along with my presidential summary, to the Vatican Office for the Synod of Bishops.
- I am grateful to Cardinal Joseph Tobin, chairman of the Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, and Archbishop Charles Chaput, chairman of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, along with their respective Committee staff and other USCCB staff, for assisting with this Synod process and, in particular, with the national summary I submitted.
- As President of the USCCB, I also received an invitation for three young adults to attend a Pre-Synodal Gathering in Rome in March 2018, to assist the Holy See in gathering input from young people directly in advance of the Synod of Bishops in October 2018. Cardinal Tobin and Archbishop Chaput have graciously agreed to take the lead in identifying and preparing the young adults who will represent the United States at this Pre-Synodal Gathering. We will keep you updated on further developments.
- In what follows I will comment briefly on what we learned, and on what I conveyed in my presidential report, based on the consultation process:
 - What we knew going in and what was reinforced in the reports is that, in our country, the age-range of "young people" identified by the Synod Office, that is, those ages 16 to 29, is comprised of several different groups including high school youth, college students, and young adults, and they come from many ethnic and cultural communities. Each grouping has distinct developmental, emotional, and spiritual needs and experiences, including those arising from cultural diversity. The reports confirmed our understanding that ministry with these age groups is unique and should not be lumped together. I felt these points would be important to communicate to the Holy See since the preparatory document notes the concept of young people "needs to be adapted to local circumstances."

- The reports also affirmed our growing awareness of the challenges that youth and young adults face today. Young people frequently cited economic struggles, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, isolation, anxiety, and societal pressures as top challenges. They also expressed a desire for the Church to accompany them through these concerns.
- Youth and young adults want to be listened to and heard by the Church and to be intentionally invited into leadership roles. They desire mentorship and spiritual direction, and they look for support in times of transition. At the same time, many young people noted that they do not feel heard and have not been invited to lead. Many said they do not know where to go for mentorship or spiritual direction. Based on the reports, for many young people, the Church is not often there at critical moments of transition in their lives.
- The data showed that youth and young adults are disconnecting with the Church at greater rates than in previous generations, and pastoral leaders are struggling more and more to find ways to make connections with the “nones,” that is, those with no religious affiliation.
- Issues of racism, prejudice, violence, economic disparity, mental health, and challenging immigration laws are concerns for a number of young people, most especially from African-American, Native American, and Hispanic/Latino communities. However, according to the reports, many of our churches and ministries with youth and young adults are not adequately addressing or discussing these concerns, and there is a lack of intercultural competency among leaders and the young people themselves. These were noted as areas in need of great improvement in such a diverse nation as ours.
- Reports evidenced the wonderful presence of lay ecclesial ministers, as well as priests and consecrated religious, in the U.S. who have answered the call to serve youth and young adults in parishes, college campuses, dioceses, and movements. However, the reports also indicated several challenges in resourcing and fully-appreciating these ministries, most especially with young adults in their 20s and 30s, and with Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and African-American communities.
- Regarding the promotion of vocations, there are many positive efforts encouraging primary and secondary school youth to consider priesthood and consecrated life. However, data indicated a continuing struggle to engage college students and young adults.

- Furthermore, reports confirmed that more work needs to be done in the promotion of vocations to marriage and family life, as well as the call to holiness for all the baptized.
- Reports noted a gratitude and a desire for more bishops to personally accompany youth and young adults through their vocational journey, with positive references to the presence of bishops at diocesan and national gatherings and at World Youth Day.
- The diocesan consultation affirmed that we have excellent and talented leaders in the fields of youth, campus, and young adult ministries, as well as in pastoral juvenil hispana, who are doing incredible things for young people, even with limited resources. It was exciting to see the best practices raised up within the reports, and we can be grateful for the dedication and energy of so many faithful leaders here in the U.S.
- The reports revealed some untapped opportunities that exist to connect young people to a relationship with Christ, to the Church and her mission, and to their vocational pathway. More work needs to be done in building up our efforts with youth and young adults, and we can be hopeful that this Synod process will contribute to those efforts and bear much fruit.
- The diocesan, organizational, and committee reports included incredibly rich information and helpful feedback from young people. We hope this input will assist the Holy See as it compiles all the data and prepares the working document in preparation for the Synod of Bishops next year.
- In closing, it is important to know that the Holy See is still collecting input from young people directly. Through November 30, a special online survey for youth and young adults remains open at <http://youth.synod2018.va>. Brothers, I encourage you to pass this along to all the young people in your respective dioceses so that feedback from our young people in the U.S. is adequately represented. Thank you for this opportunity to share these insights with you today.