

DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS



A Pastoral Letter from the U.S. Bishops to Youth and Young Adults

Dear young friends: **Christ is alive in you.** We, the Catholic bishops of the United States of America, echo our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who reminds us, “He is in you, he is with you, and he never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One.”¹ Wherever this letter finds you, we invite you to allow Jesus, the most important companion you will ever have on the journey of life, to transform you, so that Christ can always remain alive in you. That transformation begins with an encounter with Jesus, who is present for us and *listens* to our joys and struggles. He invites us to learn from him as he *teaches* us the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Gospel. Then we are transformed as Christ *sends* us forth on our mission to share what we received.

For our part, we – as your shepherds and companions on life’s journey – have heard from you through the years, attentively listening to your stories. We have allowed your prophetic voices and enthusiastic zeal to touch our hearts and souls, and, with spiritual affection, we are grateful for your presence within our Catholic communities of faith. For those who are not connected to the Church: your presence is missed. You are always welcome, and, with us, we pray that you will find a loving and supportive home where Christ is truly present and ready to encounter you and touch your heart.

We have met many of you through the sacramental life of the Church, through Confirmation, Marriage, Baptism, or Holy Orders, and at various moments of return throughout the liturgical year. We pray that the graces you received from the Lord during those sacramental experiences have taken root in your lives. We have also met a number of young people through pilgrimages like World Youth Day. We have seen you at national and diocesan gatherings, events, and listening sessions². Each of these encounters has been, for us, a source of great joy and hope.

In the Scriptures, the risen Christ meets and accompanies two disciples on the road to the town of Emmaus (see Lk 24:13-35), and this “journeying together”³ is a fitting model for us to follow as we

¹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (CV), 2019, no. 2.

² On a national level in recent years, these have included the USCCB [Convocation of Catholic Leaders](#) (2017), the Fifth [National Encuentro](#) (2017-2018), conversations leading to the [XV Synod on Young People](#) (2017-2019), the [National Dialogue](#) process (2017-2021), the USCCB [Journeying Together](#) initiative (2020-2023), and listening done to prepare for the [XVI Synod on Synodality](#) (2021-2024), as well as at [National Catholic Youth Conferences](#) (NCYC), [Steubenville youth conferences](#), [FOCUS SEEK conferences](#), and [Catholic Social Ministries Gatherings](#) (CSMG), among others.

³ CV, no. 206.

reflect on the Catholic Church’s engagement and ministries with youth and young adults. In this story, we see as Jesus *listens* to their realities so that they might recognize what they are truly experiencing; he then *teaches* the disciples, causing them to interpret their lives in light of that teaching; finally, he speaks to their hearts and *sends* them out on mission, which they boldly choose to embark upon immediately.⁴ We, too, are eager to listen to and understand your experiences, to teach and share the Catholic faith rooted in wisdom and a deep understanding of Christ and the Gospel by the Church, and to empower and send you forth into the world with hearts on fire for the Lord and his people.

This threefold path (*listen-teach-send*) is the [framework](#) that we are sharing with the leaders of the Catholic Church, so that, together, we might imitate Jesus Christ in accompanying you and your peers. We invite you to be receptive to the Church’s engagement and ministries with young people, so that you, like those two disciples on the road, can also recognize Christ in your lives, interpret them in light of the Gospel, and choose to set forth on a lifelong path of missionary zeal and commitment.

God has always been at work in this way. The Scriptures and the story of the Church through the ages offer us many examples of the Lord speaking through the voices and actions of young people—biblical heroes such as the prophet Jeremiah, St. John the Apostle, and St. Timothy; courageous martyrs like St. Joan of Arc, St. Isidore Bakanja, and St. José Sánchez del Río; bold witnesses such as St. Pedro Calungsod, St. Kateri Tekakwitha, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux; and modern-day examples like Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, Bl. Chiara Badano, Bl. Carlo Acutis, and so many more. The most prominent of these holy men and women is the Blessed Virgin Mary who said “yes” to the Lord as a young woman betrothed to Joseph (see Lk 1:38). They have all journeyed together with Christ in their own way, and we pray that you will follow the lead of these and countless other saints toward holiness and salvation.

The purpose of the [framework](#) we offer to the Church is to empower the entire Catholic community to be conduits of the Holy Spirit in sharing the Gospel with all young people to transform the world by Jesus’ love. As St. John Paul II once said, “Dear young friends: I pray that your faith in Christ will always be lively and strong. In this way, you will always be ready to tell others the reason for your hope; you will be messengers of hope for the world.”⁵ As your bishops, in the company of dedicated priests, deacons, lay, and consecrated leaders and your parents and families, we join you in this endeavor, as we seek to bring the light of Jesus to all people.

⁴ See CV, no. 237.

⁵ John Paul II, “Teleconference with Young People,” Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Canada, Universal Amphitheatre (Los Angeles, CA), September 15, 1987, no. 3.

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis' apostolic letter to and about young people, the Holy Father wrote, "Jesus, himself eternally young, wants to give us hearts that are ever young."⁶ Though we are of different and older generations than you, we have all been invited to share in Christ's eternal youthfulness, which "means having a heart capable of loving, whereas everything that separates us from others makes the soul grow old."⁷ Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:8) for every age, every generation, and every culture. He is the path, the companion, and the destination of a pilgrimage on which we are all traveling together. He wants us all to have a conversion of heart.

At times, members of the Catholic community—and this includes us—have not always been attentive to the needs of young people and families. We recognize the pain and struggle many of you experience in your lives, communities, or the Church. For anything that we may have done or failed to do, individually or collectively, contributing to young people's distress, we humbly and sincerely ask for forgiveness, and we resolve to do what is "right and just" now and into the future.

We are also writing this in the wake of several difficult events over the past few years: scandals within the Church, a global pandemic, financial difficulties that have impacted you and the Church's ministries for you, the breakdown of the family, an increase in acts of racism and prejudice, the rise of polarization, secularism, and individualism, and a growing awareness that many of you do not feel valued, listened to, or loved. On our part, we resolve to continue working with you and all of the Church to bring healing, reconciliation, and the peace of Jesus Christ.

This national pastoral framework is being given to the Church as a step toward more substantial conversations and Spirit-led renewal in our ministries to, with, and for you. We hope and pray that all the young people of our country, in particular those who are suffering, lost, or alone, "feel the closeness of a Catholic community that can reflect Jesus' words by our actions, our embrace, and our concrete help."⁸ Please know that you are constantly in our hearts and we, as servant leaders within the Church, want to journey together with you so that "we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands."⁹

⁶ CV, no. 13.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ CV, no. 77

⁹ CV, no. 199

In that spirit, we join Pope Francis in speaking directly to you as he did in *Christus Vivit* and as he does at World Youth Days and in other encounters and addresses. To begin, we wish to reiterate that God is always with you. Do not lose hope! There are reasons the Lord put you on your path in life. Do not lose faith when bad things happen and do not abandon hope if you have strayed from a good and moral path. You are holy and precious in the eyes of Christ: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19). Do not feel you are unlovable or unforgiveable.

In fact, you are so significant and worthy of love “for you are the work of his hands.”¹⁰ You are infinitely loved! You belong. You have a purpose. You matter. To God, to the Church, to us, to your peers, and to the world, you truly matter. Know of God’s boundless mercy and seek out opportunities for reconciliation. Christ pursues us, no matter how far we might stray from him, because he loves us. You are never too far away, and you always have a home in the Lord’s house, where you can encounter Jesus’ redeeming mercy.

Make time to read [Scripture](#), [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), and the lives of the saints, who inspire us by their timeless witness of faith. Read and reflect on [Christus Vivit](#) and hear Pope Francis speak directly to your heart. Persevere in the Christian faith. Be an active part of the Catholic community. Be protagonists of love and hope “and make good decisions”¹¹ in your daily life. Pray often. Slow down and allow God to speak to you in a still, small “whispering sound” (1 Kgs 19:12). Serve those in need. Consider where God is calling you in life “to share in his work of creation and to contribute to the common good by using the gifts we have received.”¹² Go and “make a ruckus!”¹³

As we said at the beginning of this letter, Christ is indeed alive in you. This is why “there can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life... If we hold fast to him, we will have life, and be protected from the threats of death and violence that may assail us in life.”¹⁴ We share this fervent hope with you. Have the courage to accept these challenges: being open to a conversion of heart to the way of Jesus; becoming a missionary disciple on fire with the faith; bearing witness to Christ and sharing the Gospel with your peers; and freely giving your life to the Lord and for others.

¹⁰ CV, no. 115.

¹¹ CV, no. 143.

¹² CV, no. 253.

¹³ CV, no. 143.

¹⁴ CV, no. 127.

For our part, we commit to praying for you and your well-being. We join you in prayer for the world, especially those on the peripheries who suffer greatly. We humbly ask you to pray for us, your bishops and pastors. The power of prayer is incredible. May we each pray for one another and for all our intentions. We especially look forward to praying alongside you when we have the honor of encountering each other in the sacred liturgy of the Church and sharing the Eucharist. We also commit to supporting you in your boldness as missionary disciples and to help you seek God’s truth, beauty, and goodness in the world, even if your peers may not support it. Pope Francis wrote, “Don’t think that this mission is soft and easy... don’t wait until tomorrow to contribute your energy, your audacity, and your creativity to changing our world... You are the *now* of God, and he wants you to bear fruit.”¹⁵

We commit to *listening to you* as, together, we discern what the Holy Spirit says to us through Scripture and Tradition, being attentive to the courageous words you share with the Church.

We commit to *teaching you*, ever watchful for the “signs of the times” (Mt 16:3),¹⁶ yet always faithful to Christ and his truth. We endeavor to share the Gospel by the witness of our lives and actions.

We commit to *sending you*, accompanying, investing in, and equipping you for the vocation and mission God has called you to in this life so that you might be loving agents of transformation.

Working together, let us all—bishops, ministry leaders, and young people, in the company of your pastors, families, and local communities—fervently commit to carrying out Christ’s mission in the world, in solidarity and in collaboration with each other, always guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us renew our mutual call to be missionary disciples who love the Lord and seek to do his will. Let us walk side by side with one another on this shared pilgrimage, “keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:2), with the maternal protection of our Blessed Mother Mary, the young woman of Nazareth, to whom we entrust the Church’s ministries to, with, and for you.

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¹⁵ CV, no. 178.

¹⁶ See also John XXIII, Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis* (HS), 1961, no. 4.