



INVITING

Young Adults into Dialogue

A Guide for Bishops & Church Leaders



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

Committee on
Evangelization
and Catechesis



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“Young people need to be taken seriously. We need to find ways to include them in the decision-making processes of the Church and to give them more room in pastoral care and in its structures.”

– *Christus Vivit*, 38

“...the place to begin engaging with any youth or young adult is through intentional and patient listening and dialogue, with the goal of helping a young person recognize God at work in their lives and stories. Christ always listens to us, and the Church should always listen to youth and young adults.”

– *Listen, Teach, Send*, Part 1

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Why These Conversations Matter

We are living in a time when many young adults in the United States are questioning institutional religion or quietly stepping away from parish life. That is why authentic conversations—rooted in love, deep listening, and genuine accompaniment—matter now more than ever.

When we sit down with young adults and truly listen, we create space to:

- Affirm them and the reality of their lived experiences.
- Invite them into deeper encounters with Christ and His Church.
- Invite them to moments of listening to God.
- Understand their spiritual hungers and respond with compassion.
- Discover together how the Holy Spirit may already be at work in their lives.

Pope Francis reminded us that the Church is called to be a “listening Church,” one that “pays attention to the legitimate desires of young people” (*Christus Vivit*, 7). The USCCB in its pastoral framework around young people noted that “like Jesus, we are called to listen with love, tenderness, and compassion” (*Listen, Teach, Send*, Part 1). Therefore, these conversations are not just another initiative, but can be meaningful ways to build trust, accompany young adults in their journey, show them love, tenderness, and compassion, and strengthen the life of the Church.

The Potential Impact

Engaging young adults in meaningful dialogue has ripple effects that can:

- Renew their personal faith and sense of belonging.
- Inspire them to discern and embrace their vocation.
- Foster co-responsibility in the Church’s mission.
- Encourage healing and reconnection for those who have felt excluded.
- Deepen their relationship with Christ and his Church.
- Strengthen the Church’s witness in the world by elevating young adult voices.

Who, Where, When, and How to Invite

WHO to Invite:

- Young adults who are active in parish life, including young singles and couples, young professionals, liturgical ministers, and catechists.
- Those on the margins: young adults who come to church occasionally, have left but remain curious, or feel excluded altogether.
- College students, recent graduates, young workers, and those discerning vocations.
- Young people who represent the ethnic, cultural, and social economic diversity of your diocese/eparchy.

WHO You May Encounter:

- Young adults who are passionate about the faith and want to know how to live and share it.
- Young people discerning their career, vocation, and place in this world.
- Young adults who may have felt unwelcome in some Church spaces.

- Young adults who love the Church but struggle with certain teachings.

WHERE to Invite Them:

- A meal at the bishop's residence, parish, college campus ministry, retreat center, or even neutral spaces like a café, bar, or park.
- A holy hour for reflection and conversation afterward.
- A community service project or a diocesan/eparchial activity where young adults might naturally gather.
- An online forum or digital town hall for wider reach.

WHEN to Invite:

- During liturgical seasons that invite deeper reflection.
- In response to major Church or diocesan/eparchial events.
- In light of sacramental moments they may have experienced, such as marriage, baptism, or OCIA, or key life transitions like moving to a new city, getting engaged or married, having a child, job loss, or the death of a beloved family member.

HOW to Invite:

- Personal invitations from the bishop's office, or parish leaders, vocation directors, or the diocese/eparchy's office for ministry with young adults.
- Utilize existing structures: diocesan/eparchial youth and/or young adult offices, Catholic colleges/universities, campus ministries, marriage prep programs, OCIA, or service/volunteer groups, especially those connected to the Catholic Church.
- Partner with "influencers" in young adult communities (and online)—those who are trusted and relationally connected to young adults.
- Frame it as a conversation, not a program. Consider language like "I want to hear and learn from you."

Extending the Reach Beyond the Pews

To engage those tangentially connected to the Church, bishops can:

- Invite dialogue via social media with short videos or open questions.
- Collaborate with Catholic service organizations or alumni networks.
- Host public events that explore common themes like meaning, purpose, or service.
- Encourage parishes to form listening teams specifically to engage lapsed or curious young adults.

Final Encouragement

The most meaningful invitation is personal. Making a space for real, open-hearted conversation can become a moment of encounter—an echo of how Jesus walks with his people. In writing *Listen, Teach, Send*, the USCCB used the Emmaus narrative as the foundational story, saying "Just as 'Jesus himself drew near and walked with them... while they were conversing and debating' (Luke 24:15), Christ draws near to us once more, as we ourselves continue to converse and discern the best practices and latest trends about young people" (Introduction). These recommended conversations may seem like small steps, but they are seeds. With prayer, presence, and trust in the Holy Spirit, these encounters can grow into something deeply meaningful—for the young adults and for the Church.

"... ministry must be synodal; it should involve a 'journeying together'."

– *Christus Vivit*, 206



Guiding Themes and Sample Questions

The questions in this section are just that—*questions*. They are not a script or checklist, but a collection to keep in your back pocket as you sit down with young adults. Think of them as good companions to have at the ready. They're meant to stir up your own curiosity and pastoral instincts—not replace them.

You do not need to ask all of them. Honestly, one well-placed question might be all it takes to open the door to something deeper. Let the conversation breathe. Let it go where the Spirit leads.

These sample questions are grouped around themes we've found helpful in drawing out meaningful stories, honest reflections, and moments of connection. You'll likely come up with better ones yourself—and that's exactly what we hope for. So, use what fits, adapt what helps, and trust that God is already at work in the space between your question and their answer.

Warm-Up Questions:

These are potential questions that you can use to start the conversation and get to know them a little. They are designed to build rapport with you and each other.

- Do you know why your parents gave your name?
- Where did you grow up—and what do you miss (or don't miss) about it?
- What is something people are surprised to learn about you?
- When life gets busy or overwhelming, what is one thing that helps you reset or recharge?
- What is something that made you smile this week?

1 Encountering God in Daily Life

THEME "Where is God showing up in your ordinary life?"

- Can you share a moment in the last week or two where you felt close to God—or maybe far from God?
- What keeps you spiritually grounded (or what are you still looking for)?
- If Jesus walked into this room and sat next to you, what would you want to ask Him?

Note: Look for entry points into grace—stories of parenting, work stress, transitions, or joys. Echo back what you hear with warmth and encouragement.

2 Belonging and the Church

THEME "Do I have a place here?"

- What has made you feel welcome—or unwelcome—in a parish community?
- What would an ideal parish feel like for you?
- When has the Church helped you feel more whole? When has it hurt?

Note: Acknowledge pain. Don't explain it away. Extend hope and healing. As noted in *Listen, Teach, Send*, "These healing acts are essential to a Church that truly listens to the young" (Part 1).

3 Wrestling with Faith and Teaching

THEME "I believe... help my unbelief."

- Are there parts of the faith that you find hard to understand or live out?



- How do you stay connected to the Church when it feels like a struggle?
- What do you hope the Church understands better about people your age?

Note: Consider modelling vulnerability. Offer “I, too, have wrestled with...” responses. Express admiration for faithfulness even in tension.

4 Tradition and Change

THEME “Holding on and moving forward”

- What traditions of the Church draw you in deeply?
- What parts of Church life do you struggle with?
- If you were bishop for a day, what’s one thing you’d do?
- How do you see your generation shaping the Church of tomorrow?
- How do you see AI changing human relations or your own relationships? How can the Church respond to AI?

Note: Encourage both reverence for tradition and openness to the Spirit’s movement.

5 Receiving the Kerygma

THEME “God’s love is not an idea—it is a person, a presence, and a promise.”

- What difference does it make in your life today that we were created out love?
- How does the reality of our brokenness help you make sense of what you are feeling and going through?

- How does knowing that we are redeemed through Christ shape the way you see yourself and others and how to live today?

Note: These are not theological quizzes. They are invitations to reflect on grace—on how the great story of salvation intersects with the stories we are living right now. Listen with reverence. Echo back what speaks of God’s love.

6 Mission and Calling

THEME “What is God inviting me to?”

- Where do you feel God calling you—right now?
- What are the gifts you bring to the Church?
- How are you already contributing to Christ’s mission in your daily life (through charity, justice, and love), and what can the Church do to support you in this work?
- If you could dream boldly with God, what would you hope to build or become?

Note: Affirm each person’s unique calling. Echo the Church’s encouragement: “Each of you has a mission... do not be afraid to dream of great things!”



Closing the Conversation

- Pray deeply with the young adults. Invite them to pray with and for you. Offer a blessing at the end.
- Consider final word of encouragement, such as:
“Thank you for your honesty and your heart. The Church is better, holier, and more alive because of you.”

Encouraged Follow-Up

- Connect them to their pastor and young adult ministries.
- Give a prayer card or a small item of meaning.
- Send a thank you note.
- Pray for them in your own daily prayers: that they continue to be listened to, that they may experience hope and healing through the community of the Church, that they continue on the journey towards understanding and their own vocational path.
- Consider giving them the recent U.S. Bishops’ letter to young people, written as part of the *Listen, Teach, Send* pastoral framework. This letter can be found in written format on the USCCB website (<https://www.usccb.org/dearyoungpeople>) or as a video message from several bishops (<https://www.usccb.org/resources/dear-young-friends-letter-us-bishops-youth-and-young-adults>).

“Dear young people, aspire to great things, to holiness, wherever you are. Do not settle for less. Then you will see the light of the Gospel grow every day, within you and around you.”

– Pope Leo XIV

Closing Mass Jubilee of Young People
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