

Setting Out: From College to Catholic Parish Life

A Catholic Campus Minister's Guide to Helping Students Navigate the Faith Journey Beyond College Graduation

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Setting Out: From College to Catholic Parish Life

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A special resource for campus ministers and pastoral ministry leaders accompanying collegiate young adults prepared by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth, in collaboration with the Secretariat of Catholic Education.

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Introduction

Here is what this guidebook is all about:

How can we invite graduating college students to stay connected to the Catholic Church, as they set out for whatever may come next?

While college provides a great opportunity for young adults to grow in the Catholic faith and the community of the Church, many graduates might feel alone and unsupported once they set out from the collegiate or university setting. Added to this, there may be less opportunities (compared to campus ministry experiences) for young adults to flourish in their faith life.

Campus and parish ministers, chaplains, mentors, and peer leaders can help prepare college students to remain alive in Christ after their graduation. This is done through intentional acts of pastoral accompaniment on the part of a Catholic ministry leader.

Pope Francis tells young people: “Christ is alive!... 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

With this important truth in mind, the Catholic bishops of the United States continue to encourage youth and young adults, saying, “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.”²

The pastoral minister, then, is wonderfully situated to ensure that the young people within their care know this and continue to radiate and feel Christ’s presence wherever they set out to go next. In a particular way, this certainly extends to the experience of graduating collegiate young adults, whose experience of transition sits at the key inflection point within that youth-to-young-adult journey.

The *Setting Out* guidebook provides some tools for college or university campus ministers and pastoral leaders in Catholic communities who work with collegiate-age young adults to engage with college students through various program ideas and information about the young adult experience within the Catholic Church. As with any ministry resource, use what you like, use what works with the young adults within your care, and feel free to adapt. Pastoral ministry leaders in campuses, parishes, and dioceses/eparchies know the young people in their care and can discern what they may need the most.

Above all, be a person of prayer. **Pray for these young adults** – for the completion of their collegiate studies, for their discernment and growth, and for wherever the Lord is calling them to go next.

¹ Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit* (CV; Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), nos. 1, 2.

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Listen, Teach, Send: A National Pastoral Framework for Ministries with Youth and Young Adults* (USCCB, 2024), p. 6. Please note that the edition of *Listen, Teach, Send* (LTS) cited in this guidebook will be the PDF version available on the USCCB website, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/listen-teach-send>. These page numbers do NOT refer to the print edition published in 2024 by Our Sunday Visitor (OSV) Publications.

Beginning with a Conversation

“Then (the disciples) set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news.” (Lk 9:6)

The first step in preparing young adults as they set out in their own way for Catholic life beyond college is through **conversations**: encouraging the young person’s voice and practicing Christ-like listening with a pastoral heart. Just as Jesus “summoned the Twelve” to prepare them for the journey ahead (see Lk 9:1-5), the campus ministry leader can do something similar.

Some prompt questions that the U.S. bishops have encouraged in their national pastoral framework, *Listen, Teach, Send*, include:

- What’s on your mind?
- What’s on your heart?
- What’s bothering you?
- What’s exciting for you?
- What are you dreaming about?
- For what are you hoping?³

As Jesus “drew near and walked with” the two disciples departing Jerusalem along the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:15), he asked them questions and listened (cf. Lk 24:17,19). In the same way, we begin with “intentional and patient listening and dialogue, with the goal of helping a young person recognize God at work in their lives and stories.”⁴

Meeting with students to talk about their plans after graduation often happens organically. They may begin by sharing career plans or expressing excitement or uncertainty about job prospects. Some may come with worries about keeping their faith going after graduation. These are signs that the young adult is taking ownership for their journey and maturing in their faith.

Walk patiently with them on this journey with empathy and compassion. Invite them to imagine or discern what they hope for and where God might be found on the road ahead, rather than telling them what they should or should not do. Convey these insights with a loving tone. As they begin to discern their dreams and visions and hopes, the pastoral leader can offer simple suggestions, based on their own lived experiences, for the young adult to grow their faith outside of a collegiate setting.

What follows are some additional tools for effective listening and dialogue along with detailed outlines of topics to cover in small group settings.

The goal is to support collegiate young adults as they look out into the future and thrive and feel prepared when they set out for the “real world” with a Catholic faith that can sustain and guide them.

Deepening the Conversation

When a student or young adult comes to you with questions and concerns about how to foster their faith beyond college, you may be unsure where to start. Begin with the prompt questions encouraged by the U.S. bishops. To expand upon them, the following questions can also be used to guide the conversation. Use them in a one-on-one setting, retreat, or small group.

The young person can spend time with these questions individually and, with the accompaniment of a pastoral leader and/or campus minister, a dynamic discussion can flow from his or her reflections as

³ LTS, p. 15.

⁴ Ibid.

the individual begins to think more critically and reflectively about what he or she wants to do after graduation. It is best to start with a few questions at a time.

About God

- Describe your relationship with God right now. Is it where you want it to be?
- What (if anything) do you want to change about your relationship with God?
- What are some devotions or prayer practices you want to continue practicing or implement into your routine as you set out beyond college?

About Faith

- How has your faith experience in college given you joy?
- What motivates you to continue growing your faith after college?

About Life

- What fears do you have about life after graduation?
- What life questions are most pressing for you as you begin this journey?

About Community

- How do you build trust and relationships with older generations in the community?
- What mentors, spiritual directors, or wisdom figures can you lean on for support and to help you navigate transitions in your personal or faith life?
- What are you looking for in a parish faith community?
- What can you know about Catholic life in the place where you will live after college?

About Ministry

- What was most important about your ministry experiences on campus/in college?
- What are you looking for in a meaningful ministry with young adults?
- What will you do if your local parish or the local diocese/eparchy in your area does not have an active ministry for young adults or if it doesn't meet your expectations?
- How do you feel about starting a ministry with young adults in your new area/parish?

Preparing Students for Catholic Life After College

What is Catholic life like beyond college graduation?

The answer is not the same for everyone or everywhere, as circumstances across the country and around the world are different and distinct. However, with some guidance on what to generally expect, graduates might feel more prepared and confident of what to anticipate.

Being a young adult Catholic can be challenging. It can be particularly challenging to know how to find one's place in the Church as a young adult. For pastoral leaders, though, this "sending forth" is the very reason for our work with young adults. As the U.S. bishops note,

Thus, the result of our ministries should point young people toward their mission, motivating them to go where Christ is calling them. The Church, having listened and taught them, now encourages them to choose to follow the path God has offered them for their lives.⁵

The work of campus ministry is directed toward guiding young adults along that path, grounding them in the tradition, and equipping them with tools to continue the journey. A few notes to pass along:

- **Catholic life beyond the college campus is a mix of experiences** and it is helpful to share with students the variety of Catholic settings they may encounter:
 - Some dioceses (for Latin/Roman-rite Catholics) or eparchies (for members of Eastern Catholic Churches like Byzantine, Ukrainian, Syro-Malabar, etc.) offer diocesan or eparchial-wide efforts or programs for young adults, while others may not.
 - Many Catholic parishes provide opportunities to be involved in a variety of ministries and service opportunities; some of them are young adult-specific, but many are not.
 - In some areas, there are ecclesial movements, associations, new communities, apostolates, and non-parish ministries that engage young adults, often centered around a particular spirituality or emphasis area. These are generally not geographically limited and may have "chapters" or groups around the world.
 - There are a rising number of digital or virtual Catholic programs, though these are not as regulated as in-person programs; always be mindful of the Catholic foundation of online ministries. Recommended ones are typically linked to a religious community, a particular apostolate, or have episcopal (bishop) endorsement.
 - Note that "ministry" is an activity of the Church and approved by the Church. Be mindful how this term is used, especially among entities not working with the approval of the Catholic Church in a parish, diocese/eparchy, or religious order.
- **Everyone is always welcome in their local ("territorial") Catholic parish.** Canonically, every person belongs somewhere (cc. 107 518 CIC). Wherever one lives, they are within the boundary of a Catholic parish. This should be the first place one should visit and with which to engage for fruitful Catholic participation.

⁵ LTS, p. 38.

- **No two parishes are the same.** One may have a vibrant ministry for young adults or be very welcoming of newcomers, while others may struggle to know how to engage young people. This also applies to local movements or diocesan/eparchial efforts.
 - Different communities emphasize or are equipped in certain dimensions of the Catholic faith but are lacking in other areas. Even though they are all united in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, each parish has its own identity, as well as strengths and experiences that make them unique.
 - The staffing and economic resources available to each parish or group varies. Limited financial support may hinder a community in developing various aspects of ministry. There may or may not be staff to coordinate an outreach to young adults. Much of this is dependent on economic realities in a given area.
- **In a similar way, each diocese or eparchy has its own distinct features** with priorities reflecting local needs. One diocese/eparchy may have a thriving ministry with young adults with staff and leaders eager to support individuals, while another may just be getting this ministry off the ground with a few volunteers.
- **Each bishop, pastor, priest, deacon, or other pastoral minister** in parishes and dioceses/eparchies will possess distinct strengths, weaknesses, and spiritual gifts. Some are gifted preachers and teachers, while others may be strong in pastoral care or administration.
- **Every person in a parish is important, including young adults;** however, they are one of the many generations and groupings of people with whom the Church engages. Recognize that communities balance time, resources, and attention for each population in their reach.
- **Recognize that some Catholic communities may be experiencing rough times:** trauma, polarization, disaffiliation, or other hurts may exist in a faith community, amplified by the realities impacting the wider society. It is important that graduates are aware that, at any given time or in any given place, a parish or diocese/eparchy may be struggling with something.

These notes point to a common theme: each diocese/eparchy and parish - as well as each pastoral leader within those communities - is **wonderfully unique** when it comes to their resources, capacity, and ability to engage young adults. The primary thing to share with young adults is that they should not lose hope: there are ways to navigate this journey and best navigated with Christian patience.

It is also important to share that a parish can be a new “home” for them, even if no formal ministry with young adults yet exists. Young adults can get involved in a variety of parish ministries such as:

- Adult Faith Formation
- Evangelization Ministries
- Charitable Activities
- Social Justice Advocacy
- Liturgical and Music Ministries
- Community and Networking Activities

Additionally, they can support the work of ministries for other generations or populations in the community such as children, youth, or senior citizens.

Recently arrived graduates are invited to work with the pastor and/or pastoral leadership of the community to develop a young adult outreach, group, or ministry. However, this is best done in consultation with those already in leadership within the parish or diocese/eparchy.

Campus ministers may also wish to walk with graduating seniors one-on-one through:

- The specifics of their intended geographical area/region
- Sharing links and resources from the local diocese/eparchy or surrounding parishes
- Suggesting Catholic alumni or colleagues with whom they can connect in that area

Keep in mind the personal priorities of what each young adult looks for in Catholic life: prayer experiences, music, preaching, community, social activism, and so forth. This way, the campus minister will know what to look for when exploring these resources with the young adult.

A Summary: Key Consideration for Post-Collegiate Parish Engagement

Regardless of the scenario, when it comes to getting involved in parish life as a young adult, there are a few things that campus ministry leaders can gently remind graduating students of as they begin their journey of faith as a post-grad young adult:

- **Parishes are intergenerational**, and therefore there are many needs that must be factored into parish life: children, youth, young adults, parents, grandparents, and families, single adults, and the elderly, not to mention other areas of ministry: sacramental life, education, social justice advocacy, environment, and so on.
- **Parishes are generally organized by territory or geography**, meaning that an individual already has a parish simply as a result of where he or she lives (cc. 107 518 CIC).
- **Parishes often have established ministries and long-term leaders**. As such, it is always important to practice patience and understanding, especially when proposing ideas or changes to the community's practices. It is best to respect and be aware of this reality.
- **Parish structures and systems can appear frustrating**, especially to newcomers. It can be easy to give up (especially when faced with phrases like "we've always done it that way"). If this happens, it is not a reflection on the young adult or their faith and passion, nor is it an indictment of the health or catholicity of a particular parish, diocese/eparchy, or pastoral leader. These realities are simply part of the fabric of Catholic life within and beyond college and university settings. Again, encourage patience and an appreciation of a broad perspective as young adults navigate challenges or pushback.
- **Parishes are places of trust**. Mutual trust may need to be further developed between the young adult(s) and the existing local community and its leadership, so that conflict and frustration can be avoided. Time and patience are key in situations like these. Campus leaders should encourage students to remain vigilant and persistent.
- **Parishes are built on relationships and community**. It is highly recommended for newcomers to foster authentic relationships with others in a community. Encourage students to get coffee with 5 to 10 different parishioners upon their arrival, and counsel them to listen to the concerns of those individuals. Equip them with questions such as "What brought you to this parish?" "What do you love about this community?" "What keeps you Catholic?" "What sustains and feeds your spirituality?" "What are your hopes and dreams for the parish?"

Ministries with Young Adults: A Brief Primer

Connecting with a Catholic ministry for young adults can be invaluable to a recent college graduate, as it can help her or him “develop relationships with peers who share similar values and beliefs which nurture and strengthen their faith, thereby creating communities of support.”⁶

It may be challenging for one young adult on his or her own to navigate through the various dimensions of Catholic life after college (as noted in the previous section). It is certainly good to build up graduating seniors’ confidence but also guide them to build a good peer network.

- **If there is an existing ministry with young adults at a parish,** it is a good idea for the graduate to attend some events, meet people who are involved, and introduce him or herself to the ministry leader or volunteer responsible for this outreach, letting them know that he or she is new to the area and that he or she is looking to get more involved.
- **If there is a young adult ministry office at the diocesan/eparchial level,** it is best for the graduate to reach out to the director (or associate director or coordinator) of that office to get more information about ministry with young adults across the diocese/eparchy. The diocesan/eparchial leadership can guide a young adult to a parish that may have something for young adults; they can also point a recent graduate to places that could use the energy and vitality they bring to the Church.
- **If there is not a well-established ministry with young adults at the parish or at the diocesan/eparchial level,** it may be helpful to guide the graduate in seeking out alternative options for getting involved as a young adult Catholic:
- **Seek out apostolates and ministries:** There are national and regional ministries, service organizations, third orders, associations, lay ecclesial movements, or new communities that are available in certain areas of the country. Examples that some young adults have connected with in the past include [FrassatiUSA](#), [Young Catholic Professionals](#), [Corazon Puro](#), [Climate Covenant Creation CareTeams](#), the [Given Institute](#), [Ignatian Volunteer Corps](#), the [Knights of Columbus](#), the [Knights of Peter Claver](#), or Catholic groups on [Meetup](#).
- **Starting a new parish ministry:** If the individual and/or their circle of friends have the energy and enthusiasm to do so, they might want to reach out or approach the pastor or a pastoral staff leader about starting something new for young adults (or a particular subsection of the young adult demographic such as recent college graduates) in the parish. This should be done with great patience and respect.

Young adults can receive training in the work of ministry with young adults by working with the [National Institute for Ministry with Young Adults](#) (NIMYA) on how to build an effective outreach to their peers. There are also resources available (books, websites, etc.), [linked at the USCCB website](#), that can give tips and ideas for developing this ministry.

⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults*, second edition (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 1996), p. 40.

Program Idea 1: Small Groups for Graduating Seniors

During the year prior to their leave-taking, engage college seniors in discerning their next steps in their faith lives by holding small group conversations. Each small group meeting could outline various aspects of a young adult's faith life beyond college. Not only will this be an avenue to share valuable information, but also bonds them together as a peer community.

One idea is to hold small group sessions on key topics of interest to a graduating senior, and connect them with *Christus Vivit* (CV), Pope Francis' 2019 apostolic exhortation (pastoral letter) to and about young people and to the entire People of God. This is available online at the [Vatican website](#), though you can purchase hard copies for each participant from a Catholic publisher of your choosing.

Timing for these small groups may be ideal in the fall semester or early in the spring, before collegiate young adults get busy with graduation events and end-of-the-year assignments.

Suggested Meeting Format

In short, the general outline for the one-hour sessions can flow from prayer and check-in to an introduction of the theme and Church's wisdom, which leads into a discussion and reflection from or on *Christus Vivit*, closing with prayer and final thoughts. Feel free to adapt or change the structure to accommodate local needs, including the timing of each element of the program.

1. Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Starting in prayer can ground the meeting in the presence of God and allows a few minutes for reflection and stillness as the meeting begins.

2. Check-in with Participants (5 minutes)

Offer a fun "get to know you" question (depending on the familiarity of the group), sharing highs and lows of the week, or a quick activity to build community.

3. Introduce the Meeting Topic (5 minutes)

Briefly introduce the topic of discussion for the meeting. The details of the discussion are found below in this chapter. You can also take this time at this moment of the program to share why this topic is important before getting into the heart of the discussion. If a speaker or facilitator has been invited in to share a perspective on the theme or issue chosen, this is a fitting element during the session for a formal introduction of him or her, and then allowing that person to offer some introductory comments.

4. Introduce the Church's Wisdom (5 minutes)

Share some initial insights on the topic from Scripture, the Catholic Tradition, the Saints, Church documents (including insights from the U.S. bishops' framework, *Listen, Teach, Send*, available [online here](#)), and especially the excerpts from *Christus Vivit* which will be used later in the session. This can be done by asking the young adult participants to read aloud the brief selections that have been pre-selected, or by the leader reading the passages to the young adults and asking for some time of stillness or silence to take in this wisdom.

5. **The Heart of the Discussion (20 minutes)**

This is the focus area for the session: a topic of relevance to those looking at their future beyond graduation. This can be done by developing an engaging activity or posing key questions to the group. Another way could be inviting a guest speaker or panel of alumni or students to share more about the topic at hand; this can be done as a formal presentation, a panel conversation, or a synodal dialogue with those present. Ideas listed with the topics below.

6. **Connecting with the Church's Wisdom (15 minutes)**

Another important aspect of the small group is reading and dissecting *Christus Vivit*. This apostolic exhortation is an important writing in the life of the Catholic Church today, as it is directed, in part, to young people and it is about young people. The hope is that the students involved will read the respective chapter(s) for each session and come ready to discuss points or insights that stood out for them. You may wish to have some specific talking points or questions to begin this reflective dialogue.

7. **Closing and Farewell (5 minutes)**

Closing the meeting in prayer can engage the students in their spiritual life. Consider inviting the young adults to take the lead in closing the session with a brief prayer (asking them to volunteer the previous week and bring a prayer with them). This is also an opportunity for the facilitator to share any announcements that need to be made.

The Mentorship Option

Students can also thrive in smaller or individualized settings. One-on-one time or a mentorship program are great alternatives to small groups. If you meet with students individually, you can organically go through the small group plan listed below as you guide students on this journey, using *Christus Vivit* (as well as *Listen, Teach, Send*) as a compass.

You can also coordinate a program of established “mentors” (alumni, faculty, staff, local pastoral ministers in the region or diocese/eparchy, priests, consecrated religious, lay ecclesial ministers, caring adults in the community, etc.) who could be trained and paired with one or more students throughout the course of a given academic year or a semester.

The Listen, Teach, Send Option

If time is short, another route is reading together the “Preface Letter” for young people at the beginning of the U.S. Catholic bishops’ document, *Listen, Teach, Send* (LTS). This letter is short (less than six pages) but it is an opportunity for collegiate young adults to hear their own bishops speaking directly to them and their realities. LTS can be found at <https://www.usccb.org/resources/listen-teach-send>.

The *Listen, Teach, Send* option can be done over one or over several (two, three, or four) sessions, depending on the situation within the campus, parish, or ministry. It can also vary depending on how deep each session goes, or how you might supplement the session with additional activities or prayer. Below is a quick template for a flow for one or for each of the sessions.

1. **Opening Prayer (5 minutes)**
2. **Check-in with Participants (5 minutes)**
3. **Read an Excerpt or the Entire Letter (5 to 20 minutes)**

At this time, a brief excerpt can be read, or the entirety of the letter can be read together. It is advisable that different young adults read different paragraphs or pages, to break up the hearing of the text. If broken into excerpts, here are recommended breaks (beginning after the opening greeting “Dear young friends”) for four (4) sessions:

- Paragraphs 1 to 6 (“Christ is alive...” to “...saints toward holiness and salvation.”)
- Paragraphs 7 to 11 (“The purpose of...” to “...lend new strength to our hands.”)
- Paragraphs 12 to 15 (“In that spirit...” to “...your life to the Lord and for others.”)
- Paragraphs 16 to 20 (“For our part...” to “...ministries to, with, and for you.”)

N.B. For two (2) sessions, use the first two bullets above; for three (3) sessions, keep the first two bullets as is, and combine the last two bullets together for a third session.

4. **The Heart of the Discussion (30 minutes)**

Take time to reflect carefully on what was heard from the bishops; if time allows, consider re-reading certain passages to allow a deeper hearing to take place.

Key questions to explore:

- How does what I heard resonate with my reality as a young adult today?
- What word, phrase, or sentence particularly caught my attention? Why?
- In what ways do I/we feel the bishops have heard me/us?
- How are the bishops encouraging me and my peers in these words?
- How are the bishops challenging me and my peers in these words?
- In what ways do I/we feel compelled to move forward or take action?

These questions can be asked with one excerpt from the letter or the entire letter. The discussion may take longer if the entire letter is covered in a session.

5. **Closing and Farewell (5 minutes)**

The *Christus Vivit* Option

The flow of the sessions moves a participant from their starting point in college toward their life beyond college. Each part flows from one to the other, building upon past insights. These sessions would use Pope Francis’ *Christus Vivit* as the foundational text.

Session 1: Personal Prayer and Spirituality

- Corresponding with *Christus Vivit*, Chapter One: “What does the word of God have to say about young people?” and Chapter Two: “Jesus, ever young”

In this session, students will have the opportunity to reflect on their own faith life as it currently stands. Campus ministers can lead students through a reflection activity to examine their faith life and their

relationship with God throughout college and where they hope to take it beyond college. This is a great way to help students see where they have been, where they currently are, and where they would like to go next with their faith life.

Another approach is to dive deeper into a particular type of prayer, devotion, or Catholic spirituality (i.e., Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian, Benedictine, Carmelite, etc.). The activity or guest speaker could help students find a particular prayer practice that may be helpful to them as they enter into a new world beyond the college or university setting.

Some questions based on *Christus Vivit* could include:

- Pope Francis speaks about how our faith lives can be described as a “community on a journey” where we, like Jesus, “can move freely and learn to journey with others.”⁷ How has your own faith life prior to and during college felt like a “community on a journey”?
- Since “Jesus’ life can prove inspiring for all those young people who are developing and preparing to take up their mission in life” (CV 30), what have you learned about Christ and the Catholic faith that will help you take up your mission beyond college?
- Which, if any, of the saints or blessed mentioned throughout *Christus Vivit* (nos. 49-63) do you already know and go to for spiritual support? Who would you like to know more about? Which saints or blessed (of those listed in CV) would you like to closely accompany you as you go forward?

Session 2: Realities Facing Young Adults Today

- Corresponding with *Christus Vivit*, Chapter Three: “You are the ‘now’ of God”

In this session, students will reflect on their and their peers’ lived realities and how they understand the world around them. As young adults prepare for living, working, and experiencing life in the “real world,” it is helpful to keep in mind how God is present for them, no matter the challenges or difficulties they might face. An activity or guest speaker can focus on overcoming a struggle, navigating the digital landscape, or handling a moral or ethical issue at work or at home. The activity could also include creating a tool for navigation (compass or map) as it relates to their own experience.

Some questions based on *Christus Vivit* could include:

- Pope Francis observes that “the hurt felt by some young people is heart-rending, a pain too deep for words.”⁸ What are some of the struggles you faced throughout college? Looking beyond graduation, what are the fears that come to mind?
- Despite the “setbacks, disappointments and profoundly painful memories,” “Jesus makes his presence felt amid these crosses borne by young people; he offers them his friendship, his consolation and his healing companionship” and others in the Church can also “be his instrument on this path to interior healing and peace of heart.”⁹ How and with whom have you felt Jesus’ love in your difficult times in the past? How might you seek support when challenges arise in the future beyond college? Who are the people in your life that have been Christ-like to you?

⁷ CV, no. 29.

⁸ CV, no. 77.

⁹ CV, no. 83.

- Throughout the listening and learning process that led up to *Christus Vivit*, the Synod Fathers recognized the great numbers of youth and young adults around the world who are hurt and overwhelmed - and who are mentioned throughout Chapter 3 (nos. 64-102). How can you, as a young adult, be Jesus' instrument of healing and comfort to the people you will encounter? How can you become more aware of others' struggles?

Session 3: Becoming Protagonists and Leaders

- Corresponding to *Christus Vivit*. Chapter Five: "Paths of youth"¹⁰,

This session could be a great opportunity to introduce (or reintroduce) the themes of [Catholic Social Teaching](#) to graduating college students and why the Catholic faith calls them to action: to protagonism and leadership in Church and society. Many young people in college enjoy volunteering or being part of a service immersion experience, and this session is a great time to share ways they can carry on or expand that passion when they leave college and continue through young adulthood. A focus on how social justice/charitable work can be an integral part of the Catholic lifestyle.

Some questions based on *Christus Vivit* could include:

- Pope Francis notes that "Much of the longing present in the hearts of young people can be summed up in the word 'restlessness'" which "generates a boldness that leads you to stand up and take responsibility for a mission."¹¹ What are you restless about regarding injustices in the world? What are your dreams for humanity?
- Pope Francis "ask(s) young people to go beyond their small groups and to build 'social friendship, where everyone works for the common good'... find points of agreement amid conflict, build bridges, and make peace for the benefit of all."¹² How do you foresee yourself getting involved with charitable service and social justice in your young adult life after college graduation? What would help you stay motivated?
- Young adults are called to be "protagonists of change" who get involved to "[c]ontinue to fight apathy and to offer a Christian response to the social and political troubles emerging in different parts of the world" and "to work for a better world."¹³ In what ways are you a protagonist for change? How are you a peacemaker working for a better world? How can we move from being people that volunteer when it is convenient and when we want to "do something for others" into a relationship with people in need and the entities that provide them with various resources?

Session 4: Navigating Parish Life

- Corresponding with *Christus Vivit*, Chapter Six: "Young people with roots"

This meeting will explore what it means to belong to a parish, how to find a parish, and why registering is important. Parish life is intergenerational, and it may be challenging to navigate (where most fellow Catholics are not of the same generation). Focus on the transition and the uncertain

¹⁰ *Christus Vivit* and other Vatican texts use the word "youth" but the word often means those approximately 16 or 18 years of age to one's 30s. In the United States, this age group would be called "young adults."

¹¹ CV, no. 138.

¹² CV, no. 169.

¹³ CV, no. 174.

experience of locating a parish and feeling at home in a new community. Reflect on the *parish discernment tool* found in this guidebook.

Some questions based on *Christus Vivit* could include:

- “[I]t is impossible for us to grow unless we have strong roots to support us and to keep us firmly grounded. It is easy to drift off, when there is nothing to clutch onto, to hold onto.”¹⁴ How can parish community life keep us rooted in our Catholic Christian faith in a way that individual or digital-only engagement cannot? On the reverse side, how can digital ways help young adults grow in their faith in ways parish communities cannot?
- You might fear, in joining an intergenerational parish community, that there might be danger in homogenizing all of our experiences, “blurring what is distinctive”¹⁵ about us in order to be part of the Church. How can you approach parish life without giving up who you are? How can you add your distinctive generational and cultural gifts to parish life?
- Pope Francis reminds us that “If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future.”¹⁶ How can we reframe our approach to parish life as a life-giving experience of “journeying together” across generations, cultures, and communities? What can we do to learn from and contribute to the intergenerational nature of parish life?

Session 5: Ministries with Young Adults

- Corresponding to *Christus Vivit*, Chapter Seven: “Youth Ministry”

Ministries with young adults can vary from one parish or diocese/eparchy to the next. Finding a “home” within a pastoral outreach for young adults can be a challenge for many young adults, who seek to find something akin to their experience in college campus ministry.

It may be helpful to invite to the session a local diocesan/eparchial or parish young adult minister. You may also want to prepare students for the climate of the local church that they will face in the new city or town where they are going after graduation. Another route could be to invite students to participate in a spiritual gifts assessment to find out how their gifts can best fit in with parish life.

Some questions based on *Christus Vivit* could include:

- Pope Francis notes that “Young people frequently fail to find in our usual programs a response to their concerns, their needs, their problems and issues.”¹⁷ How are you prepared to encounter parishes that may not be as responsive to your realities? How will you prepare yourself to not lose hope in Catholic parish life if faced with setbacks? What strategies can help you navigate these challenges?
- Pope Francis also affirms “that young people themselves know how best to find appealing ways to come together... to organize events, sports competitions and ways to evangelize using social media, through text messages, songs, videos and other ways”¹⁸ How will you step forward in

¹⁴ CV, no. 179.

¹⁵ CV, no. 186.

¹⁶ CV, no. 199.

¹⁷ CV, no. 202.

¹⁸ CV, no. 210.

this ministry - either to add your voice to already-existing ministries or help build up a new ministerial outreach?

- Pope Francis warns that ministries with young people should not “become isolated and lose contact with parish communities, movements, and other ecclesial institutions” but rather “be better integrated into communities that are open, living their faith, eager to radiate Christ, joyful, free, fraternal, and committed.”¹⁹ He also noted that “it will prove beneficial for (people) not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church.”²⁰ How can you make sure that any ministry with young adults you might engage in might build a bridge and makes connections with the parish?

Session 6: Vocation and Discernment

- Corresponding to *Christus Vivit*, Chapter Eight: “Vocation” and Chapter Nine: “Discernment”

Pope Francis’ *Christus Vivit* flowed from the Synod on “Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.” This latter element is a critical aspect of young adulthood. Vocation, as the Holy Father notes, is broader than usually thought: it is “the call to life, the call to friendship with (God), the call to holiness,”²¹ encompassing everything that the Lord has in store for one’s life and mission in the world.

The purpose of ministry - in college and in young adulthood especially - is to prepare the young person for a movement towards mission. A conversation on this topic can include different vocational pathways (marriage, ordained ministry, consecrated life, lay ecclesial ministry, etc.), unpacking both how they discerned their calling and how they continue to live out their vocation every day.

Some questions based on *Christus Vivit* could include:

- Pope Francis notes that “The first thing we need to discern and discover” is how we relate to Jesus Christ, “the basis of all else.”²² How does your relationship with God inform your life’s goals, your future plans, and your outlook on the world?
- Vocation in the strict sense is defined “as a call to missionary service to others... to share in his (the Lord’s) work of creation and to contribute to the common good by using the gifts we have received.”²³ Pope Francis remarks that this “personal vocation does not consist only in the work you do, though that is an expression of it” but that it “is something more: it is a path guiding your many efforts and actions towards service to others.”²⁴ With this in mind, how do your career goals, your relationships, and your dreams about family life, accomplishments, and future plans all connect to service to others? How can your work be oriented completely towards this missionary service to other people?
- Have you considered special service to the Catholic Church as an ordained minister (priest or deacon), as a person in consecrated life (e.g., sister or brother, consecrated virgin, hermit), or as a lay ecclesial minister? Pope Francis reminds each of us: “do not dismiss the possibility of

¹⁹ CV, no. 220.

²⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 29.

²¹ CV, no. 248.

²² CV, no. 250.

²³ CV, no. 253.

²⁴ CV, no. 255.

devoting yourself to God... (for) if you do recognize and follow a call from God, there you will find complete fulfillment.”²⁵ How can you pray around these possibilities?

- Pope Francis encourages silence,²⁶ questions,²⁷ internal reflection and dialogue with Jesus,²⁸ and engagement with mentors and spiritual companions²⁹ as routes to discerning one’s vocation. How will you regularly engage in the discernment process, so you can always be open to wherever God is calling you in your life ahead?

Session 7: Moving Forward in Hope

- Corresponding to *Christus Vivit*, Chapter Four: “A great message for all young people”

All things come to an end, but it is great to be able to “land the plane” and “wrap up” the small groups as the graduating students prepare to enter the “real world.” The future is uncertain and for many, this can be both scary and exciting. Some may be worried about the unknown places they are going to and may even feel rudderless. Others may be excited and encouraged by a new beginning that is emerging. This last session is a great opportunity to instill a sense of confidence and hope in young adults.

As an activity, this would be a great chance for the students to participate in the “Faith Roadmap” activity listed later in this guidebook. This session may also involve a motivational speaker who can provide them with a dose of inspiration. Helping the young adults reflect on what they learned over the course of these sessions, and what they will take with them, may clarify their hopes and direction as they look ahead to the future, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Some questions based on *Christus Vivit* could include:

- Pope Francis offers this comforting note: “If you are young in years, but feel weak, weary, or disillusioned, ask Jesus to renew you. With him, hope never fails.”³⁰ He also reminds us: “(Christ) does not get upset if you share your questions with him. He is concerned when you *don’t* talk to him, when you are not open to dialogue with him.”³¹ How can you keep Jesus close to your heart in times of uncertainty? How can you be a protagonist in your own story?
- We know that Jesus Christ is more than “a fine model from the distant past” but rather he is “[t]he one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us.” “Alive, he can be present in your life at every moment, to fill it with light and to take away all sorrow and solitude.”³² How will you remain alive with Christ and radiate Christ in your post-collegiate young adult life?
- Because Christ is alive in us, “there can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life and that all our struggles will prove worthwhile”³³ Aided by the Holy Spirit, how will you maintain and move forward in hope? How will you be a source of hope for those around you, as Christ remains alive in all you do?

²⁵ CV, no. 276.

²⁶ See CV, nos. 283-284.

²⁷ See CV, nos. 285-286.

²⁸ See CV, nos. 287-290.

²⁹ See CV, nos. 291-298.

³⁰ CV, no. 109.

³¹ CV, no. 117.

³² CV, nos. 124, 125.

³³ CV, no. 127.

Program Idea 2: Alumni Panel Discussion

Offer graduating students a chance to meet Catholic alumni and/or young adults (who have graduated from any college) who are active in the community and in their faith.

Current students would be invited to listen to this panel of three to five people who share their experience of finding or maintaining their faith life after graduating college or university. It is ideal if you can find panelists who have graduated from the institution itself in order to zone in on the journey of a young adult from that particular school, as every university is different. Regardless, what is key is making sure there are individuals who can share their post-grad story to inspire current students.

TIP: *You can work with the local diocese/eparchy (perhaps a youth, campus, or young adult ministry office) to find young adult Catholics who would be willing to be part of this panel. You can also reach out to your institution's alumni office. You may also keep in touch with past students who live nearby, and they would be another good choice for a panel such as this.*

Suggested (One-Hour) Format

1. **Welcome and Introductions** (5 minutes)
2. **Panel Conversation** (30 minutes)

Examples of questions to ask panelists:

- What has been your career, vocation, or life path since graduating?
- What do you wish you knew about what it's like to grow your faith after college?
- What is something that has surprised you about the process?
- What has been the most joyful part about your faith life after graduation?
- What has been challenging about your faith journey after graduation?
- How do you balance your career/job and faith?
- How do you see your career/job as a vocation or service to others?
- What is something you think everyone should be involved in or look for as they navigate their faith life after graduation?
- How did you discover a parish "home" after graduation? What would you do differently? What advice do you have for future graduates seeking a parish?
- What challenges have you faced in your faith journey?
- Are you engaged in a "young adult ministry" of any kind? Can you share?
- What do you know now that you wish you knew when you graduated?

If the alumni had the experience of encountering no ministry with young adults, and had to take action to develop a sustainable ministry with and/or for their peers:

- What advice do you have regarding approaching and/or talking to a pastor or pastoral leader about starting something for young adults?
- What advice do you have about parishes or dioceses/eparchies that may not have an active ministry with young adults?
- What advice do you have about starting a new ministry with young adults?

3. **Audience Questions** (20 minutes)

4. **Closing and Prayer** (5 minutes)

Consider also having a post-panel reception or social where the students and the alumni could interact with one another in informal ways and share information and/or contact details with one another (as networking will be very important for graduating students going out into the “real world”).

You may also want to invite parishes and dioceses/eparchies in the area to “exhibit” or “sponsor” the event, so that students know there are Catholic opportunities available in the area after graduation.

TIP: *Reach out to the staff of the local Catholic parishes and/or dioceses/eparchies about collaborating on this project in general. The parish and/or diocesan/eparchial leaders would likely welcome the chance to meet young adults who may be new to their area. You may even wish to have someone in an ecclesial leadership position (ordained, religious, or lay) to be a part of the panel.*

Program Idea 3: The “Looking Ahead” Retreat

Depending on available resources, college campus ministers can put together a “Looking Ahead” retreat, whether day-long or weekend-long, to allow upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) in college a chance to take time to reflect on their hopes for fostering their Catholic faith after graduation.

The retreat could include some talks about various topics relating to this (vocation, what do you want for your faith life, how to connect with God, prayer, etc.). In addition, previous activities and ideas mentioned in this guidebook could be incorporated into the retreat, if they were not already part of the students’ experiences that year. This would be a special retreat, focused on the future beyond graduation, and because of that, should be targeted for forward-looking juniors and seniors in college.

A sample schedule for a day-long “Looking Ahead” retreat for students

- **Students arrive** and get settled, ice breaker activity (30 minutes)
- **Welcoming** remarks, opening prayer (15 minutes)
- **First talk** about prayer (20 minutes)

This talk would explore how inviting God into the next phase of their life through prayer and reflection will help ease some of their feelings of being overwhelmed. Sharing how prayer as a young adult without the support of Campus Ministry programs can look different. Giving examples of prayer and how a young adult might engage in it will be helpful here.

- **Personal reflection** time (10 minutes)

Give students time to absorb the talk and reflect through journaling or sitting in silence. Students will stay in the same room as the talk to sit in quiet reflection before moving into small group spaces next.

- **Small group** time (45 minutes)

This is a time for students to reflect on the talk on prayer. Reflection questions could include “what is your prayer life like now, and how can you continue those practices after college?” “What new prayer practices from the talk would you like to try?” “What is God’s role in your discernment as you begin to reflect on your faith life after college?”

- **Alumni panel** and dialogue (see Program Idea 2 for more information on this) (1 hour)

- **Lunch** (1 hour)

- **Presentation about parish life** and young adult ministry from alumnus/alumna (20 minutes)

A recent alumnus or alumna could come and give a short presentation about the experience with parish life or young adult ministry. This can help students see a recent grad’s perspective on how they transitioned from their own school to the “real world” and how that transition has gone for them, especially as it relates to their faith life.

- **Large group discussion** about parish discernment tool (see below) (15 minutes)
- **Reflection activity** surrounding the theme of **vocation** (1 hour)

Students could break up into the same small groups as earlier to reflect on readings from Christus Vivit or Listen, Teach, Send about vocation as a young adult, using other writers and Scripture to remind them that our true vocation is to love others through our words and actions, listening to the spirit, and discerning how to best live out our faith in the “real world.” Note that vocation “can be understood in a broad sense as a calling from God, including the call to life, the call to friendship with him, the call to holiness, and so forth... it situates our whole life in relation to the God who loves us.”³⁴

- **Presentation about discernment and transitions** in adulthood (20 minutes)

This talk could be about how students can discern during the transition into adulthood. Discernment can often be about big things like what job they’ll have or where they want to live, or it can be about little things like how they’ll spend their free time. Sharing how discernment is a life-long process and doesn’t stop once they’ve discerned where they’re going and what they’re doing will help them have a spirit of discernment throughout their adult life.

- **Personal reflection** time (10 minutes)
- **Presentation about charity and justice** in adulthood (30 minutes)

Have someone share about ways to get involved in social justice advocacy and various causes/programs to engage in as a young adult. This presentation should integrate the lessons on mission, service, and justice in Christus Vivit and Listen, Teach, Send. A young adult from the community can come in and share about his or her volunteerism and how they use Catholic Social Teaching in their life. Students can ask questions after the presentation as well.

- **Prayer** to wrap up the experience (30 minutes)

Spend some time prayerfully asking students to reflect on what they will take away from the experience of the day, how they will begin to think about their faith outside of college and offer them a resource packet with information from the day so they have something tangible to remind them of the day. Close with a prayer tradition that is special to the students, the campus community, or has a connection to the themes of mission and vocation.

³⁴ CV, no. 248.

For Collegians: Discerning a Parish Home

Though the majority of this guidebook is meant for college campus ministers as they minister to young adults preparing to graduate from university or college, **this discernment guide below was created for the young adults directly.** The “you” in the next few pages is the soon-to-graduate or recently graduated young adult as they leave the collegiate environment and put into practice what they have learned from your accompaniment.

Graduates, this is for you as you look beyond college life...

Finding a new place to live and finding a faith community can be both exciting and hopeful, but also challenging, especially in one’s young adulthood, filled with rapid transition and new beginnings. Knowing where to start or what to do might be a mystery when you begin looking. You may have fond memories of parish life before college as a child or teenager. Or you may have no preconception or previous experience. For the moment, we begin with fresh new eyes.

This **Parish Discernment Guide** is meant to help you, as a college graduate, discern where you might live so that you can call a parish “home” – where you can grow in the Catholic faith. This tool can help you pay attention to various aspects of prayer and liturgies, opportunities you will discover, people you will meet, and personal reflection on your own stake in this journey.

The first note is that Catholic canon law says that, wherever you move, you have a parish home simply as a result of where you live, that is, within the territorial boundaries of a Catholic church within your local diocese/eparchy (cc. 107 518 CIC).

It is advised, before you move to a given area, that you do this discernment process within the overall decision-making process of where to live. Explore the various Catholic communities in the general vicinity of where you hope to settle upon leaving college.

Important Reminders

Keep in mind that this is a process – a journey. As you discern a Catholic community to call “home,” remember that first impressions may not always be accurate or, at the very least, could be far from complete. It can be unfair to assess a parish and its people after only one singular experience. Take the time to visit each parish in an area on several occasions. Make notes each time you visit and notice what was comfortable or uncomfortable.

What touched your heart and what left you wanting more?

Consider participating in a few activities or events or take part in some of the parish’s programs. Most importantly, it is essential to make connections with parishioners, the pastor or lay pastoral leaders as well as those sitting in the back of the church.

Laying down “roots” takes time and patience. There is nothing wrong with taking time to explore and discover. It can help to connect this exploratory journey with discernment and prayer - allowing you to see the Lord work in mysterious ways. Checking out parish websites and livestream masses are a good way to make an initial assessment of a parish.

Consider using the Ignatian Examen as a means to prayerfully guide you through each question listed below, to see where God is pointing or urging you. Another route is by treating the questions below like an assessment/evaluation tool, writing down first (and second and third) impressions of the parish for each question.

Regardless of the method, be patient and gentle with yourself. Finding a new home takes time and effort. A discernment process calls attention to where the Holy Spirit is moving within and around you. It is a process, not a checklist. There may be aspects of a parish community that you may like or don't particularly care for. All that said, the goal is to find Spirit at work in our unique journey. Feel free to make this tool your own.

Step One: Reflect.

Starting with prayer helps to ground the discernment experience in God.

Discerning a parish home takes patience and an intentional listening to the Holy Spirit. Whether you pray before arriving at a parish, as you sit in the pew, or after you return home, grounding your heart and mind in God can help you pay attention to the movement of the Spirit during this process. Allow your hopes and desires to surface as you invite God into this process. Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you as you discern where God is calling.

Even if a parish does not become your eventual home, it is crucial to pause in gratitude for the experience you had passing through. Thank God for the gift of each and every parish you visit and consider. Be grateful for the local community and for the faithful who already call it their "home." Give thanks to the Lord for all its history and stories that form the parish's foundation, for the people who feel connected to the spiritual life of this place, and for the presence of God that emerges from the Word and Sacrament each week and from the ministries that flow from them. Use this moment of gratitude to also thank God for allowing you to enter into this space, to encounter these particular people, and to hear the Lord's voice in your heart.

Pray also for the intentions of each community. If there is a book of prayer in the vestibule or within the sanctuary itself, pause over that book and pray for the needs expressed. Pray for the other people who may also be new or uncertain, that God may guide them as he is guiding you.

Finally, pray for openness to the Holy Spirit. Pray that all worries, assumptions, and judgments will be cleansed from your heart and mind so that you can receive God's grace in this parish unencumbered by distraction and anxiety. Pray to be fully present in this place.

Step Two: Participate.

In 1963, during the Second Vatican Council, the Church released a document called *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, or the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. In this document, the Catholic Church invited all the People of God to "fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations."³⁵ This means that when we attend a liturgy, we are invited to be fully present: to pray, to sing, as well as act as one with others in posture during the Mass. While listening to the movement of the Spirit, participate fully to be more in tune to the Spirit in the music, people, priest, and environment of the parish.

³⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14.

As you sing, what stands out to you about the lyrics of the hymns? When listening to the homily, what lessons can you apply to your own life? When kneeling in reverence, how is the Spirit present in you? Asking yourself questions allows you to recognize the Spirit's presence.

As Pope Francis said about young adults' engagement in the world, "Don't observe life from a balcony."³⁶ The same applies to your discernment process. Don't just observe parishes in your journey; rather, engage fully with each community and their worship. By doing this, you can be truly immersed in the discernment process and can make a more fruitful decision of where you may ultimately call home, geographically and spiritually.

Step Three: Contemplate.

Once the liturgy ends, take a moment to contemplate and reflect on your experience of the Spirit at work during the Mass. Come back to the experience in prayer, a few days later, a week or two later, and even a month later. What speaks to you about that liturgical experience? What do you want to further explore? Where might it have been difficult to feel the Spirit?

Careful contemplation is the key to this process and prevents us from making snap decisions or incomplete judgments. Patient contemplation is essential for the Spirit's call to take root in us.

Consider making a second (or third) trip to each parish. Be especially mindful of those things that caught your attention on the first visit, and those things that caused you concern or that brought joy to your heart.

Approach the community with an open heart and mind. Consider attending a liturgy at a different time in their weekend schedule of Masses. For example, if you went to the 11:00 a.m. liturgy, try the 5:00 Saturday Vigil Mass. Be open to the Holy Spirit. Some parishes have different priests, deacons, ministers, or music experiences at their various liturgies. Give the parish another chance if you feel moved to do so, so that your contemplation is even more full.

Some questions to consider asking yourself in prayer as you discern each parish experience could be:

- What was most meaningful to me about this experience of liturgy at this parish?
- Where was I challenged in this experience of liturgy at this parish?
- What did I observe about the space, music, environment, preaching, and people?
- Did I connect with anyone at the parish? How was that connection received?
- Did anyone reach out to me at the parish? How can I build a relationship with them?

Always remember that the Church is both a divine and a human institution, and as such, each community is a blessing to God, regardless of idiosyncrasies or challenges within a particular parish. Reflect on how you can become appreciative of God's love for all communities of faith.

Step Four: Engage.

On your first, second, or later visits, be sure to introduce yourself to other parishioners, to the parish leaders, and to the priest and/or deacon. Let them know you are new and are exploring ways to live your faith at a local Catholic community in your new area.

³⁶ *Christus Vivit*, no. 143.

Offer to meet one-on-one with anyone you feel drawn to get to know more, continuing to look for the movement of the Spirit. As a person of integrity, be honest with your exploration. Let those you engage know that you were active in college campus ministry and are now seeking a new parish “home.” Ask some questions about the various ministries of the parish and the opportunities for a young adult to get involved.

Some questions can include the following:

- Where can I learn more about the various ministries you offer?
- What ministries are in need of volunteers?
- Is there a young adult who currently serves on the parish’s pastoral or finance council?
- I was really involved in (service projects, retreats, small groups, etc.) in college. What can I get involved in here that would be similar?
- Do you have an organized ministry for young adults?
 - If so, tell me more about who to connect with.
 - If not, would I be able to start one?

As you make your personal reflection on what you observe, are there any activities that speak to you? Can you imagine yourself integrated into this parish community? If so, you may wish to explore these questions with the individuals who are overseeing these ministerial areas or ask them more specific questions about the ministry you are considering.

The key component to this step is going deeper, and that can only happen through dialogue with people (and not just their promotional materials like bulletins, web pages, etc.).

Step Five: Be patient.

Patience is key when discerning a parish. In fact, patience is a key to the Christian life.

Pope Francis advises young people: “my joyful hope is to see you keep running the race before you... May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them! And when you arrive where we have not reached, have the patience to wait for us.”³⁷

Attending two or three or more liturgies at the same parish will offer a better sense of the community. It allows us to ask: How does each experience align with what I am seeking? Keep trying. The beauty of the Church is that there are Catholic communities in every part of the world.

There is a place that is just right for you. Persevere and know that God is looking out for you at every stage of the journey. Give this process time and ask God for guidance as you discern and decide. A home parish community is so very important in the life of a Catholic. It roots us to our faith and connects us to the universal family of faith. Take the time you need to find a parish community that can help you to grow and be “at home” with God. Pay attention to how the Spirit moves in you, in the parishioners, and through the liturgy itself. Sit in prayer and discernment and then decide.

³⁷ CV, no. 299.

Final Thoughts

If you happen to attend a new parish with a friend or family member, continue this process, but be aware of the ways the Spirit will move in the other person you're with in ways that are different from your own. You may be drawn to one aspect of a parish in a way your friend is not, or vice versa.

It's okay to include others in your discernment process, but remember you are your own person, and the Spirit will move in you the way the Spirit is meant to.

It is also important to pay attention to the way the entire community of faith operates. A parish's most frequent participants may be established families and the elderly, so including young adults in the life of the parish may take time for them to adjust to (and keep in mind that others in their 20s may have young children and may already be an active part of the parish). Be patient and try to get to know the pastor and lay leaders to show you hope to get involved.

There may also be specific traditions or ways of worship that you may be unfamiliar with at a particular parish. For example, there may be some parishes that are associated with a specific religious order like the Franciscans or the Augustinians that may involve certain traditions at Mass that you will not find in a parish staffed by diocesan clergy. These parishes are more common in larger cities, but there is a presence across the country.

Always keep in mind that, in the end, the goal of this journey is to encounter Jesus Christ through the experience of a loving Catholic faith community. The exact manner of how that happens will be unique and distinct for every person who sets out on this special and sacred journey.

In spiritual communion, the U.S. Bishops set out on the road with you. As you take this path, be assured of their prayers and these words they wrote to every young person in the United States:

We have allowed your prophetic voices and enthusiastic zeal 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... Persevere in the Christian faith. Be an active part of the Catholic community. Be protagonists of love and hope.³⁸

Thank you for setting out on the journey. May Christ be with you every step of the way and may you find a home where you can discover the love of Christ, the embrace of the Catholic family, and your vocation to love and serve the Lord and the People of God.

For continued support, see the "Resources for Young Adults" page on the website for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) at <https://www.usccb.org/topics/youth-and-young-adult-ministries/resources-young-adults>.

You can access the USCCB national pastoral framework for ministries with youth and young adults, Listen, Teach, Send, and supplementary resources, at <https://www.usccb.org/listen-teach-send>.

³⁸ LTS, p. 6, 9.