

## USCCB NATYAM FORUM

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"Arise! Ministry with young adults in a time of innovation."

("¡Levántate! Pastoral con jóvenes adultos en un tiempo de innovación.")

Wednesday, December 9, 2020.

Keynote Presentation - "*Arise and commit to changing the world*"

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### 1. Introduction

Thank you so much and I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to be with you in this wonderful encounter. I apologize for not speaking directly in English – I will also be sharing my screen, **SLIDE 1** this is the topic that was asked of me "to arise" it's the theme also of the encounter – *Arise! Ministry with Young Adults in a Time of Innovation* – with the specific topic of the theme of the day "Arise and Commit to Change the World." I will speak about 5 points **SLIDE 2** and I hope to be clear and brief, so you can see where I am at in my presentation.

I am Brazilian, from Rio de Janeiro; a Schoenstatt priest for almost 20 years. For 16 years, my main work was *ministry with young people* and, about three and a half years ago, I was called by Pope Francis to work in *the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life*, something that was explained already, so I will skip over the explanation

The COVID-19 pandemic and the current social situation in the United States (and around the world) **severely affected our pastoral work**, and especially the work with young adults. Many universities spent many months – and many still – closed, classes are online, contact is fundamentally virtual, pastoral and liturgical spaces are physically inaccessible. Parishes and young adult ministries have very limited schedules and activities. Many young adults are out of work and suffer the consequences of social isolation, which has clear consequences for their ecclesial participation.

Discouragement and lack of hope can dominate the hearts of young adults, but also of us their ministers. We all wonder what we can do to reach young adults, to listen to them, and to attend to their needs in the midst of this social and religious crisis, and to offer them with an encounter with Christ and His Church.

### 2. Arise! The Pope's providential message to young people

**SLIDE 3** After that introduction, I would like to share of the Pope's providential message to young people. Despite the whole situation of the pandemic, and rightly in the midst of it,

we are invited to draw inspiration from the Synod of Bishops on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment," Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, and his message for WYD 2020. The answer to the question of "**what should we do?**" came to us earlier. "**Arise!**" is the response - the Pope had already told us before this health crisis.

As you know, "**Arise!**" is Pope Francis' central message for the upcoming World Youth Days – you see here all the themes of WYD and in all of them the word "Arise – Stand Up"

I would like to draw attention to the fact that these themes were chosen and announced *long before* the pandemic (in June 2019). Even the Pope's message for WYD 2020 was **written well before the pandemic** and published on March 5, 2020, just days before Italy decreed lockdown and restrictive measures to contain the coronavirus. However, this "Arise!" and the whole message of the Holy Father are absolutely **providential**. It is the right word for the time of the pandemic and for the post-pandemic.

On the path of life, "every time we reach an important milestone," the Pope says in his message, "we are challenged by God and by life to make a new beginning. You, young people, are experts in this."<sup>1</sup> To start again.

The **pandemic** is not only an important milestone, when the Pope wrote this, he wasn't thinking of the pandemic but the pandemic is a milestone, a true "**watershed moment**" for the history of humanity. In his most recent book, I would like to promote the Pope's most recent book called *Let Us Dream Together*. In this book, the Pope speaks of crisis - that, "from this crisis, we can come out better or worse. We can go backwards or create something new. Right now, the Pope says what we need is the opportunity to change; to innovate to make room for that new thing, we need to emerge."<sup>2</sup>

This "Arise!" must involve creativity, innovation, and "thinking outside the box" out of the "status quo" to provide adequate pastoral service to young adults, who must change the world after the pandemic. Already in *Christus Vivit*, the Holy Father stated that young people "make us see the need for **new styles and new strategies**" (ChV 204).

I would like to emphasize that not only was the Pope's message for WYD fitting, but the **whole synodal path, was absolutely providential**. We must think *that never before* in history has the universal Church been so intensely dedicated to young people. This is very important for us to know who work with young adults. The church had never dedicated so much time in thinking and writing about young people; listening to young people. We are still in the **midst of the implementation phase** of the Synod, the Synod had a phase of

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. "Message for IXXXV World Youth Day", 05 April 2020. In: [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200211\\_messaggio-giovani\\_2020.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco_20200211_messaggio-giovani_2020.html)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis. *Let's Dream Together: The Way to a Better Future. Conversations with Austen Ivereigh*. New York et al.: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 4. (Version In English: *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future. Pope Francis in conversation with Austen Ivereigh*. New York et al.: Simon & Schuster, 2020)

preparation, of realization and now the implementation of the Synod and in that period the coronavirus crisis exploded. With a providential gaze, we can say that the whole synodal path **was a preparation for this crisis**. If God allowed us to make that path with the young, **we cannot let the crisis make us forget the way**.

### 3. Arise to walk together! Missionary synodality for future change

**SLIDE 4** The third part, "Arise to walk together! Missionary synodality for future change" – this is precisely the journey we made. Just to live that newly indicated "innovative" style, I have no doubt that we should look for the answers for the future on **the path made "together", synodally, with young people**. They are the ones who should help us give answers for the present and the future. We don't have the answers to future **change yet**. Personally, I must admit that I have no "easy recipes" to offer you in this reflection. If you called me to offer recipes – I don't have any to give you. That's why I am looking forward to hearing our friends on the panel. Conversely, not being a young man anymore, I realize that I need to ask *them*, put myself in a *listening* attitude and let *them* enlighten *me* in this hour of bewilderment, but also filled with hope and commitment for the future.

The young people "awakened the synodality of the Church" – it was said so many times on the synodal path – and it is *they* who must now "wake *us* up" and help *us* to "arise" as a Church and as a society.

The new Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Mario Grech, states that the "Synodal Church" is the "prophecy for the third millennium," seeing that the pandemic is *a kairós* (a time of grace) to live out this synodality, which is a valuable resource to go beyond the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

It is no coincidence that the Pope has chosen *synodality* as the subject of the next Synod (in 2022). And the importance of the topic was just as evident during the Synod on Young People (in 2018).<sup>4</sup> It was the young people who made sure that that message emerged; I remember this because I was a synod father and I recall that "**missionary synodality**" was a great **surprise** during the Synod, not foreseen in the preparatory work.

**"Ministry with young people has to (can only be) be synodal,"** says the Pope in *Christus Vivit* (no. 206-207). I was glad to see that the Church of the United States took this invitation of the Pope to "journey together" seriously. Your "**Journeying Together**" initiative has initiated an important **deeply synodal** process of dialogue and meeting focused on the Church's pastoral work with youth and young adults involving each and every different cultural family present within your country.

<sup>3</sup> Mario Grech. "A synodal Church: a way of being ecclesial and a prophecy for the third millennium." In:

<http://www.synod.va/content/synod/es/actualidad/una-iglesia-sinodal--un-modo-de-ser-ecclesial-y-una-profecia-para.html>

<sup>4</sup> The theme of the next meeting of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled for October 2022 in Rome, has already been announced: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission."

I was also impressed with the **ethnic and cultural diversity** that is so present in the United States, I was very aware of the Latinos, but not all of these other groups: African Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders, European Americans and so forth). It is admirable the **seriousness** with which your Church is reflecting on the pastoral care with each of these groups for its synodal process of dialogue and integration. I congratulate you and encourage you to continue along this path, which will certainly be very fruitful for the future of the American Church and society.

As you are certainly experiencing in the process of "Journeying Together," a **synodal Church** walks with young people in at least two ways, in many ways but I will talk about two, that I would like to highlight here: it **accompanies** them through all their needs and gives them room as **protagonists** who can commit themselves in a missional way to change the world.

I would like to begin with the theme of **accompaniment**, **SLIDE 5** which I consider to be the *fundamental attitude* of pastoral care with young people and young adults. In the reflections of the synodal process, the importance of accompanying young adults was *one of the most present topics*, which always appeared linked to the themes of *listening and discernment*. Empathetic listening does not abandon the young adult in his or her quest but accompanies them in the process of discerning God's will. So there are three steps in this process: listening, accompaniment and discernment.

In the Synod, the **cry of the young people** was felt, the young people themselves screamed asked for accompaniment, a **dedicated accompaniment** by the older adults or other more experienced young people there. In fact, the Pope wants a **ministry of processes** (not of acts or rules), a ministry that knows how to accompany and shows us how to advance a broad approach for each case (because every young person is unique and original). In other words, the first stage of these processes is *listening then accompaniment* but listening without *accompaniment* can generate disappointment; and accompaniment without true *discernment* can generate bewilderment. Each phase / step is important.

I leave you, therefore, with an invitation or a provocation. **If we had to choose one point** from which to start, or reinforce, or a point from which we can "pull up the tablecloth" so that pastoral care with young adults can truly "get up," "rise up," and "resurge" (or the famous "Arise!"), **I would suggest that we put all our strength into accompaniment:** with good formation for those who accompany, giving it time and energy – human, financial, and spiritual – so that we can have better conditions for listening, accompanying, and helping young adults in the art of discerning God's will for their lives.

I have read some American surveys done at the time of the pandemic and these statistics say, very clearly, that young people feel excluded. One in three young people feels *completely alone* most of the time, or that about 40% *have no one to talk to and feel left*

out.<sup>5</sup> So we see that we are working more often with young adults who belong to a generation that tends to live in **solitude and isolation**.

And, Pope Francis recalled: "In the Synod 'many pointed to the shortage of qualified people devoted to accompaniment.'" (ChV 244) that's why to me this topic is so important.

**SLIDE 6** A second point that I would like to highlight in this missionary synodal style is the fact that what must mark our post-pandemic time is **young adult protagonism or young adult protagonists**. To give young people space. In accompanying young adults, the Church should not hesitate to give them space for protagonism and leadership, to empower them in leadership so that they can become the **agents of the change we need**. In *Christus Vivit*, the Pope speaks a lot of this, I will not read fully no 174 but I recommend you read it. It's as if it was written for our time. The Pope says that a better world is what should arise after the pandemic. *Christus Vivit* no. 174 appears to have been written as the Pope watched demonstrations of young adults in the streets which have multiplied in recent months (including here in the United States), protesting racism, cultural discrimination, economic inequality, health issues etc. Please read no. 174 it is very enriching.

With these words, I would also like to encourage you to seek, in a missionary spirit, the answers to the post-COVID moment with young adults. *They* are the "**protagonists of change**", as Francis reminds them throughout paragraph 174 of *Christus Vivit*.

Young people will be able to do even better than we can do. Let us place our trust in the young, let us walk with them (because they expect and need our company and life experiences), and let us learn from them.

For example: young adults are "digital natives" who know better than most of us how **modern technology and cultural and social media** can be used to reach other young people and know the right language and understanding of their own generation.

#### 4. Arise, Mother Church, to meet the young adults!

**SLIDE 7** In the fourth point, "Arise, Mother Church, to meet (to encounter) the young adults." Allow me a moment to share the results of my doctorate at the University of Dayton in Ohio, on the **mariology of Pope Francis and its implications** for his vision of the Church. I am convinced that Jorge Mario Bergoglio's relationship with the Virgin Mary fundamentally marks his understanding of the Church. "I dream of a Church that is Mother and Pastor," he told his fellow Jesuit, Fr. Antonio Spadaro, in a famous interview.<sup>6</sup> In

<sup>5</sup> Josh Packard. "The risks of going out and the risks of staying in for young people". In: *Springtide National Research Results*, July 15, 2020. [www.springtideresearch.org/two-covid-threats/](http://www.springtideresearch.org/two-covid-threats/)

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis. "Entrevista to Antonio Spadaro". *L'Osservatore Roman*, weekly edition in Spanish language, Year XLV, n. 39 (2,333), 27 September 2013. [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html)

*Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis clearly said that "the Church is a mother with an open heart" (EG 46-49) and emphasized the value of **pastoral motherhood** of all God's people.

In an interview I gave for my doctoral thesis (on June 9, 2015), as I did two interviews directly with him, he explained: "Sometimes, when we talk about a field hospital, the image that comes most to mind is that of an orphanage. Soldiers and boys die saying 'mom, mom'... They call their mother, don't they? So, it's the Mother Church that goes to that orphanage in a field hospital."

I cannot dwell too much on this explanation, but I would like to underline the importance that Francis attaches to a **Church that is Mother**, which is key in understanding his *pontificate*. A Mother Church is a Church with *Marian, feminine, and maternal attitudes*: a Church that is merciful, welcoming, tender, and strong all at the same time (as a mother would be), not "dogmatic," but inclusive, which acts in the world as a "field hospital".

In this sense, the proposal for a **new ecclesial paradigm** based on that analogy of the "field hospital" is very suitable for working with today's young adults, as Paul Jarzembowski recently demonstrated in his article for the journal, *Religions*. Our pastoral ministry cannot be limited to "marketing strategies" to attract young people to the Church, nor to a "catechesis" that educates them only in the doctrines of the Church, but rather as a ministry that goes out in search of the wounded on the peripheries of society, which enters into the "battle" that young adults must face every day, and to offer "first aid" through a pastoral care marked by dynamic accompaniment.<sup>7</sup>

**SLIDE 8** This "field hospital" needs a "new ecclesiological imagination," as Tracey Lamont points out, in another recent article in that same journal. She draws the consequences of a more **synodal Church**, as Pope Francis wishes, based on a style of *ministry rooted in dialogue, listening*, and accompaniment, which today's young adults so desperately need.

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In order to reverse the current trend of ecclesial disaffiliation and addressing the real needs of young adults requires the "kenotic ecclesiology" of Pope Francis, a humble and off-centered Church (not centered on itself) capable of going out into the world to find young people where they are, at the crossroads of life, listening to their stories, without the pretense of indoctrinating them, without proselytizing them, but to "journey together" with them. Qualified ministers, with a new style and a new ecclesiological vision that, in a "reciprocal, careful, and respectful dialogue", will help them to root themselves in a human community and faith, whose sense of belonging is marked by human relations, not programs.

<sup>7</sup> "Adopting the paradigm of the "field hospital" requires ministry leaders to begin an engagement with young adults with responsive pastoral action. The painful issues that younger generations face are not wounds that can wait to be healed. Just as a field medic on the battlefield must instantly spring into action to tend to wounded soldiers, so too must church ministers engage in this pastoral activity posthaste." (Paul Jarzembowski. "Mobilizing the Field Hospital: Pastoral Care as a Paradigm for Ministry with Young Adults". *Religions* **2020**, 11 (11), 617, 8-9. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/11/617/htm>)

<sup>8</sup> Tracey Lamont. "Ministry with Young Adults: Toward a New Ecclesiological Imagination". *Religions* **2020**, 11 (11), 570. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/11/570/htm>



**This form of ministry is multifaceted and unpredictable.** It cannot be conceived, therefore, and here I will read in English:

"within a complete, perfect, rational, and manageable scheme, but starting from *a dynamic that is always open to the action of the Holy Spirit* who is the authentic protagonist of the Church's pastoral mission. Moreover, as we know, the Spirit of the Lord surprises us every time: The Spirit does not create unity by homogenizing us but urges us to integrate our differences and thus enter into that mystery of communion which is God himself."<sup>9</sup>

This is an article that was written by Fr. Rossano Sala in the same series, in the same journal. It's the importance of being open to the action of the Holy Spirit – it is not easy that type of ministry. we are open to the action of the Holy Spirit because we cannot find unity by homogenizing.

## **5. Conclusion: Arise and transcend! And then you'll raise the world!**

**SLIDE 9** By way of conclusion, "Arise and transcend and then you'll raise the world." We may ask ourselves, as the Pope does at the end of his book, *Let's Dream Together*. He has a lot beautiful things to say in this book and I will say again we need to read it; "it's a must" and he says: "Now what do I have to do?" His answer is expressed very synthetically in two words and one image, two concepts, "**de-center yourself and transcend**," and the image of "**the pilgrim**." As pilgrims in the midst of the labyrinth of life at this historic moment, the Spirit of God invites us to leave ourselves, transcend to the heights and to others, a double transcendence towards the heaven and towards others; giving our best so that our people may have life.<sup>10</sup>

The Pope said: "Young man, arise and commit to changing the world!" As pastoral leaders working with young adults, our mission is to listen to those young people, to accompany them, and to provide them with opportunities to be the protagonists of change. The journey we face the present moment is to build a future of **missionary synodality**. Providentially, the Synod on Young People happened at just the right time, that is, it was envisioned by God for this particular moment in history!

Our Prefect, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, at a recent international meeting for ministry with young people, said a phrase that struck me very much: "Young people have to take the Church **out of the catacombs after the pandemic**." That's why it's time to say, "Arise, young adults!" "Arise, Ministers!" "Arise, Church!" "Arise, world!" We begin a **new moment** in the life of the world. What will be different? How will the world be different? What will change in the Church? That is all up to us and especially dependent on the young

<sup>9</sup> Rossano Sala. "Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People," 9.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pope Francis. *Let's dream together*, 139-142.

adults who are the "now of God" (ChV 64) and who are called to live in this moment in a spirit of missionary synodality.

So: Arise and transcend! And then we can help the world to arise!

The encounter we are living must be a **framework, a new beginning** to dream, to risk, and to innovate pastoral care and ministry with young adults across the United States. From this meeting "many dull faces of young people around us," says the Pope, "will become animated and become more beautiful than any virtual reality".<sup>11</sup> He says it in his message to us this year. It is now in our hands, with the grace of God, that the **world may return to life and come out of the catacombs after the pandemic.**

Christ lives and wants us to live, especially in this time and place. "Journeying together," we can lift each other up, and that's how we will help the world to arise!

Thank you for your attention – and have a wonderful encounter (event).

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis. "Message for XXXV World Youth Day."