

## ***Christus Vivit***

### ***An apostolic exhortation for the young and the people of God***

*“Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!” These are the first words addressed to young people and “the entire people of God” in **Christus Vivit**, Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, signed on March 25, 2019. The exhortation was inspired by the “wealth of reflections and conversations” of the Synod on Young People of October 2018.*

*Yssa Licsi, the Youth and Young Adult Ministry Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, offers some initial comments on a document that she is convinced will take her ministry to a whole new level.*



*Yssa Licsi, Youth and Young Adult Ministry Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface.*

**Nine chapters divided into 299 paragraphs. *Christus Vivit* has a lot to chew on...**

**Yssa Licsi:** Definitely. There are so many important observations and advice for young people, and there’s a clear vision of renewal for the many ways young Catholics can deepen their faith and live it out in the Church and in the world. I’ve already taken

*Christus Vivit* into my heart. But it's obvious I need to take it into my work. I sent a summary to all the youth ministers in the diocese, because Pope Francis has given us a tool to take our ministry to a whole new level.

**Even a cursory look at *Christus Vivit* shows that Pope Francis listened carefully to what young people were saying at the Synod in Rome last October...**

**Y. L.** Yes! Along with the Synodal Fathers, Pope Francis took careful note of our reality. Being a young Catholic in 2019 isn't like being a young Catholic a generation or two ago. The world has changed. The culture has changed. Our challenges are unique to our times.

Pope Francis acknowledges that. And despite the challenges, or maybe because of them, he takes the time to remind young people of their dignity. In Chapter One, he gives examples from the Bible, reminding us that the young are loved by God. Looking at the Old Testament, he talks about Joseph, Gideon, Samuel, King David... the list goes on. And in the New Testament, he points out that "Jesus has no use for adults who looked down on the young". Jesus says that "the greatest must become like the youngest" (Luke 22:26).

Our dignity is why God made us free. We're free to discover who we are called to be. Pope Francis talks about this sense of purpose. That's so encouraging. I'm meant for more, and I'm called to point that out to other young people.

**That sounds like a vocation...**

**Y. L.** In a way, yes. *Christus Vivit* addresses the topic of vocations head on, in the final chapter. As a young adult who's finished her postsecondary studies, I haven't yet put down roots. I have the luxury of being freer than older adults to really think, seek and discern. Now is the time to pray for my future. Many young adults are in the same place as me on their spiritual journey. We have to discern what we're called to do, and to be.

Pope Francis reminds us that in one way or another, we're all called to love. It could be as a married lay person with a family, or as a religious person or as a priest. We are all called to be the Church together. For the young, the greatest barrier is the distractions that are out there.

Pope Francis also mentions young saints who can help us, such as Joan of Arc and Kateri Tekakwitha. Saint Kateri is a role model and an intercessor for me. She brought the peace of the faith to First Nations people. I'd like to do the same, but for young people living in our modern culture. A culture that in many ways is so hurt.

### **Pope Francis uses the words “desires, hurts and longings” to talk about the challenges of being young in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...**

**Y. L.** There's a lot of loneliness. We hide from it by being busy. Young people often get caught up in sports, music, a full schedule that keeps you from finding the peace from anxiety that comes from knowing Jesus and who you're called to be.

People talk about “digital migration”. So does the Pope. Young people can live isolated lives by spending a lot of time online. Social media can help you connect with others, but that physical presence isn't there. You get drawn away from family and community relationships.

And real migration can have a negative effect on young people too. I was born in the Philippines. Reading the exhortation, I was reminded that it was hard for me to leave my home country to a land I knew little about. I didn't know the culture, so it was difficult.

I was lucky and received many graces. But I can understand how gangs could be attractive for new young Canadians looking for a sense of belonging, or even an identity. As young Catholics, we can counteract this by creating groups focussed on immigrants. On the displaced, the lost, those who are searching to belong.

### **There are other challenges...**

**Y. L.** Definitely. There's the hurt that can come from following the culture when it comes to sex and relationships. Relationships can be shallow and unrewarding. You can feel alone in a romantic relationship, or in a group of friends. The message we get from the secular culture is that life is really not that special. That it's something that can simply be gotten by, because nothing's permanent.

But life is a gift. A blessing from Love itself. To say that is so contrary to the culture! Pope Francis says we're all born original, but that life can turn us into photocopies. There's a lot of healing to be done. Starting with the realization that you are hurt. Catholics need to work to help young people heal and find meaning in their lives.

### **How do we do that?**

**Y. L.** That's the challenge. The young are passionate, so our generosity can come out. Maybe not financially, but if we Catholics know our gifts and our talents, we can give of ourselves to others. Our time, our energy.

The key, Pope Francis reminds us, is to be synodal. What does that mean? It means to reach out to others, to walk with them and help them grow. They will also help us grow. Being synodal is learning from others and then become a better version of yourself, all while you're helping others to become the best person they can be.

### **Pope Francis talks about using "the grammar of love"...**

**Y. L.** Yes. He explains this as walking with the other person, like Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. In conversation and fellowship, Jesus guides them to the truth, while allowing them the freedom to realize who He really was.

That's a reminder that we shouldn't bury people with dry teaching. Of course, there will be time for teaching, but there has to be love, understanding, communication. Youth ministry leaders can have all these great initiatives, but they can come off as pastors

who preach. I know. I've been there! It's an easy path to take, to be preachy. To impose ideas on the young people we're wanting to help. We must move forward in love and provide a community of love and service.

So, when the time comes for faith formation, youth ministers have to find a balance. They must dig deeper to find exciting and creative ways to deliver the teachings. We must put our whole selves into the effort. At the Synod, the Pope and the Synodal Fathers did just that. They listened to us to understand our reality. We have to do the same.

### **This seems like good advice for parents, not just young Catholics...**

**Y. L.** Indeed! Parents should read *Christus Vivit*. Pope Francis talks about the role of mentors. They're called to be holy and loving when walking with their children or their students. They need the self-awareness and humility to walk beside the young they accompany, not in front of or behind them.

And not try to shield them from the world in a kind of Catholic bunker. Pope Francis asks us all to swim against the current and to be bold and confident. You can't do that if you've been shielded.

### **Pope Francis also invokes Saint Paul, by asking us all to "keep running"...**

**Y. L.** That's his final wish in *Christus Vivit*. We have Jesus running with us. Christ is here, alive. In a society that so messy that you can get lost in it, that's so much more than a consolation or a comfort. Christ is here, alive, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

*For a synthesis of *Christus Vivit*, [click here](#).*

*For the full version of Pope Francis' *Apostolic Exhortation*, [click here](#).*