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Press Conference for the presentation of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

At 11.00 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the *Instrumentum laboris* of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, on the theme “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment” (3-28 October 2018).

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, general secretary of the Synod of Bishops; H.E. Msgr. Fabio Fabene, under secretary; Fr. Giacomo Costa, S.J., special secretary of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops; and Don Rossano Sala, S.D.B., special secretary of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

The following is the intervention by Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri:

Intervention by Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri

I cordially greet all of you attending this Press Conference. I would like to help each and every one of you to “get in tune” with the *Instrumentum laboris* of the next Youth Synod on the theme “Young people, faith and vocational discernment”, which will take place in Rome this coming 3 to 28 October.

As you have certainly noticed, it is a fairly broad and articulate text, of which I will try to illustrate some main elements, beginning by saying something about the purpose of the Synod, the method followed and the structure of the document.

The Synod’s primary aim is to make the whole Church aware of her important and not at all optional task of accompanying every young person, without exclusion, towards the joy of love; secondly, by taking this mission seriously, the Church herself will be able to reacquire a renewed youthful dynamism; thirdly, it is also important for the Church to take this opportunity to carry out vocational discernment, so as to rediscover how she can best respond today to the call to be the soul, light, salt and leaven of our world.

As a consequence of these purposes, the *Instrumentum laboris* has been drawn up according to the “method of discernment”. By this I mean that in essence the Synod itself is an exercise of discernment, the process of which is accomplished by taking the same steps that help each young person to shed light on his own vocation. Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (51), presents the process of discernment with three verbs: to *recognize*, to *interpret*, and to *choose*. The text is therefore divided into three parts, each referring to one of the three verbs.

The first phase of discernment is marked by the verb “to *recognize*”. There immediately comes to mind the story of the episode of Emmaus, where it is said that “their eyes were opened and they recognized Him” (Lk 24: 31). It is therefore evident that “to recognize” is not a generic seeing or listening, but rather much more: it is about letting oneself be inhabited by the grace of having the disciple’s outlook, an understanding of reality that knows how to see the heart, an intelligence that arises from the viscera of mercy that dwell in every one of us. “To recognize” means to participate in God’s gaze upon reality, observing the way in which God speaks to us through this.

The second phase relates to the verb “to *interpret*”. Reality is more important than the idea, but ideas become necessary when the appeals that come from reality are recognized. A frame of reference is needed to interpret reality, otherwise we remain prey to superficiality. It is necessary to examine in depth, towards a biblical and anthropological, theological and ecclesiological, pedagogical and spiritual level. Good ideas illuminate, clarify, untie knots, help untangle the skein, overcome confusion and resolve fragmentation, accompanying an integral and symphonic vision.

The third moment focuses on the need to *choose*. After recognizing and interpreting, the most delicate and important phase is to make courageous and far-sighted decisions in light of the path taken. Discernment too often threatens to run aground as a result of endless analyzes and many different interpretations, which do not come to fruition, that is, they do not reach concrete, prophetic and practical decisions. Here it becomes important to complete the journey through shared choices that help us in our journey of pastoral and missionary conversion.

Content

It is impossible to shed light on the full contents of the *Instrumentum laboris* here. I will briefly consider some, passing through the document in a linear fashion. The fundamental choices that guided its compilation will also emerge.

1.1 First part: “Recognizing: the Church listening to reality”

After having clarified in the introduction the purposes, the method and the structure, the first part is composed of five chapters.

The first two offer a rather broad view of the different contexts, showing that there are indeed many differences and many commonalities among young people around the world: globalization creates a lot of homologation, but nevertheless many social, economic, cultural, religious and spiritual differences remain. Among the various concerns that are indicated, I emphasize the theme of intergenerational relationships - which see adults tendentially in competition rather than in alliance with young people - and the now overriding presence of the digital continent, which is an unprecedented platform of life for young people with important opportunities and new dangers.

Three chapters then follow, which define three specific *focuses* on specific issues.

The magnifying glass is first turned on the poorest and most abandoned young people, who are continually rejected by a world that understands itself starting from the paradigm of rejection, of “buy, use, and discard”. When this “culture” is applied to human persons, any consideration of their dignity is lost: work (both from the point of view of its absence and that of exploitation), migration, discrimination and social exclusion offer sad

examples.

The second magnifying glass - the fourth chapter - offers a deeper reading of six “anthropological and cultural challenges” that the Church is called to face today in her pastoral commitment to young people: the new understanding of the body, of affectivity and of sexuality; the advent of new cognitive paradigms that convey a different approach to the truth; the anthropological affects of the digital world, which imposes a different understanding of time, space and human relationships; generalized institutional disappointment in both the civil and the ecclesial sphere; the paralysis in decision-making that imprisons the younger generations in limited and limiting paths; and finally, the nostalgia and spiritual search of young people, who appear less “religious” but more open to authentic experiences of transcendence.

The third and final focus of the first part refers to listening to the word of young people. Starting from an awareness that the Church struggles today to listen, the demands and attentions of the young emerge: they ask for consistency, authenticity, spirituality; they want a renewed relational capacity and dynamics of prophetic welcome; they ask for a lively and lively liturgy; they ask for a disinterested commitment to justice in the world. They thirst for fraternity. The voice of seminarians and of young men and women religious on these issues is particularly precious.

1.2. *Second part: “Interpreting: faith and vocational discernment”*

The second part consists of four chapters. In the light of faith, it offers an overview from different points of view on the key words of the Synod: youth, vocation, discernment, and accompaniment.

The first chapter, of a biblical and anthropological nature, has the task of accompanying the reader in examining more deeply the idea of youth, starting from some biblical constants that illuminate the fundamental traits. Through various texts it emerges that youth is the time of love and joy, of fortitude, of conquest and of risk, of uncertainty and of fear, of fall and conversion, of readiness to listen and of maturation. Above all, it is a time of salvific contact with the God of the covenant and of the love that His Word offers, and the relationship with Him with a view to a full and abundant life.

The second chapter is of a theological and ecclesiological nature. Starting from listening to young people and educators/trainers, it is clear there is a need to offer a framework for understanding the wide-ranging vocational question, enabling it to be meaningful to all young people, without exclusion, and not only in the most specific vocation to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life. This is why the chapter starts from the need to illuminate life from the vocational horizon and ends by inviting all kinds of vocations in the Church and in the world. Among these, the family certainly has a prominent position, which strongly links us to the previous Synod. I also note the emergence in the Church of a less typical question about the vocational collocation of those who choose to remain “single” without referring either to marriage or to a particular consecration; indeed, it is noted that in many countries their number is increasing.

The third chapter then enters the dynamisms of vocational discernment. In a world they perceive as confused and fragmented, many young people ask to be helped to interpret the events of their life in the light of faith. The chapter then clarifies the meaning and content of discernment, relying on the three verbs *recognize-interpret-choose*. The comparison with personal conscience remains decisive in this journey.

The last chapter is dedicated to the theme of accompaniment. There is an overview of the different types of accompaniment: there is indeed an accompaniment of the environment and community, there is an accompaniment in the reading of the signs of the times, one of a psychological type and a more spiritual one, just as we are accompanied in family and peers. The relationship between the Sacrament of Reconciliation and accompaniment also emerges. The words of the young when they highlight the qualities that expect in the people who accompany them are very interesting. They note with regret that in many situations and in many ecclesial contexts they do not meet prepared and adequate people.

1.3 *Third part: “Choosing: paths of pastoral and missionary conversion”*

The title of the third part takes up an expression in *Evangelii Gaudium*. It is a demanding perspective: after having recognized and interpreted, the reference to choice is decisively directed to the conversion of the heart and the mind, and the renewal of pastoral practices. Here too, as in the second part, we have four chapters.

The first is introductory and serves to provide orientation: it accompanies the redefinition of the face of a Church who wishes to be generative towards the young, making discernment her habitual way of proceeding and her unmistakable style. A Church called to take in hand her forms and her way of inhabiting today's world; called to be a sign of fraternity in a torn world; called to work for the kingdom of God in an integral, disinterested and decentralized way.

The second chapter is the most consistent of all the *Instrumentum laboris*. It shows the need for the Church to confront the daily life of young people and to be present and operative where they live out their concrete existence. Often the young are blamed and held responsible for moving away from the Church *en masse*. But they very often experience situations that lead them to affirm that it is the Church that has moved away from them. And they say so openly. In many cases they have not felt and do not feel close to her in the different experiences and in the different areas of their life: school, university, the world of work, political commitment, digital environment, music, sport and friendship. Without excluding the necessary closeness and the proper support in the hardship and the marginalization: disability and illness, dependencies and other fragility, prison, violence and war, migrations and death. Being part of the daily life of young people means being able to recognize that their existence is traversed by the presence of God and by the action of grace that is to be welcomed, accompanied and brought to fulfilment.

The third chapter focuses on the form and strength of the ecclesial community today in relation to its identity and mission for and with young people. In ten passages, points of strength, weakness, prophecy and discussion emerged from the requests of young people and from the feedback from the Episcopal Conferences throughout the world. There are so many points that need to be examined further: from the familiar form of the Church to her spiritual proposal, from the evaluation of her educational passion to the involvement of families in vocational youth ministry, from the quality of Christian initiation to the enhancement of the Word of God and liturgy; from service and voluntary service with a view to vocational discernment to the vocation of the Church as open and welcoming to all.

The last chapter of the *Instrumentum laboris* is dedicated to the animation and organization of pastoral care. Here too there are several options and choices to be made, as the questions that emerged from listening were innumerable: how to promote youthful leadership in an ecclesial reality that is still dominated by clericalism? How can we create communion between the various levels of pastoral care (worldwide, diocesan, parish)? How can we start or strengthen a work of communion among the different subjects of the pastoral care of the young vocational (clergy, men and women religious, movements and associations)? How can we strengthen the work of networks not only in the Church, but between different religions and different civil, social and religious subjects? How can we structure educational and pastoral programs able to unify extraordinary events and the daily life of young people? How can we design appropriate training proposals for candidates for priesthood and religious life, accompanying them in a path of maturation in freedom and progressive discernment with a view to making a definitive choice? Finally, starting from which perspective should we imagine a pastoral care that is truly integrated and oriented towards the centrality of young people?

The *Instrumentum laboris* ends with a renewed appeal for holiness. In three short passages it becomes clear that holiness is the unique and unifying vocation for all of humanity, because no-one is potentially excluded from this goal of existence. Then it is emphasized that youth too, like all the other ages of life, is a favourable time for holiness, that is, living according to God's will. Finally we remember that we have at our disposal a host of young saints who have shown us the best way to experience the exciting age of life that is youth.

Hope

As you can see, the *Instrumentum laboris* offers countless ideas for reflection and inspires the search for concrete answers. It is certainly an interlocutory document, which collects and converges indications given by

many subjects. It seeks to help recognize, interpret and choose. It encourages journeying, shedding light on problems and finding ways to solve them.

Above all, in a world that no longer helps us to dream, it can be interpreted as an invitation to start wishing for the impossible, to dream great things for and with young people. The *Instrumentum laboris* (no. 43) reports what young people say in the Document of the Pre-Synodal Meeting: “Sometimes, we end up discarding our dreams. We are too afraid, and some of us have stopped dreaming. This is seen in the many socio-economic pressures that can severely drain the sense of hope among young people. At times, we have not even had the opportunities to keep dreaming”. And at no. 81, in the part dedicated to biblical anthropology, referring to a passage very dear to Pope Francis taken from the book of Joel, it is stated that “the dreams of the elders and the prophecies of young people only happen together (see *G/3*: 1), confirming the goodness of intergenerational alliances”. If we, adults and elderly, do not dream, young people will not be able to prophesy!

Here the Synod dedicated to the young gives us the opportunity to rediscover the hope of a good life, the dream of pastoral renewal, the desire for communion and the passion for education. To speak here only of hope - not of an immanent and generic hope, but Christian - I refer to a very sad fact that forces us to think. The listening that we have done during these last years with a view to this Synod has shown us rather general lack of hope: instead of cultivating a reliable hope and living from it, many young people continually try their luck: betting in every field is increasing exponentially, gambling spreads among young people, in our cities there is a proliferation of gambling halls, where one stops hoping, entrusting life to an unlikely stroke of luck. Indeed, when you lose hope you try your luck.

The greatest wish I would like to communicate is that this Synod be an occasion for life and hope for the young, for the Church and for the world. For all young people, so that in a world that is stealing their affections, bonds and prospects for life, they may rediscover the beauty of life starting from a happy relationship with the God of the covenant and of love. For the Church, so that in a moment that is not easy she may reacquire, through a path of authentic discernment in the Spirit, a renewed youthful dynamism. And finally for the whole world, so that all men and women may rediscover themselves as privileged recipients of the good news of the Gospel.

[Link to the Italian text of the “Instrumentum laboris”](http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/19/0458/00978.html)

<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/19/0458/00978.html>
