



ACCOMPANYING YOUTH TODAY

-Bishop Barthol Baretto

The Church has always loved her youth. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Popes have issued Statements and Messages to the clergy and laity – emphasizing that they listen to the youth, accompany them and channelize their resources, so as to transform our society. “It is to you, young men and women of the world that the Council wishes to address its final message. For it is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders, and live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who are to form the society of tomorrow. The Church looks to you with confidence and with love. Look upon the Church, and you will find in her the face of Christ, the genuine, humble and wise Hero, the Prophet of truth and love, the Companion and Friend of youth. It is in the name of Christ that we salute you, that we exhort and bless you.” **(Vatican II, Closing Message: 8 December, 1965)**

St Pope John Paul II, a friend of the youth said, “The Church supports you as you face the challenges that are yours as young people in India. The Church asks for your collaboration, your help in leading humanity to God. She asks you to bear witness to Christ. She asks you to serve your neighbour in the circumstances of your daily lives, here

and now: in Bombay, in India. Each one of you is called to a specific service, and all together, you are called to transform the world by promoting peace by working for justice, beginning with your own lives; by loving your country and working for the advancement of all your people; by remaining faithful to your national heritage and your community, by rejecting all discrimination based on race, religion, sex, social condition or language groups.” **(Address to the youth of India at Shivaji Park, Mumbai: 10 February, 1986)**

Pope Francis, speaking to the priests, urged them, “Youth are attracted by whoever sincerely commits their lives, supporting them with respect and listening to them with love. To genuinely share their experiences means having a heart full of passion and compassion, above all towards youth.” **(Speech to the Vatican Department in-charge of priests: 1 June, 2017)**

Hence, the call of the day is that we should spare no effort in ministering to the youth. Our call is to form them in mission, to accompany them and to help them become itinerants who will communicate the Faith of Jesus. Jesus Himself did this with His own disciples. He formed them. He sent them out on mission and they listened.

The month of October 2018 is going

to be a special month for the Universal Church. Pope Francis is going to convene the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome from October 03-28, 2018 on the theme: 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment'. To prepare for this mega event, a Preparatory Document (*Lineamenta*) with a set of questionnaires was sent out to all the Episcopal Conferences on January 13, 2017. A special website was also opened for the youth to respond to the questionnaire. The responses collected have provided the basis for the drafting of a working document for the Synod (*Instrumentum Laboris*) released on June 19, 2018. On March 19, 2018, Pope Francis devoted an entire morning to 300 young people from around the world, as he wanted to help them prepare for the Synod of Bishops.

The entire Church desires to listen to the youth and accompany them. The Church wants to know what our youth have to share about themselves: their anxieties, their joys, their hopes and struggles. What is their experience about God, knowledge of faith and morals, etc? Can we lead them to Jesus who loved the youth, regardless of their situation? The Church of Mumbai has decided to accompany the youth in all the parishes by entrusting its Parish Youth Directors (PYDs) with the task of forming Neighbourhood Youth Groups (NYGs) [groups of youth according to the Small Christian Communities], so that we can listen and minister to all the youth in an extensive manner. To help in the formation of the NYGs, we've also recommended that each NYG ought to have a Youth Animator (Lay), so that the youth of that particular



community can be mentored and given proper direction, according to the mind and teachings of the Church. This methodology of working with and for youth may be a source of inspiration for youth and youth animators even beyond the confines of the Archdiocese of Mumbai.

What is heartening to note is that our Parish Pastoral Council members have accepted the new methodology of the NYGs, as they too have felt the need to accompany them as Jesus did: with a loving and welcoming look (Jn 1:35-51), an authoritative word (Lk 4:32), a God-given opportunity to become a "neighbour" (Lk 10:25-37), a choice "to walk beside" (Lk 24:3-35), or to be an authentic witness, accepting the youth as they are (Jn 13:1-20).

I believe if the Church continues to listen and minister to our youth as Jesus did in His public ministry, we will be HIS instruments of enabling and empowering them to become Christ-like in the daily grind of life. This is our hope; this is our goal and this must be our vision-mission.

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