

A background image showing three young people (two girls and one boy) in a grassy field, arms outstretched, smiling. The image is overlaid with a green tint.

CHRISTUS VIVIT: TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ENTIRE PEOPLE OF GOD

Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Francis

The Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association is pleased to offer Directors and Supervisory Officers an opportunity for prayer and reflection with a precis of **Christus Vivit: To Young People and The Entire People of God**. The summary of Pope Francis' exhortation and corresponding questions for discernment provide senior teams with a framework for kerygma in our calling and responsibility to evangelize and renew the Church. This document serves to provide intentional time for senior teams to listen to the needs of our Catholic schools for faith formation, chaplaincy, youth ministry and calling all souls to be saints.

SUMMARY

Christus Vivit was published on April 2, 2019 as the fourth apostolic exhortation of His Holiness Pope Francis. The exhortation is a loving embrace of the youth of the world with Pope Francis' fatherly welcoming of young people to personal encounters with Jesus Christ.

Christus Vivit (Christ is Alive) is rooted in the prayer and discernment of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops - Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment that took place in Rome in October, 2018.

Christus Vivit is written by Pope Francis in a personal and direct conversation with youth and leaders. The exhortation provides a realistic reflection of contemporary issues that are experienced by youth and adults. Pope Francis is scholarly, humorous and pastoral in an engaging conversation and summary of the messages shared by the leaders and youth of the world in the Synod of Bishops - Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.

Christus Vivit is divided into nine chapters:

- i. **What does the word of God have to say about young people?**
 - o The richness of scripture with references to youth in both the Old and New Testaments.
- ii. **Jesus, ever young**
 - o Jesus himself experienced youth as an example to the young, thereby sanctifying and consecrating to the Lord.
 - o A Church open to renewal with youth as active leaders (N.B. There are pertinent and natural connections here with *Renewing The Promise* – ACBO).
- iii. **You are the “now” of God**
 - o A realistic account of the contemporary needs of today's youth.
 - What are today's young people really like?
 - What is going on in their lives?
- iv. **A great message for all young people**
 - o Pope Francis speaks in this chapter about what is essential with three great truths: God Loves You; Christ Saves You; He is Alive.
- v. **Paths of youth**
 - o Youth is a blessed time for the young and a grace for the Church and the world; a time of dreams, decisions and commitments.
 - o A thirst for life and experience in friendship with Christ.

vi. Young people with roots

- o Importance of having solid roots with humility and realizing the dignity and value of work.
- o Relationships with the elderly; dreams and visions; taking risks together.

vii. Youth ministry

- o The imperative need for a new model of youth ministry.
- o Outreach, growth, suitable environments, less doctrine.
- o Importance of Catholic schools; values that youth are looking for in a mentor.
- o Areas needing to be developed and a popular youth ministry.

viii. Vocation

- o A calling by the Lord to perfect holiness, each in his or her own way.
- o The importance of love and family; value and dignity of work.
- o Vocations of special consecration.

ix. Discernment

- o Importance of prayer and sacraments.
- o Listening, accompaniment, walking with others.
- o Let vocations grow to be a gift to others.

A Discernment Opportunity for Teams of Catholic Supervisory Officers

Christus Vivit asks all leaders to carefully discern how we are leading youth in rich, vibrant and realistic encounters with Jesus Christ. Pope Francis invokes pertinent messages for the senior leaders of Catholic school systems in Ontario in the following excerpts of his exhortation:

103. "I encourage communities to examine, respectfully and seriously, the situation of their young people, in order to find the most fitting ways of providing them with pastoral care."
14. Let us also keep in mind that Jesus had no use for adults who looked down on the young or lorded it over them. On the contrary, he insisted that "the greatest among you must become like the youngest" (Lk 22:26). For him age did not establish privileges, and being young did not imply lesser worth or dignity.
196. "...I call us to be memory keepers. We grandfathers and grandmothers need to form a choir. I envision elders as a permanent choir of a great spiritual sanctuary, where prayers and supplication and songs of praise support the larger community that works and struggles in the field of life.

The following quotes from *Christus Vivit* provide guided reflection and an opportunity for senior teams to renew Catholic faith formation in our homes, schools and parishes. The quotes are organized into themes for discernment:

A Church Open to Renewal

Pope Francis encourages young people and the entire people of God to be open to a meaningful and vibrant renewal of the Catholic Church:

35. Let us ask the Lord to free the Church from those who would make her grow old, encase her in the past, hold her back or keep her at a standstill. But let us also ask him to free her from another temptation: that of thinking she is young because she accepts everything the world offers her, thinking that she is renewed because she sets her message aside and acts like everybody else. No! The Church is young when she is herself, when she receives ever anew the strength born of God's word, the Eucharist, and the daily presence of Christ and the power of his Spirit in our lives. The Church is young when she shows herself capable of constantly returning to her source.

118. "...His outstretched arms on the cross are the most telling sign that he is a friend who is willing to stop at nothing: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1).
119. The same Christ who, by his cross, saved us from our sins, today continues to save and redeem us by the power of his total self-surrender. Look to his cross, cling to him, let him save you, for "those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness".

Questions to guide Catholic Supervisory Officers:

- o How are God's word, the Eucharist and the daily presence of Christ rooted in the lives of our Catholic schools?
- o Is the sacredness of human life a core belief in which all students understand and witness to the creative action of God?
- o What does humility look like in our schools? How do students and staffs 'wash the feet of others'?

Models for Mentorship and Accompaniment

Pope Francis encourages young people to look to role models who said 'Yes' and espouse an open commitment to accompanying others in a journey of faith:

22. Jesus is "young among the young in order to be an example for the young and to consecrate them to the Lord". For this reason the Synod said that "youth is an original and stimulating stage of life, which Jesus himself experienced, thereby sanctifying it".
44. "We are always struck by the strength of the young Mary's 'yes', the strength in those words, 'be it done', that she spoke to the angel. This was no merely passive or resigned acceptance, or a faint 'yes', as if to say, 'Well, let's give it a try and see what happens'. Mary did not know the words, 'Let's see what happens'. She was determined; she knew what was at stake and she said 'yes' without thinking twice. Hers was the 'yes' of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise.
49. The heart of the Church is also full of young saints who devoted their lives to Christ, many of them even to dying a martyr's death. They were precious reflections of the young Christ; their radiant witness encourages us and awakens us from our lethargy. The Synod pointed out that "many young saints have allowed the features of youth to shine forth in all their beauty, and in their day they have been real prophets of change. Their example shows what the young are capable of, when they open themselves up to encounter Christ".

Questions to guide Catholic Supervisory Officers:

- o How are saintly models of grace and accompaniment present and celebrated in the lives of students?
- o How do our schools model holiness as evident in the grace of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph?
- o How do our schools practice gratitude and forgiveness in our daily work?

Personal Encounters with Jesus for Youth

Pope Francis encourages adults to nurture popular and revived opportunities for youth ministry that breathe new life into prayer and sacramentality:

- 204. Youth ministry needs to become more flexible; inviting young people to events or occasions that provide an opportunity not only for learning, but also for conversing, celebrating, singing, listening to real stories and experiencing shared encounter with the living God.
- 212. As for growth, I would make one important point. In some places, it happens that young people are helped to have a powerful experience of God, an encounter with Jesus that touched their hearts. But the only follow-up to this is a series of "formation" meetings featuring talks about doctrinal and moral issues, the evils of today's world, the Church, her social doctrine, chastity, marriage, birth control and so on. As a result, many young people get bored, they lose the fire of their encounter with Christ and the joy of following him; many give up and others become downcast or negative. Rather than being too concerned with communicating a great deal of doctrine, let us first try to awaken and consolidate the great experiences that sustain the Christian life.
- 230. In addition to the ordinary, well-planned pastoral ministry that parishes and movements carry out, it is also important to allow room for a "popular" youth ministry, with a different style, schedule, pace and method. Broader and more flexible, it goes out to those places where real young people are active, and fosters the natural leadership qualities and the charisms sown by the Holy Spirit.
- 283. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light".

Questions to Guide Catholic Supervisory Officers:

- o Do we need a renewal of school liturgies and personal encounters with Jesus?
- o How can we nurture popular pastoral activities that are fresh, authentic and joyful?
- o Do we provide meaningful opportunities for faith formation and stewardship through music, the arts and creation in the environment?

Courageous Missionaries at the Foot of the Cross

Pope Francis discusses three areas of utmost importance that were shared during the Synod of Bishops - Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment:

- The Digital Environment
 - Migrants as an Epitome of Our Time
 - Ending Every Form of Abuse
- 76. "...Some realities in life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears."
 - 104. I remind you of the good news we received as a gift on the morning of the resurrection: that in all the dark or painful situations that we mentioned, there is a way out.
 - 129. If in your heart you can learn to appreciate the beauty of this message, if you are willing to encounter the Lord, if you are willing to let him love you and save you, if you can make friends with him and start to talk to him, the living Christ, about the realities of your life, then you will have a profound experience capable of sustaining your entire Christian life. You will also be able to share that experience with other young people. For "being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction".
 - 289. A vocation, while a gift, will undoubtedly also be demanding. God's gifts are interactive; to enjoy them we have to be ready to take risks. Yet the demands they make are not an obligation imposed from without, but an incentive to let that gift grow and develop, and then become a gift for others.

Questions to Guide Catholic Supervisory Officers:

- o How do our teaching and learning spaces nurture vocations in a digital environment?
- o How do students courageously celebrate their Catholic faith and vocations across the globe with digital platforms?
- o Are the curricula, teaching and learning of our Catholic schools highlighting corporal and spiritual works of mercy with a preferential option for the poor, vulnerable, refugees and migrants?
- o Are we equipping our students to be brave witnesses so that every form of abuse will cease?

Quality of Catholic Schools

Pope Francis shares an important supplication to ensure that our schools are rooted in an authentic commitment to the Gospels of Jesus Christ:

21. Schools are unquestionably a platform for drawing close to children and young people. Precisely because they are such privileged places of personal development, the Christian community has always been concerned to train teachers and administrators, and to found its own schools of various kinds and levels. In this field of educating the young, the Spirit has raised up countless charisms and examples of holiness. Yet schools are in urgent need of self-criticism, if we consider the results of their pastoral outreach, which in many cases focuses on a kind of religious instruction that proves often incapable of nurturing lasting experiences of faith. Some Catholic schools seem to be structured only for the sake of self-preservation. Fear of change makes them entrenched and defensive before the dangers, real or imagined, that any change might bring.
222. Catholic schools remain essential places for the evangelization of the young. Account should be taken of a number of guiding principles set forth in *Veritatis Gaudium* for the renewal and revival of missionary outreach on the part of schools and universities. These include a fresh experience of the kerygma, wide-ranging dialogue, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches, the promotion of a culture of encounter, the urgency of creating networks and an option in favour of those who are least, those whom society discards. Similarly important is the ability to integrate the knowledge of head, heart and hands.

Questions to Guide Catholic Supervisory Officers:

- o How do the audits of the Catholicity of our schools model fidelity to the Catholic Church?
- o Are our schools demonstrating effective Catholic programming and high standards for quality Catholic education?

Faith Formation of Adults – Every Stage of Life is a Permanent Grace

Pope Francis provides a constant reminder for quality programming so that the faith formation of adults proceeds from a pastoral approach with integrity for the teachings of the Catholic Church:

16. If you have lost your inner vitality, your dreams, your enthusiasm, your optimism and your generosity, Jesus stands before you as once he stood before the dead son of the widow, and with all the power of his resurrection he urges you: "Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Lk 7:14).
160. Adults, too, have to mature without losing the values of youth. Every stage of life is a permanent grace, with its own enduring value. The experience of a youth well lived always remains in our heart. It continues to grow and bear fruit throughout adulthood. Young people are naturally attracted by an infinite horizon opening up before them. Adult life, with its securities and comforts, can risk shrinking that horizon and losing that youthful excitement. The very opposite should happen: as we mature, grow older and structure our lives, we should never lose that enthusiasm and openness to an ever greater reality. There are things we need to "let go of" as the years pass, but growth in maturity can coexist with a fire constantly rekindled, with a heart ever young.

Questions to Guide Catholic Supervisory Officers:

- o Are the plans we have made for adult faith formation bearing fruit and active?
- o What needs to be renewed for prayer and sacraments so that faith formation is enthusiastic, constantly rekindled and ever young?

A Vibrant Sacramental Life

Pope Francis addresses youth with fatherly guidance to provide comfort that they should take risks, be kind to themselves, remain connected to Jesus through prayer and place their worries at the foot of the cross in a vibrant sacramental life:

143. "Whatever you do, do not become the sorry sight of an abandoned vehicle! Don't be parked cars, but dream freely and make good decisions. Take risks, even if it means making mistakes. Don't go through life anesthetized or approach the world like tourists. Make a ruckus! Cast out the fears that paralyze you, so that you don't become young mummies. Live! Give yourselves over to the best of life! Open the door of the cage, go out and fly! Please, don't take an early retirement."
145. Contrary to what many people think, the Lord does not want to stifle these desires for a fulfilling life. We do well to remember the words of an Old Testament sage: "My child, treat yourself well, according to your means, and present your offerings to the Lord; do not deprive yourself of a day's enjoyment, do not let your share of desired good pass by" (Sir 14:11.14).
158. Dear young people, stay connected to Jesus... "remain online" with him, since you will not grow happy and holy by your own efforts and intelligence alone. Just as you try not to lose your connection to the internet, make sure that you stay connected to the Lord. That means not cutting off dialogue, listening to him, sharing your life with him and, whenever you aren't sure what you should do, asking him: "Jesus, what would you do in my place?"
299. Dear young people, my joyful hope is to see you keep running the race before you, outstripping all those who are slow or fearful. Keep running, "attracted by the face of Christ, whom we love so much, whom we adore in the Holy Eucharist and acknowledge in the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. 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 yet reached, have the patience to wait for us."

Questions to Guide Catholic Supervisory Officers:

- o Are prayer and a vibrant sacramental life central to the life of our schools?
- o What needs to be nurtured in our school system to embrace Christ-centred, inclusive and caring school communities that are focused on the Gospels and teachings of Jesus Christ?

Francis. "Christus Vivit." The Holy See, 2 April, 1998,

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html



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