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Press Conference on the pre-Synodal Meeting (Rome, 19-24 March 2018) in preparation for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Fabio Fabene

Intervention of Stella Marillene Nishimwe

Intervention by Filippo Passantino

Documentation and Links

At 11.00 am this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held on the pre-Synodal Meeting schedule to take place in Rome from March 19 to 24, in preparation for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

The panel was composed of: Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops; H.E. Msgr. Fabio Fabene, under-secretary of the Synod of Bishops; Stella Marilene Nishimwe, a young woman from Burundi; and Filippo Passantino, a young Italian.

The following are the interventions by the speakers, along with the documentation and various links on the pre-Synodal Meeting:

[Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri](#)

On 4 October 2017 Pope Francis announced the convening of a pre-Synodal Meeting from 19 to 24 March 2018, in preparation for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. “With this journey, the Church wants to listen to the voice, sensitivities, the faith and also some of the doubts and criticism of the young — we must listen to young people —. This is why the conclusions of the March meeting will be communicated to the Synod Fathers”.^[1]

Also when he recently met the young people of Chile at the National Shrine of Maipú, the Holy Father reiterated that next March’s meeting is intended to be one “where you [the young] are going to be the protagonists, young people from the whole world, Catholic and non-Catholic youth; Christian youth and youth from other religions; and young people who do not know if they believe or do not believe. All of them, to listen to you, to hear you directly, because it is important that you speak; do not let yourselves be silenced”.^[2]

The objectives of the pre-Synodal Meeting

The main objectives of the pre-Synodal Meeting may be summarized as follows:

1. This is an event in which the young will be the actors and the protagonists. We will not only talk about “them”, but rather they will recount themselves: with their language, their enthusiasm and their sensitivity. The next Synod of Bishops is intended to be, in fact, not only a Synod “on” young people and “for” young people, but also a Synod “of” young people and “with” young people.
2. A key word, repeated several times by the Pope, is “listening”. In this pre-Synodal Meeting we will listen to young people “live”, directly, so as to try to better understand their situation: what they think about themselves and adults, how they live their faith and what difficulties they encounter in being Christians, how they plan their lives and what problems they encounter in discerning their vocation, how they see the Church today and how they would like it to be, etc.
3. Among the young people to be listened to, there will be in particular those who come from situations of hardship and from the “existential peripheries”, young people who often do not have the opportunity to be heard to make their situation and their expectations known. Then there will be young non-Catholics, not Christians and non-believers, because young people will be listened to, as far as possible, “at 360 degrees”.
4. The pre-Synodal Meeting will be an opportunity to put ourselves in step with the young: keeping in mind that the Synod is by definition a “journey taken together”, we want to show what it means in a real sense to walk together with young people, all young people without exception.
5. Walking with young people also means identifying specific pastoral paths, which enable the Christian communities to consolidate their youth pastoral projects, adapting them to the needs of today’s young people.
6. At the pre-Synodal Meeting, together with the young people, some parents, educators, priests, pastoral workers and experts in the world of youth will take part, to listen to those who live alongside the young and have the “tools” to interpret their situation from the inside and in depth.
7. In this way we also wish to propose a method of intergenerational exchange and collaboration, encouraging dialogue between young people and adults, who often struggle to communicate with each other in everyday life.
8. The pre-Synodal Meeting intends to inspire dynamics of participation based on the encounter between cultures, living conditions, faiths and disciplines, developing a model that can be repeated in different ecclesial realities.
9. We will ask ourselves how to help young people to seek and find the meaning of their life, in the light of the specific vocational perspective that Pope Francis wanted to give to the Synod journey.

10. Finally, the pre-Synodal Meeting will draw up a shared document, which will be delivered to the Pope on Sunday, 25 March and will be incorporated, together with the other contributions received, in the *Instrumentum laboris*, the document the Synod Fathers will study next October.

The Pre-Synodal Meeting as a stage in the journey towards the Synod

The Pre-Synodal Meeting is an appointment that takes place in the tradition of the Synod, since pre-Synodal Meetings have been organized in the past, such as the one in preparation for the 7th Ordinary General Assembly of 1987, on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world, and the Symposium in view of the First Special Assembly for Europe in 1991.

This is not an isolated event, but a stage in the path of preparation for the October Synod: a journey that began, after the opening of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly on 6 October 2016, with the publication of the Preparatory Document and related Questionnaire on 13 January 2017. In this period, many ecclesial realities - episcopal conferences, dioceses, associations and movements – have been active with various types of initiatives, which have in a way anticipated the pre-Synodal Meeting at local level. Without claiming to be exhaustive, I would like to mention the Symposium promoted by the Council of European Bishops' Conferences in Barcelona in March 2017; the International Colloquium on African Youth held in Dakar last month, with the participation of Catholics and Muslims who expressed the common belief that the meaning of life is found in God; events to which the meeting of young Italians with Pope Francis will be added in August. Furthermore, we can point out the ecumenical gatherings of young people in Taizé, the prayer vigils for young people promoted by the Shalom Community in the Roman Basilica of Saint Mary Major, and the weekly "mini-Synods" organized in Lourdes for young people who carry out a pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine.

The answers to the Questionnaire contained in the *Preparatory Document* have engaged in the last year all the particular Churches and numerous ecclesial realities (such as schools and universities, associations and lay movements): all these contributions, collected and summarized by the episcopal conferences and the Synods of the Eastern Churches, have arrived and are still arriving in Rome, joining the responses of the Vatican Dicasteries and the comments freely received by groups and individuals, mostly young people.

To facilitate the participation of young people, including those who are far from our usual ecclesial "circuits", a website was opened last year dedicated to Synod 2018, containing a special Questionnaire for young people that has been online for over six months. I would like to offer some data in this regard. There were about 221,000 participants in the Questionnaire. Of these, 100,500 answered all the questions: 58,000 girls and 42,500 boys. Almost 51,000 participants, corresponding to 50.6% of completed questionnaires, are young people between 16 and 19 years of age, demonstrating that the youngest have proved to be more sensitive to the initiative. The most represented continent is Europe, with 56.4%, followed by Central and Southern America with 19.8% and Africa with 18.1%. Among the participants who completed the Questionnaire, 73.9% declare themselves to be Catholics who consider religion important, while the remaining are Catholics who do not consider religion important (8.8%), non-Catholics who consider religion important (6.1%) and non-Catholics who do not consider religion to be important (11.1%).

Another meeting of the journey in preparation for the Synod was the International Seminar on the condition of youth, held in the month of September and whose proceedings are currently being printed. The purpose of this event was to offer suitable scientific support to the path of preparation for the Synod. Indeed, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers and theologians have much to say about youth, helping us to free the "discourse on young people" from approximations, stereotypes and prejudices that often do not help adults to know young people nor the latter to understand themselves. It should also be noted that already during the Seminar some young people from different regions of the planet and life experiences were invited to Rome. Their contribution was enthusiastic, generous and competent, offering us "on a small scale" a foretaste of next month's event.

Online participation and Mass on Palm Sunday

Today's young people use the web, and in particular the social networks, as a natural "Areopagus" to meet,

communicate and express their opinions. Hence the idea of virtually extending participation in the pre-Synodal Meeting through social media: in this way, young people from all over the world will not only be able to follow the work remotely in real time, but also interact with their peers present in Rome and send their contributions, which will merge into the final synthesis. In short, through new communication technologies too, the Pre-Synodal Meeting is intended to widen as far as possible the “audience” of young people involved, so that no one should feel excluded.

The date of the Pre-Synodal Meeting was chosen to allow all young people invited to Rome to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist on Palm Sunday in Saint Peter’s Square on the occasion of the 33rd World Youth Day on the theme “Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favour with God” (*Lk 1: 30*). As I mentioned previously, it will be precisely during that event that the fruit of the work of the Meeting, summarized in a document, will be given to the Holy Father,

[1] Pope Francis, *Catechesis*, General Audience, 4 October 2017.

[2] Pope Francis, *Address to young people at the National Shrine of Maipú*, Chile, 17 January 2018.

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Fabio Fabene

In continuation with what was said by Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, I would now like to present the programme of the pre-Synodal Meeting, to offer some information on the participants and to briefly illustrate the *Sussidio* that is published today.

The program of the pre-Synodal Meeting

On the morning of Monday 19 March, the work will be opened in the presence of the Holy Father, who on that day will commemorate the fifth anniversary of the beginning of his Petrine ministry. The Holy Father will greet the participants and answer questions from young people from the five continents. From the afternoon onwards the young people will be divided into groups according to language, in which they will discuss the appropriate *Work Framework* and draw up summaries in preparation for the final project, to be presented in plenary assembly on Thursday morning.

This first project will be explored further both in assembly and in groups. The proposals and suggestions that will result will enable us to arrive at the definitive text, whose presentation and approval is scheduled for Saturday morning.

The pre-Synodal Meeting is to some extent inspired, as far as possible, by the dynamics of the Synod Assembly. It will not be simply a conference, as the discussions – facilitated by the exchange within the linguistic groups – will converge in a common document, which – as we have heard – will be submitted to the Holy Father and, together with the other contributions received, will contribute to the *Instrumentum laboris* of the 15th General Assembly of the Synod.

Aware that young people express themselves more easily with new digital technologies and also like to communicate with the language of narration, images and music, together with the final document, a video will be created: it will be a further way to leave space for the creativity of young people and to help them express what they feel they want to say.

The pre-Synodal Meeting will not be just a week of “work”. During the week there will also be moments of prayer,

such as on Friday, when a *Via Crucis* will take place at the Catacombs of San Callisto, to which the young people of Rome and those who wish to participate will be invited. On Saturday afternoon, the young will visit the Pontifical Villas of Castel Gandolfo and in the evening they will take part in a moment of celebration together with the youth of the diocese of Albano.

Participants in the pre-Synodal Meeting

It has already been said that there will be approximately 300 participants in the pre-Synodal Meeting. Each episcopal conference and each Synod of Eastern Catholic Churches has appointed its own representatives, so as to give a “voice” to all young people committed in Christian life throughout the planet.

To these, there will be added young people from seminaries and houses of formation to male and female consecrated life; representatives of associations, movements and ecclesial communities; and young people attending Catholic schools and universities. Other young people will come to represent the worlds of culture, theatre, music, universities, social commitment and voluntary work, political education, the military sphere and sport. There will still be young people belonging to other Christian confessions and other religions, as well as young people who have lived or live particular situations, such as imprisonment, human trafficking and drug addiction, and differently-able young people. There will also be young non-believers or non-confessional youth associations.

Finally, there will be a number of educators from seminars, training houses, universities and schools, colleges and educational institutions, and organizations that help children who live in difficult situations.

There will also be some experts in various youth-related situations and in the pastoral care of vocations, who will follow the work. There will also be the moderators of the language-based groups; and a group of young people will work together to collect data from social networks.

The *Sussidio* for the pre-Synodal Meeting

The *Sussidio* for the pre-Synodal Meeting, published in several languages, is a tool designed both for young people who will be physically present in Rome, and for those who will participate via social media.

The text, which begins with the Pope’s Letter to young people published on 13 January 2017, contains first of all the *Work Framework*, designed as a basic tool for the work during the Meeting. In fact, between Monday and Tuesday, the linguistic groups will discuss the three parts of the Framework, elaborated on the basis of the *Preparatory Document* of the Synod. Five questions are included in each part, intended to facilitate discussion in the language groups. They touch on different aspects of youth: from the search for the meaning of existence to the relationship with technology, from emotions to vocational discernment, from political participation to volunteering.

After the *Work Framework*, the *Sussidio* includes an *Invitation Letter*, written by some young people to their peers to urge them to participate in the pre-Synodal Meeting through social networks. It highlights 15 hashtags, key words that will allow the participation of young people on the net.

To participate in a concrete way via social media, young people can simply go to the website www.synod2018.va, where they will find the link to register for the Facebook Group of one of the six languages provided. Within these Groups, members will have the opportunity to give their contribution to the themes proposed by the questions – which will “re-launch” the themes discussed by the young people present in Rome – each one combined with a hashtag.

As we read at the beginning of the *Sussidio*, “we hope, in this way, to truly make the young people of the world

feel involved in this journey of sharing and listening that is very dear to today's Church".

Intervention of Stella Marillene Nishimwe

Good morning, everyone!

I will not dwell on the issues addressed by those who preceded me in speaking. They have already taken the time to clearly explain this pre-Synodal meeting of young people, to be held in March.

I would like simply to invite all the young people of the world to participate in this precious moment that the Church offers us, to make our voice reach as far as possible: the Pope himself has affirmed that every young person has something to say to the Church, to the bishops and to the Pope. So, the ball is in our court.

Firstly, I would like to emphasize how, in order to be able to listen to the voices of all young people, the Church began by approaching us through what we use most: social networks. From now on, every young person who wants to participate in this pre-Synodal meeting will be able to do so via the social networks. To facilitate intervention by young people, it will be possible to answer with the help of 15 #hashtag that have been placed on these social networks:

The hashtags are as follows:

#WhoAmI
#Differences
#Future
#DigitalWorld
#InteriorLife
#Jesus
#IBelieve
#Called
#Choices
#Guide
#Church
#ActivelyInvolved
#Places
#Proposals
#WaysAndMeans

Each of these hashtags will be linked to notes to facilitate the path of reflection. These notes will be published on www.synod2018.va.

Dear young people, in this Synod we will talk about us, we will talk about ourselves: in short, we will be the subject. This meeting in March is an opportunity we must seize to make our voices heard, to communicate what we feel deep down.

However, we will not all be able to be in Rome at the same time, but the voice of each person counts in building this Synod. That is why we invite all young people of the world, whether they are more or less involved in the Catholic Church, in other Christian denominations or other religions but also those who do not believe in God. The Youth Synod is for all young people.

I could not but personally express my joy when I learned about this pre-Synodal meeting and the opportunity to participate through social networks. I said to myself: "Finally an opportunity for us to be able to express what we

have deep inside us (our concept of the life, of the Church, our doubts, our fears, our suggestions...), to do so without intermediaries, without official letters, without a request for an audience, and to do it through what has become our lifestyle: social networks. For me, it may be a new era for us in the Church and everywhere else as it concerns all young people, not just Catholics. Who knows what fruit this Synod will bear? What I am sure of is that everything will depend on our participation. I repeat, the ball is in our court.

In summary, if you are interested, during the course of the pre-Synodal meeting, you will be able to participate in its work by sending your thoughts to one of the language groups, being sure to register beforehand. To register, visit the website www.synod2018.va or [Facebook.com/synod2018](https://www.facebook.com/synod2018).

In responding to this invitation, we will take part in the journey the Church is making now.

Thank you.

Intervention by Filippo Passantino

In order for the Church to be able to speak the language of young people, as often desired, the Secretariat of the Synod has involved a group of young people, to which I belong, who attend Roman parishes or ecclesial movements, to develop the consultation process through social networks.

A Facebook page, a Twitter account and an Instagram account have been set up under the heading Synod2018. They are all multilingual channels. With our advice and insights we have offered a young outlook so as to be able to talk to other young people.

The goal of the online presence is to foster interaction with our peers around the world and to facilitate their participation. We proposed to them a few months ago to share and “post” on social media, including selfies and videos. We thought that opening the doors of the Synod to all would be important to transform social channels into a forum open to all.

In this way we suggested presenting stories and problems we live on an everyday basis. The experiences of Alessio, who describes with a self-portrait in front of an aircraft the difficulty of those who are compelled to leave their land because there is no work, seemed meaningful to us.

We have received numerous messages from all over the world. From Australia, for example, Angela told how she is preparing for the pre-Synodal meeting in which she will participate. Photos and videos of our meetings have also been published on social media. We want to testify to our desire to involve as many young people as possible via digital media, because through these channels, even during the pre-Synodal meeting, their concrete experience can come to us.

We wish to do so through the hashtag # Synod2018, which will bring together many messages from all over the world. And worldwide, we wanted to ask a question each month, so as to hear the voices and concerns of our peers. This month’s question is: “What can politics and society do for young people?”. We all wonder about this a little, but our answers vary according to our expectations. But we believe that something must be done to avoid stories like that of Alessio.

We have also proposed the creation of another channel of communication, WhatsApp, dedicating a mobile phone number to messages. In short, we have tried to open different doors so that more than the 300 people invited can enter the pre-Synodal Meeting room. Our hope is that this may really be achieved.

Personally, from the next Synod I expect valuable words and encouragement on how young people can be

happy today, in a demanding and competitive world that seems not to leave room for human dimensions and authentic relationships. I and many others of my age are convinced that we can contribute with our commitment and our skills, to sow seeds of hope in today's world. The Synod can be a valuable occasion to invite those who have responsibilities of any kind not to ensure that no door is closed to us young people.

Documentation and Links

1) Link to the Presentation of the pre-Synodal Meeting, the Work Framework and the Letter from young people inviting other youths to participate via Facebook Groups:<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1VSAkJ-ZAugZbNNFoqKmJG-P54IDGdeOi>

Video in Italian: <https://youtu.be/itHvdpkEliM>

Video in French: <https://youtu.be/GL8hy7AEaIE>

2) Link to the mini sites of the pre-Synodal Meeting:

Italian: <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/it/riunione-pre-sinodale.html>

French: <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/fr/reunion-pre-synodale-des-jeunes.html>

English: <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/en/pre-synodal-meeting.html>

German: <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/Deutsch.html>

Spanish: <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/es/reunion-pre-sinodal-de-jovenes.html>

Portuguese: <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/reuniao-pre-sinodal.html>

3) Link to the Facebook Groups of the pre-Synodal Meeting:

Italian: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/presinodale/about/>

French: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/pre.synodale/about/>

English: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Pre.Synodal/about/>

German: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Versammlung.der.Vorsynode/about/>

Spanish: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/pre.sinodal/about/>

Portuguese: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Reuniao.Pre.Sinodal/about/>
