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Press Conference to present the “Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of World Youth Day in the Particular Churches” issued by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life

At 11.30 this morning a press conference was live-streamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the “Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of World Youth Day in the Particular Churches”, issued by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.

The speakers were: Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, I.Sch., secretary of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; Fr. João Chagas, head of the Youth Office of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; Dr. Dorota Abdelmoula, official of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; Maria Lisa Abu Nassar, 26, from Nazareth, coordinator of reception at the San Lorenzo International Youth Centre; and Gelson Fernando Augusto Dinis, 24, Angolan, seminarian and student of dogmatic theology in Rome.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention by Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, I.Sch.

The impetus to draft these orientations came to us from the choice made by Pope Francis to move the date of diocesan WYDs and to relaunch their celebration in the particular Churches. In fact, at the end of the Eucharistic celebration on the Solemnity of Christ the King, November 22, 2020, the Holy Father announced that the local edition of WYD, hitherto celebrated on Palm Sunday, will henceforth be held on the Sunday upon which falls the Solemnity of Christ the King. This change of date, dictated above all by reasons of pastoral expediency, maintains the emphasis on the "mystery of Jesus Christ, Redeemer of mankind" and at the same time seeks to expand possibilities regarding the proposal of activities and initiatives that place young people in a cone of light that radiates from the same mystery.

In the final document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, we read that the Church “considers her mission [with young people] a pastoral priority of epoch-making significance, in which to invest time, energy and resources” (n. 119). And before that, the Synod Fathers wrote: "World Youth

Day, [...] and national and diocesan meetings play an important part in the lives of many young people, since they offer a living experience of faith and communion that can help them meet life's great challenges and responsibly take their place in society and in the Church" (DF 16).

These meetings, born of the prophetic intuition of St. John Paul II, have been recognized by most as a source of grace for many young people, for youth ministry and for the entire Church. How many conversions, how many vocations are born during WYD! According to Pope Benedict XVI, they represent a providential gift for the Church, a "remedy against the fatigue of believing." Pope Francis has defined them as a missionary thrust of extraordinary strength for the whole Church and, in particular, for the younger generations.

Therefore, our Dicastery, in reflecting upon how to concretely implement the proposals of the Synod and strengthened by its decades of experience in coordinating WYD, thought to collect in a document some key elements that have made these meetings fruitful over the years, to make it available to the particular Churches. We recall that, since the institution of WYD, the particular Churches have been invited to celebrate it every year at the local level, while its international edition takes place approximately every three years. It is known, however, that a large number of young people, for one reason or another, are unable to participate in international events. Therefore, through these *Pastoral Guidelines*, we would like to make all young people participants in this rich heritage. Their pastors and the various services of youth ministry of the particular Churches will thus be able, with pastoral freedom and creativity, to enrich their local experience of the "youth festival".

We firmly believe that the international WYD and its local counterpart are mutually enriching. The international dimension broadens the horizons of young people and opens them to universal brotherhood. The local WYD, because of its geographical and physical proximity, can more easily generate a commitment in young people that will change the face of the society in which they live and increase their sense of belonging.

We have designed these *Guidelines* for Bishops' Conferences, the Synods of the Patriarchal and Major Archbishops, dioceses/eparchies, ecclesial movements and associations and, last but not least, young people all over the world. Our hope is that all the recipients will find in it inspiring elements to give new impetus to youth ministry in the various parts of the world.

I thank you for your attention and I now give the floor to Fr. João Chagas, head of the Youth Office of the Dicastery, who will present the document to us in broad outline.

Intervention by Fr. João Chagas

The document is simple and agile as befits a pastoral tool; it can be read easily in an hour. It is structured in 6 chapters [and a conclusion] and is accompanied by many photographs.

The first chapter summarizes what WYD has represented over the past 35 years in the life of the Church: they have been essentially a gift for the entire ecclesial community, as confirmed by all the Popes who have celebrated them.

The second chapter considers the importance of the celebration of WYD at the local level. Many particular Churches already have in their calendar some kind of event dedicated to young people, even if on different dates and in different ways (regional, national, continental...). To those local realities, these orientations will come as a confirmation and enhancement of what they already do. Where nothing similar exists, the purpose of these guidelines is to encourage the particular Churches to discover the many fruits that can be born from the diocesan/eparchial celebration of WYD.

The third chapter returns to the choice of the new date for the celebration of the diocesan/eparchial WYD on the

Solemnity of Christ the King. On this day, the whole Church is called to gather around its young people, around ALL young people, to send them this great message: "Jesus loves you and you are in the heart of the Church. The Church has a message for you and you too have much to say to the Church. Today she wants to meet you, to listen to you, to pray with you and for you. She wants to celebrate you." The *Guidelines* state: "This is therefore an invitation addressed to dioceses/eparchies to celebrate WYD on the Solemnity of Christ the King. It is a desire of the Holy Father that this should be a day for the universal Church to place young people at the centre of our pastoral attention, to pray for them, to engage young people as protagonists, to promote communications campaigns, etc. Ideally, an event (diocesan/eparchial, regional or national) should be organised on the day we celebrate Christ the King. There may be, however, reasons for the event to be held on another date.[...] It is suggested that World Youth Day be held on the same date as the Solemnity of Christ the King, including in Churches where their rite does not provide for this Solemnity, although it can be celebrated on another day. Nevertheless, Ordinaries have the faculty to decide on an alternative."

The fourth chapter is the longest and most detailed. It brings together some of the salient aspects that have emerged from several decades of experience in celebrating the international versions of WYD. It lists several pastoral proposals that reflect the richness of the event. But the key word here is "pastoral creativity/imagination". We are not proposing a univocal model to be followed to the letter, rather, we are essentially giving suggestions that each Church or ecclesial reality can adapt and re-elaborate, in whole or in part, according to its own experience and pastoral needs.

The fifth chapter focuses on youth leadership. With this chapter, we desired to re-propose the strong message that emerged from the 2018 Synod, namely, to make young people participants - today - in the life and mission of the Church, because, as Pope Francis often says, young people are not the future of the Church. They are its present. They are today, the now (see the Homily at the Final Mass of WYD Panama 2019). The document urges the overcoming of a pastoral care "for young people" in favour of a pastoral care "with young people." This is what young people are asking of the Church: an opening of credit. They are asking for trust and they want to be accompanied and encouraged so that they can make use of the vital force that moves them.

Finally, the sixth chapter explains the importance of the Holy Father's Annual Message for WYD. Every year, the Church celebrates young people. Each year the Holy Father addresses a message to them on the occasion of WYD, a true "spiritual compass" for young people and a valuable tool for planning youth ministry.

I will now give the floor to some young people to hear from them what struck them as they read this document.

Intervention by Dr. Dorota Abdelmoula

Good morning everyone!

In my intervention, I've decided to focus on the protagonism of young people. Actually, this protagonism doesn't even really need to be spoken about, as we have just heard it resonating throughout this hall. Indeed, Maria and Gelson didn't only speak *about* the Church but above all *as* the Church.

In my opinion, it is significant that today, on the anniversary of the birth of St. John Paul II, who was so fond of the active presence of young people in the Church, here in the Press Office of the Holy See, it is precisely young people who are speaking about the faith lived in first person, with their own language and their own sensitivity. I believe that this example of theirs is also an indication of the way in which these guidelines could be put into practice: that they not only be considered as a document dedicated to those responsible for youth ministry, but that they be read, meditated upon and put into practice together with young people.

This would also be a very concrete sign of the trust that in my opinion is fundamental to putting young people's protagonism into motion.

For years, when I think back to WYD, I am always struck precisely by the trust that first John Paul II, then Benedict XVI and now Pope Francis have placed in young people, in gathering thousands of them - who before seemed anonymous - in front of the whole world by means of cameras and telephoto lenses, with a strong announcement: "This is the Church of today. These are the people who will carry the Gospel of Christ into the coming decades."

I dare say that this sign of confidence is a desire that every young person carries within themselves and that can rekindle their life. This is why it would be important - and this is one of the encouragements we promote with these guidelines - not to be satisfied with already having a group of young people involved in the parish or diocese, but rather to seek out more and more - especially among those who perhaps feel inadequate, unworthy or unbelieving.

My own journey, which brought me here to the Holy See, began with a gesture of trust from a priest who simply told me, "Pick up your guitar and come play at Sunday Mass, we need you. And don't worry, you'll learn everything along the way."

From that gesture of trust, many experiences were born: from the youth ministry of the missionaries of La Salette to the organization of World Youth Day in Krakow 2016, up to the work in the Catholic press in Poland and now in the Holy See.

Mine is a story like many others; there are so many examples just like it. They are all examples that show that when trust is given, that trust is always repaid. Especially by young people.

I hope that these guidelines will become an impetus to nurture even more of this mutual trust. For all those who wish to consult or download them - and we hope that there are many who do wish to do so – they will be available from today on the website of the dicastery *laityfamilylife.va*, in 5 languages and in various formats, including a version ready for printing.

Intervention by Maria Lisa Abu Nassar

How beautiful the Church is! As I read the text, I thought about just that. The Church continually strives to open itself, to improve itself, recognising the people who most need to be loved and guided by the Church, helping them to find their identity as children who belong to God.

At WYD in Krakow in 2016, I had my first international pilgrimage experience, in which I participated together with a group of young people from the Holy Land, mainly from Nazareth and Haifa. We spent some days of preparation in Haifa and then, arriving in Krakow, we met so many young people from different countries of the world, each group with their own flag of belonging, while we were there without any flag, to avoid any political conflict. However, it was the events of WYD that reminded us that we belong to Mother Church and that we are children of one Father, united with all the youth of the world.

Despite the many conflicts in my land, it always remains a place of pilgrimage, where young people and pilgrims come to meet Jesus. For this reason, it would be important to encourage more local young people to go out to discover the Gospel by walking in the footsteps of Jesus in the places where he lived. How many young people, as the text of the Guidelines says, would not come for a prayer in church but would be willing to participate in a pilgrimage experience, walking and discovering together, forming new friendships and sharing moments of joy.

The Holy Land is a small territory with different religions, where Christians are a minority. How important it would be, especially in these days given the situation in Jerusalem and throughout the whole territory, to open the door to dialogue among young people of different religions. I believe that all of us young people, despite our differences, start from a common point, we are on the lookout for something, or rather Someone, that can give

meaning to our existence. Promoting the opportunity for such a dialogue in the churches of the Holy Land, through WYD, and thereby giving everyone the chance to express themselves, would mean being able to hope that one day peace will reign in the Land where Jesus was born and lived.

Intervention by Gelson Fernando Augusto Dinis

My name is Gelson Fernando Augusto Dinis. I come from Luanda, Angola. I am 24 years old. I am a seminarian and have completed my undergraduate studies in Philosophy and Theology. I am currently pursuing a Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology at the Pontifical Urban University.

I had the opportunity to read the document "Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of World Youth Day in Particular Churches." Its depth and beauty truly struck me. In particular, the emphasis it gives to the Church as the mediator of the encounter of the young person with God, and to her ministers as facilitators of this encounter. In the Church each person must feel welcomed and loved, but above all accompanied, and in particular young people, who are called to be witnesses of God's love where they are.

The World Youth Days were born precisely with this intention: to show Christ's love to young people through the closeness of the Church. Young people are her precious and much-loved children who must be at the heart of her evangelizing mission.

Young people, as precious pearls of the Church, find in Diocesan Youth Days an opportunity not only to experience ecclesial communion, but also to learn to feel like members of the community in which they find themselves. Therefore, on these occasions, the closeness of the parish priest, of the bishop, is fundamental, such that the young people feel welcomed and understand that they are essential to the mission of the Church, which in itself excludes no one.

On the other hand, these Days are also a space for vocations, for the true discovery of God's will in one's life. In some meetings similar to these, I too have had important experiences in my vocational journey. For example: before coming to Rome, I was able to participate both in several Masses for the diocesan celebration of World Youth Day, presided by the bishop of my diocese, and in various vocational vigils, some of which were held in the various parishes of the diocese, to involve young people. The dedication and closeness of those who guided me made me want to enter the seminary myself a few years later.

Therefore, as has been well pointed out in the document, the closeness of pastors, whether bishops or priests, particularly on these occasions, serve as a stimulus for the discernment of each young person. But in addition to the accompaniment of bishops or priests, the witness of families - especially younger couples - is fundamental so that each young person, evangelised by their presence, may discover God's plan within himself and not be afraid to make a definitive choice for his life.
