

Mapping the Way Forward: The New Directory as Essential for Ministry with Youth and Young Adults

A Quick Annotated Guide for Pastoral Ministry Leaders
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- The *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) is a natural flow from *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), and *Christus Vivit* (2019) – the centerpieces of Pope Francis’ papacy. In particular *Christus Vivit* is a landmark document for youth and young adult ministries – and if you like this, the *Directory* takes the next step and asks: how can we implement it in our parishes and dioceses?
- The *Directory* reminds us that one of the central tasks of our engagement with youth and young adults is to show them how to respond “to the lofty vocation to holiness... that is capable of bringing every situation back to the way of truth and happiness that is Christ.” (DFC 83)
- In this sense, catechesis instructs the believer in following the Lord according to the dispositions described in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12), which manifest his very life. ‘Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card.’ (GE 63)” (DFC 83) The reminder of ministry as connected to “the lofty vocation to holiness” is something that was emphasized by the Synod of Bishops in 2018, which noted in its *Final Document*: “As the Synod progressed, it became clear that ministry with young people needs a vocational slant, and that the pastoral care of vocations should be offered to all young people. It was emphasized that pastoral programs should range from infancy to adulthood, to help the young find their place in the Christian community.” (FD 16)
- The *Directory*’s reference to living out the Beatitudes as foundational to ministry evokes the image of the patron saint of youth and young adults, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925), whom St. John Paul II deemed “the man of the Beatitudes” and whom Pope Francis extolled in *Christus Vivit* (cf. CV 60) as one of those whose “radiant witness encourages us and awakens us from our lethargy” (CV 49). We are calling young people to model their patron, Pier Giorgio Frassati.
- The *Directory* advises ministry leaders to listen to young adults with patience and try to understand their unique anxieties, to engage in authentic dialogue and accompany them through their vocational discernment. Ministry with young adults must “be first of all a humanizing and missionary outreach” with “new styles and strategies” that enable the Church “to become more flexible” with “this pastoral style.” (DFC 252) In this definition, we are drawn to the words “humanizing and missionary” – to reflect the pastoral and the vocational approaches to ministry – offering listening, patience, comfort, accompaniment, and support and moving youth and young adults toward their mission in the world as “protagonists” in the church and the world (cf. CV 174).
- Within the *Directory*, those working with youth and young adults may be drawn to the sections on “ministry with adolescents” and “ministry with young people” (DFC 248-256), but it is important that ministry leaders read the entirety of the eighth chapter of the *Directory*: “Catechesis in the Lives of Persons” (DFC 224-282) as it is critical that each of us be aware of and versed in what leads into our particular ministerial area and where we are accompanying them towards.
- Furthermore, even though the specific age ranges for youth and young adults mentioned in the *Directory* may not conform to our particular realities in the United States, the *Directory* does say “there are no clear boundaries and the approaches typical of each culture play a decision role” in articulating these ministries, “taking into account the situations in different countries.” (DFC 245)

The ministries are interwoven so that a young person is, at the same time, connected to family ministry, youth or young adult ministries, or adult formation, not to mention the specific circumstances for those in prison, those with disabilities, and migrant communities – all of which pertain to young people across the United States.

- Where a young person is along their own personal developmental journey is going to be unique – and we must respect these distinctions. Every youth or young adult is unique. The individualized approach (one by one accompaniment) is something Pope Francis has addressed in his writings over the years. Consider this one passage from *Christus Vivit* that echoes what was said throughout the *Directory*: “Youth (and young adulthood) is not something to be analyzed in the abstract. Indeed, (the concept of) “youth” does not exist; there exist only (individual) young people, each with the reality of his or her own life.” (CV 71)
- For those working with young adults, read the adult section (DFC 257-265) because we must ask to what we are leading young people towards: their mission in the world, fired up with the Gospel. Knowing this destination (even for youth ministers) is important in our work with this population.
- Just as *Christus Vivit* highlighted the family as “the first place of accompaniment” (CV 242) for youth and young adults, the *Directory* expounds upon this concept (see DFC 226-235), noting that “the future of persons and of human and ecclesial communities depends to a large extent on the family, the basic cell of society” (DFC 226). The young person’s relationship with their family is constantly in motion (akin to the winding synodal journey) – from the family being the origin of an adolescent’s perspective on the world to the creation of a new family unit when young adults enter into the Sacrament of Marriage.
- The setting of evangelization and catechesis with youth and young adults has always been a critical component of the ministry: it takes place wherever young people can be found. Pope Francis calls us “the Church that goes forth... who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice... (that can) boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.” (EG 24) Those who accompany the young are “the Church that goes forth” into the places where youth and young adults are present.
- The *Directory* echoes these encounters and safe spaces where young people can feel at home: the parish community as well as non-parish movements and associations of young people (DFC 253), and in casual settings such as the university, one’s cultural community, and recreational activities: sports, music, entertainment, nature, among other means (DFC 254). The *Directory* also speaks of the digital settings that can be safe spaces for catechesis (see DFC 359-372), in particular this line: “A season appears to be opening in which catechists can become representative of interests so as to design pathways of faith that are ever less standardized and every more attentive to the uniqueness of each person.” (DFC 370), which again echoes *Christus Vivit* 71.
- In their uniqueness, how can we help find them on the road and then accompany them? Evangelization and catechesis is about going forth to meet them wherever they are. And any person in the Church who accompanies a young person in any way is a catechist – and thus the *Directory* and all it says is applicable. It is worth learning from – but also praying with – as a pastoral leader with a heart and passion for the young.