

Presentation to the National Advisory Council,  
September 10, 2021

### **Journeying Together**

- *Journeying Together* is a synodal process of dialogue and accompaniment of young Catholics in the United States. Amidst a pandemic, the social unrest and the political polarization affecting U.S. society, and the Church, the Journeying Together process has provided a “sacred space” and a venue for bishops, young adults and youth ministry leaders of the various ethnic and cultural backgrounds to model respectful yet honest dialogue about faith, culture, racism, inclusion and the issues that affect them as young people.
- Since July 2020, thousands of young adults and ministry leaders, accompanied by dozens of Catholic bishops and eparchs, have been Journeying Together virtually, learning to listen to one another, to walk in each other’s shoes, to dialogue in large and small group settings, and to contemplate matters of faith and life from both intracultural and intercultural perspectives.
- More than 60 bishops have accompanied the process thus far. Many of them report being deeply touched by the testimonies of the young adults, their resilience, and their faith, despite the many challenges they face. We are also receiving reports that some of the national organizations are already taking steps to reimagine the way they go about ministry with youth and young adults and campus ministry as a direct result of their participation in this process.
- An important step in this journey will be the national in-person Journeying Together Event, planned for June 23-26, 2022 in Chicago. The aim of the national gathering is to bring these leaders together in person, after two years of virtual meetings, to experience the joy of encounter, to celebrate our unity in diversity and the many new friendships in the Lord created by this process, as well as to complete the journey towards a ministry that is welcoming of everyone’s gifts, one that inspires and propels young people of every cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic background to be fully alive for Christ, for the Church, and for one another.
- Journeying Together is inspired by Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit* and the 2018 Synod on Young People. The Committee felt that it was important that the Holy Father’s message reaches young people of all diverse ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

- The success of this process, and its long-term fruitfulness, hinges on its ability to ensure a fair representation of various ministries, cultural groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. More importantly, the recommendations and the tools that will emerge from this experience will benefit the Church's ministry with young people for years to come.
- In the wake of the V National Encuentro and the 2018 Synod on Young People, as well as efforts such as the National Dialogue on Catholic Pastoral Ministry with Youth and Young Adults, it is imperative for the Church in the United States to listen to all of the voices that form the rich mosaic of youth, young adult and campus ministries in the U.S. to chart a path forward together.
- Although the Committee and Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church are the leading entities in this process, we have been working closely from the beginning with the Youth and Young Adult Ministry office under the Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, the Office of Higher Education and Campus Ministry under the Secretariat of Catholic Education, and the Secretariat of Evangelization and Catechesis, as well as the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. They have not just participated, helped to shape and at times led important parts of the process. Most recently the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations has also become more actively involved in the planning of the national event and the Office of Justice, Peace and Human Development is also assisting with various aspects of the process.

### Timeline

1. Kick-off: July 25, 2020
2. Step 2: Conversations by Cultural Family (Intracultural) August-December 2020
3. Step 3: Intercultural Dialogues (led by each cultural family) January-June 2021
4. Step 4: Many Moving parts! July 2021-June 2022\*
5. Step 5: Journeying Together National Gathering, June 23-26, 2022
6. Step 6: Implementation: Taking Action! And evaluation.

(\* ) Step 4 is where we find ourselves right now.

Planning has begun in earnest for the national event. But participants (particularly young adults) have expressed an interest in deepening the reflection on some of the common or particularly urgent themes that emanated from the virtual sessions (Deeper dive sessions) during this time. Some also expressed the need to go back to their cultural families to debrief on the learnings of the process as well as to prepare

for the national in-person event (Cultural Family Reflections-Part II). Some dioceses and national organizations have expressed a desire to lead a similar process at the local level. The Secretariat of Cultural Diversity is currently working on producing a toolbox that would allow dioceses and others to replicate the process (Going Local Toolbox). And an editorial team has been formed to codify the proceedings of the process thus far, which will form the basis for the working document of the national in-person event and the recommendations emanating from it (Writing Teams). A virtual celebration of intercultural friendship is also being planned for October 2.

### Taking action

So, what is actionable about this some of you may ask?

To be clear, for the purposes of the Administrative Committee meeting, the only action the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church is asking of the Administrative Committee is to allow time in the agenda of the November meeting to inform the body of bishops about where we are in the process and to issue a cordial, joyful and strong invitation for bishops to attend the national event and encourage local young adults and ministry leaders engage in the process. So the support of the members of the NAC for this request will very much be appreciated. Despite the 60+ number of bishops engaged we need even more bishops involved. Bishops who are not afraid to walk with young people, listen to them and accompany them in their journey of faith in a very personal and direct way. And we also need more young adults and youth ministry leaders engaged.

I was asked to address in more detail for you today the “taking action” part of the Journeying Together process -or as Pope Francis calls it in Let’s us Dream the time to “propose” that comes after contemplating and discerning. So, I would like to highlight the following:

- Part of the planning for the national event involves an “action planning process” and a “post-event and national cohort team”, both of which have eyes towards what comes next beyond the event. The action planning will involve the breakout table conversations at the national event and building consensus about recommendation, and the post-event team will work on establishing systems and opportunities (with national organizations, especially those who were involved with the National Dialogue process, plus others) to ensure that those action plans have support and are rooted in realistic expectations.
- As for what exactly is being planned afterwards? In a way, we simply don’t know yet because the ideas that have emerged from the intracultural and intercultural

dialogues are still being received. At this point, the action plans will reflect the coming year's discernment, aided by further reflection within each cultural family, the deeper dive reflections, the insights that may emerge from local dialogues, and informed and inspired by the written and other materials that are being developed.

- However, what can be said is that the actions, or the impact of those actions, will ultimately be four-fold:
  - First, the local, regional, and national landscapes of ministry with youth, young adults, and on college campuses will be impacted. As a result of the *Journeying Together* processes, the current ministerial work being done to accompany and engage with young people will be changing to reflect the input of many cultures and communities from this initiative. In fact, is already happening. The effects can be felt already. Some national organizations are already taking action to reflect the spirit and the synodal ways brought about by Journeying Together experience.
  - Second, and related to this, the USCCB is developing a *National Pastoral Framework on Youth and Young Adults*, which will be heavily informed by *Journeying Together*. This Framework will set the vision for the Church's work with young people in the United States, so that is very significant for future work across the country.
  - Third, each of the cultural families will be impacted by the *Journeying Together* process, in that they will likely gain a greater understanding of the needs of young people within their family and the young people beyond their cultural experience, and because of that, will be able to engage better within their local communities. (We have beautiful examples of this in several of the communities, as expressed in multiple testimonies)
  - Fourth, the Church as a whole will be impacted by the contributions of youth and young adult protagonists of all the cultural communities working together in solidarity, enhanced harmony, and friendship. Their youthful and synodal spirit can be a model for the entire Catholic Church to follow. When young people express their ideas for the work of the Church and within the Church, and if Catholic leaders of older generations are open to receiving this input, the Church itself can be moved in ways yet unimaginable.

Young adults have heavily influenced the Journeying Together process. And so, the biblical phrase “A child shall lead them” very much applies here as they have modeled for us what a synodal church can look like.

- In sum, there are tools and recommendations being produced; the stage is being set for actors and stakeholders to take action at the local, regional, national and ministerial network levels; and let’s not forget the impact of the process itself: how will ministries and organizations change as people are learning to listen to one another, getting to know one another and losing the fear to collaborate, communicate and relate across cultural boundaries. By the way, we intend to survey dioceses and participating organizations at the turn of 3-4 years after the national event to better understand the impact of the Journeying Together process. What concrete actions were taken in youth, young adult, campus ministries and others, as a result of their participation in the process or the application of the learnings and specific recommendations that emanated from it.
- Finally, let’s not forget this is a process. To get to that action stage, a synodal journey has to be taken that follows the see-judge-act pastoral methodology. We are still in the middle of that Journey. That means that while we want to know already our action steps, we have to take the time in this process to listen, reflect on it, and lay the groundwork for action. That’s all we can do!