



Young people attending a conference at Franciscan University react to a speaker.

It is important for young people to know that their vocation is by virtue of their life. . . . Each person has a responsibility to discern what it is that God calls them to be and do.

# What young people say about vocation

**T**HERE IS A NEED FOR A SIMPLE AND CLEAR understanding of vocation to highlight the sense of call and mission, desire and aspiration, which makes it a concept more relatable to young people at this stage of their lives. Vocation has sometimes been presented as an abstract concept, perceived as too far out of the reach of the minds of many. Young people understand the general sense of bringing meaning to life and being alive for a purpose, but many do not know how to connect that to vocation as a gift and call from God.

The term *vocation* has become synonymous with the priesthood and religious life in the culture of the church. While these are sacred calls that should be celebrated, it is important for young people to know that their vocation is by virtue of their life, and that each person has a responsibility to discern what it is that God calls them to be and to do. There is a fullness to each vocation which must be highlighted in order to open the hearts of young people to their possibilities.

## BY YOUNG ADULT DELEGATES TO PRESYNOD MEETING

To prepare for the October 2018 synod of bishops on youth, faith, and vocational discernment, church officials invited 300 young adults from around the world to meet in Rome in March 2018 to provide feedback on the synod themes. The document created by this group is available at <https://goo.gl/JVYLse>. HORIZON presents just one section of this compelling document, which was written following extensive consultation via social media.

Young people of various beliefs see vocation as inclusive of life, love, aspiration, place in and contribution to the world, and way to make an impact. The term vocation is not very clear to many young people; hence there is need for greater understanding of the Christian vocation (the priesthood and religious life, lay ministry, marriage and family, role in society, etc.) and the universal call to holiness.

## Vocational discernment

Discerning one's vocation can be a challenge, especially in light of misconceptions about the term. However, young people will rise to the challenge. Discerning one's vocation can be an adventure along the journey of life. That being said, many young people do not know how to intentionally go about the process of discernment; this is an opportunity for the church to accompany them.

Many factors influence the ability of young people to discern their vocations, such as: the church, cultural differences, demands of work, digital media, family expectations, mental health and state of mind, noise, peer pressures, political scenarios, society, technology, etc. Spending time in silence, introspection and prayer, as well as reading the Scriptures and deepening self-knowledge are opportunities very few young people exercise. There is a need for a better introduction to these areas. Engaging with faith-based groups, movements, and like-minded communities can also assist young people in their discernment.

We recognize in particular the unique challenges faced by young women as they discern their vocation and place in the church. Just as Mary's "yes" to God's call is fundamental to the Christian experience, young women today need space to give their own "yes" to their vocation. We encourage the church to deepen its understanding of the role of women and to empower young women, both lay and consecrated, in the spirit of the church's love for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

## Young people and accompaniment

Young people are looking for companions on the journey, to be embraced by faithful men and women who express the truth and allow young people to articulate their understanding of faith and their vocation. Such people do not need to be models of faith to imitate, but instead living testimonies to witness. Such a person should evangelize by their life. Whether they are familiar faces in the comfort of home, colleagues in the local community,

or martyrs testifying to their faith with their very lives, there are many who could meet this expectation.

Qualities of such a mentor include: a faithful Christian who engages with the church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; is a confidante without judgement; actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; is deeply loving and self-aware; acknowledges their limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey.

An especially important quality in mentors is acknowledgement of their humanity—that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, the devastation may impact young people's abilities to continue to engage with the church.

Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person's process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well. A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a young person's ability to participate in the life of the church. A mentor should nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation. ■

## RESOURCES FOR SERVING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

List of diocesan Young Adult Ministry Offices  
<https://goo.gl/BhFzyn>

Young Adult Ministry in a Box, created by BustedHalo.com  
[youngadultministryinabox.com](http://youngadultministryinabox.com)

National Dialogue on Youth and Young Adult Ministry  
(See article on page 2) [nationaldialogue.info](http://nationaldialogue.info)

National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC)  
[ncyc.info](http://ncyc.info)

Catholic Campus Ministry Association  
[ccmanet.org](http://ccmanet.org)