

In this issue: *Andrea Pesare attended as representative of Catholic Charismatic Renewal the pre-synodal meeting of youth held in Rome in March 2018. He had the pleasant surprise to discover that, despite being the only direct representative of the Renewal, among the 300 young people there were people of the charismatic renewal from all continents, who were there for different reasons. Movements collaborate with episcopal conferences and youth pastoral ministry in the service of young people.*

The task of the participants was not to make decisions, but to say what they think, to help the Pope and the synodal bishops. The feeling of Andrea was: 'For the first time the Pope gave the floor to the young people!' They gave an answer on the question: how to meet young people, right where they are?' A report from the heart of the Church.

My experience at the Synod of youth

By Andrea Pesare

"Today's young people crave an authentic church. With these words we would like to express, in particular to the Church hierarchy, our request for a transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community". This is perhaps the phrase that best summarizes the final document of the pre-synodal meeting, which took place in Rome from March 19th to 24th, 2018. The protagonists were 300 young people from all over the world, including representatives of every reality of the Catholic youth world (Catholic Bishops conferences, youth ministry, movements, communities, associations, religious orders, pontifical universities and religious institutes), but also

representatives of other Christian denominations, other religions and non-believers too; to all these must be added about 15,000 young people who actively participated in the pre-synodal meeting via social network. I had the honor and the joy of being among those 300 young people to represent ICCRS (*International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services*) and, more generally, the *Catholic Charismatic Renewal*. So it is a great pleasure for me to give an account of this beautiful experience.



A group photo after the approval of the final document

The pre-synodal meeting, an important step for the Synod in October

It is Pope Francis himself who requested this meeting, so as to listen to the voice of young people in view of the Synod on Youth scheduled for October 2018. "Too often we talk about young people without letting ourselves be questioned by them" - he told us on the

morning of Monday, March 19, when he came to meet us in person - "When someone wants to campaign or do something, ah, we say, praise the young! Is it not so? But we don't allow the young to act out on these things. Praising is a way to please people. But people are not silly or stupid, [...] you certainly are not stupid!"

That is why we need a Synod of Youth in which young people are the protagonists and so finally have the opportunity to let the Church and the world know their thoughts, their dreams, their hopes. The ultimate goal of the pre-synodal meeting was to draw up a final document that becomes part of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the set of preparatory documents on which the discussions of the Synod in October will be based. Our task was not to make decisions, but to say what we think, to help the Pope and the synodal bishops to reflect on some issues by giving them our vision of things; this reflects the institution of the Synod of Bishops, which has only a consultative and never deliberative function.

Group Sharing

From Monday afternoon we were divided into language-based sharing groups; there were groups in Italian, English, Spanish and French, the four official languages of the conference. Each group consisted of 15 people (for a total of 20 groups, plus 6 groups made up of participants via social network) and a facilitator; then each group chose within it a moderator who led the discussion - I was the moderator of my group - and a rapporteur who took note of the various speeches. My group, one of the Italian language groups, was mainly made up of Italians, but also some foreigners who are studying or



My sharing group

had studied in Italy and who consequently knew the language; while in the groups of other languages a more international atmosphere was felt, in ours we spoke mainly of the Italian situation. Despite this, the participants of the group came from quite different experiences: some were working in parishes and diocesan youth pastoral activities such as catechism, Parish Hall or Azione Cattolica; others came from movements (I was there for the *Charismatic Renewal*, there was also a girl from Opus Dei); then there were students from some Pontifical Universities in Rome; there was also a Brazilian seminarian, a Franciscan friar,

a young nun from China and a Greek-Catholic seminarian from Hungary; finally there was a young man who had just been released from prison and moved to a recovery community and a girl who currently lives in a community for recovering drug addicts, a non-believer.

It may seem strange, but these last two, those perhaps more distant from the faith, were those who ended up being the most useful to the group, as they provided a view of the Church from the outside. The girl, in particular, proved to be very open to discussion and eager to participate with her contribution to the final document which, as expressly requested by the Pope, was to express the views of all young people, not just Catholics. She dreamt of a parish environment that even non-believers or those professing other religions can attend, being welcomed for what they are and for what they believe in; her experience of contact with the Church was of people who sought only to convert her and not to accept her as a non-believer.

The need emerged in our group for an openness to everyone and an announcement of the Gospel with facts, rather than words. People, and especially young people, are converted when they experience an unconditional and gratuitous love; when someone experiences this love from people of faith, it is then that the first questions on faith come to light and we can start talking about God: "young people eventually listen to what they want to hear" - is what emerged from our sharing - "until spontaneously ask questions arise, they are not available to listen to the answers".

The program of the meeting

During the first three sessions (Monday afternoon, Tuesday morning and afternoon) we reflected, within the individual groups, on the themes proposed by the work plan, helped by some questions. On Wednesday morning we gathered again in the groups to summarize in a final synthesis what had emerged in the previous sessions. On Wednesday afternoon a drafting group was set up; the task of this group was to read all the syntheses of the various groups and to prepare a first draft of the final document. These people worked all afternoon and all evening, until 4 in the morning to finish the work and to translate it from English, the language in which they worked, to other languages.

On Thursday morning we met in the assembly and the first version of the final document was presented to us. While reading it aloud, it was very emotional for me and I was quite moved; that, perhaps, was the first moment in which I realized the historical importance of this presynode: *for the first time the Pope gave the floor to the young people!* For the first time we had the opportunity to say what we thought, to make our voices heard to the bishops, to say everything we did not like about the organization of the Church. We tried to do our best not to waste this opportunity. At that moment, as we

were going through the first version of *our* document, I realized what a great grace it was to be there, among those 300 participants.

The first version did not satisfy a number of people, who were indeed disappointed and did not feel represented by those words. Fortunately on Thursday morning we were able to discuss these in the assembly regards what we liked or what we did not like about the document (in youth jargon, we put some *likes* or *dislikes* beside some passages of the document) and then in the afternoon, we reworked on the document in the original sharing groups. On Thursday evening (and night), the editorial team worked on the document to elaborate a second version, which was presented to us on Friday morning.

The second version was a big improvement on the first, even if in some sections of the document ideas emerged that were too progressive and there was a general discontent about some unsuitable expressions that had been used. We were given the opportunity to make other suggestions regards changes and on Friday afternoon the editorial team worked on the definitive version of the final document.

Saturday was an intense morning. The editors presented us with the final document and read it from top to bottom; all in all it lasted almost an hour. This too was an emotional moment, because finally we had the fruit of so much effort in our hands; we realized that we had done a good job and, although the document was not perfect, important issues had emerged and we had given clear messages to the bishops and to the Church. Although there were still some people not fully satisfied, the document was approved with a vote (however we believe that the secretary would have published the document in any case, so this vote felt like a bit of a joke to most of us). Then the final document was made official at a press conference with subsequent publication.

The main contents of the final document

The final document consists of three parts, following the structure suggested to us in the work plan, to which we added an initial introduction.

In the introduction we explain what this document is, what it contains and how it fits into the preparation for the Synod of Bishops.

The first part is entitled "challenges and opportunities of young people in today's world". This section presents the world of young people of the 21st century, which, while on the one hand has many more opportunities than previous generations, thanks to the development of technology and communication, on the other it is facing more and more challenges to find its own place within society. Attention is therefore paid to serious problems such as the persecution of Christians and the lack of religious freedom in some countries, migrations to the West, trafficking in human beings still dramatically

present, the role of women in society and in the Church, the difficulties in finding a job, and finally some negative consequences of new technologies, such as isolation, pornography and cyber-bullying. We youth of today "need inclusion, acceptance, mercy and tenderness on the part of the Church, both as an institution and as a community of faith".

The second part develops the theme of "faith and vocation, discernment and accompaniment". In it we present the complicated relationship of today's youth with the Church and with faith in general. In this section we also talk about the term "vocation", which is often understood only as a vocation to the priesthood or to a religious life; instead, a Christian can be called to a vocation in marriage rather than to the priesthood, or perhaps to remain alone or consecrate his life to God: all these are equally sacred vocations and, if lived in fullness, allow the person to walk towards holiness. Furthermore, it is important to understand that there is a vocation that is valid for everyone, believers and non-believers, and it is that of love and life; each one is called to live this vocation, even if he does not see it with Christian eyes. Finally, there was talk of vocational discernment and the importance of a reference figure who can accompany the young person in his or her choices, who can listen to them and guide them.

In the third and last part we talk about the "Educational and pastoral action of the Church". It is from here that I took the quote at the beginning of this report. It is important for the Church to be *authentic*, not afraid to show the world that it is made up of people and that people can make mistakes; it is important to ask for forgiveness when you are wrong and try to repair the mistakes made. The desire for an *outgoing Church* emerges - as the Pope has repeatedly asked - to know how to go about meeting young people, right where they are. Furthermore, young people want the Church to express itself more clearly on certain issues such as, for example, cohabitation, homosexuality, contraception. There was also discussion of the importance of involving young people by offering them *leadership roles*, giving them the confidence and *training* needed. Finally, we talked about some positive initiatives and the tools to be used to meet young people, among which we must recognize the importance of the Web as a real meeting *place* for young people.

In the last paragraph we expressed our desire that this dialogue between the Church and young people should not end here, but should continue to call on the youth on questions of importance. I like to note how in the document the importance of movements in the Church of today and, in particular, of the Charismatic Renewal emerges; I had the pleasant surprise to discover that, despite being the only direct representative of the Renewal, among the 300 young people there were people the charismatic renewal from all continents, who

were there for different reasons. It was nice to discover that, in some parts of the world, movements collaborate with episcopal conferences and youth pastoral ministry in the service of young people and that is what we should try to do in Italy.

Organization and other activities

The pre-synodal meeting was organized by the General Secretariat of the Synod, which was with us for the entire week. Among these, we would like to mention in particular the Secretary General, Cardinal Baldisseri and the Under Secretary, Mons. Fabene. The Vatican covered all the expenses for food and accommodation of the participants.

During the week, although work on the document took up most of the time, other activities were also proposed. Holy Mass was celebrated every morning; it was animated by a choir of focolarini and, after a few days, I joined them accompanying them with the violin. On Tuesday evening, we had a moment of celebration in which some groups of youngsters entertained the rest of the assembly with songs and dances.



The choir and the musicians during the Mass

Those who were not in the drafting group, had Wednesday afternoon free; I and other guys took the opportunity to take a walk in the center of Rome. On Friday a visit to the Cathedral of San Giovanni in Laterano was organized, where we celebrated the Stations of the Cross, presided by Cardinal Farrell, prefect of the new dicastery for the laity, family and life; even during the Stations of the Cross I had the opportunity to play the violin and I was very happy, playing in a basilica like S. Giovanni is a beautiful experience.

On Saturday afternoon, we took a trip to the Pontifical Villas of Castel Gandolfo, where we spent the evening organized by the Diocese of Albano. On Sunday we concluded the beautiful week with the Procession of

Palms and Mass in St. Peter's Square with the Pope, to whom we delivered the final document.

One thing that disappointed me was the lack of moments of prayer, besides the Holy Mass and a 15-minute guided meditation every morning. I would have liked at least one adoration during the week.

Final comments

I feel proud and honored to have participated in this event which is so important in the history of the Church. It was a very intense experience, during which I met different realities and movements, I was able to discuss some important issues with young people from other parts of the world and I could actively contribute to what will be discussed in the Synod.



The pope with young people

For the cover of the final document they asked us to express with a word that sentiment we felt and then put all these words scattered on a globe. I chose GRATITUDINE (in English, “gratitude”), because I am truly grateful to God for allowing me live this experience; to Pope Francis, because he continues *to listen to the voice of the Spirit* with openness; to ICCRS for believing in me and choosing me as a representative. So it is with this sense of gratitude and joy for the work done this week that I want to conclude this report, hoping that this work will bear abundant fruit and that this dialogue will continue.

Andrea Pesare

The official document in English and the (unofficial) translations in Italian and Spanish can be found at

<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/03/24/0220/00482.html>

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