

# Synod2018: Young People Discussion Groups Offer Reports (Full Text)

[ZENIT Staff](#)



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## 14 'Break-Out' Groups Offers Insights for a Stronger Church

On the morning of October 9, 2018, during the 5th General Congregation of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on young people, the Reports of the 14 Minor Circles were presented in the Hall to reflect on

the first part of the Instrumentum Laboris light of the contributions that emerged during the debate held in the previous General Congregations.

**The full text of the reports, provided by the Vatican, follow:**



### **Relatio – Circulus Anglicus A**

In beginning our work, our Group reflected on the mood and tone of Part One especially in light of Paragraph 3. This Paragraph explains that “in this first step, we should focus on grasping concrete realities: social sciences provide an essential contribution ... but what they have to say is looked at and re-read

in the light of faith and the experience of the Church.”

It was suggested that the faith dimension, the Christological perspective could be stronger, making it clear that we are reflecting from the heart and in the light of faith on the concrete realities of young people – just as Jesus looked with love at the rich young man’s lived experience, and as he encountered the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Relationship is clearly the key to encounter with youth.

We have offered a “modus” to Paragraph 3 which suggests deepening the process of “recognizing; Interpreting; choosing” to include, as Evangelium Gaudium puts it: “not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also – and this is decisive – choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil” (EG 51).

Our Group recommends that quotations from young people in the Aula and at the Pre-Synod would help to bring any final synod document to life, as well as providing examples of thriving “peer to peer” youth movements in various parts of the world.

We considered that the various sections on the digital world might be brought together to allow a more thorough reflection on this topic, including its potential for mission and the new evangelization. We suggested that such a reflection might include a treatment of the compulsive attraction of ‘screen culture’ including cinema, mini-series and video gaming. We raised concerns about the exploitation of young people online, including the harvesting of their data, identity theft, and scams.

It must, of course, be recognized, as the young people at the Pre-Synod put it, that Technology and especially Social Media is now understood as a permanent part of the life and identity of young people. They open up online educational opportunities, and also new possibilities for the exchange of

information, ideals, values and common interests, which “have potential to unite people across geographical distances like never before”. (see pre synod summary 4)

Since we found paragraphs 52-53 to be somewhat muddled, we have offered a modus reshaping these paragraphs to reflect the importance of the human person and the human body. We noted that a proclamation of chastity, as achievable and good for our young people, is missing from the document.

Our Group believes that the Church is called to respond to the desire of many young people for stable reference points, moorings or stepping stones to help them navigate their way through the often contradictory messages being hurled at them from every direction. From the riches of her teaching, including from her “treasure trove” of social doctrine, the Church can offer them reasons for living and hoping. She does this best with young people by avoiding a moralistic or polemical approach – as if we had all the “ready-made” answers – but instead accompanying young people in a climate of joy and adventure of discovery.

At the Pre-Synod, young people told us that they do not wish to be “mere spectators” in society, but “active participants”. Our listening and attention to them must therefore not be passive, but one which engages them in the process of “synodality”, both locally and at all levels in the Church.

We were inspired by Briana, the young woman from America who spoke to us in the Aula, to reflect on our own experiences of being young – for some of us that was a little longer ago than others! For many of us the joyful witness of respected and trusted priests in our youth had helped to inspire our vocation.

However, the context for vocational discernment has changed utterly. Our Group suggests that the issue of child sexual abuse in the Church cannot be skimmed over tangentially in a few short sentences. The shattered trust, the

trauma and lifelong suffering of survivors; the catastrophic failures in case management; the continued silence and denial by some of these awful crimes and sins – these issues cry out to be named openly by the Synod. We feel that as well as reassuring young people and their families that our safeguarding processes and norms are now robust and stringent, this Synod also provides an opportunity for us to prepare for February 2019 by speaking from our hearts about how we, as Synod Fathers feel about this shocking betrayal of our youth and of all the faithful. We should not be afraid to do so.

If young people and their families are asking themselves: can our priest and bishop be trusted? If priests themselves are afraid to minister among the youth, then how can our Synod get out the message that young people, their faith and their vocational discernment are important to us?

As one member of our Group reminded us: “Trust arrives slowly, on foot, but Trust leaves on horseback! Trust must be rebuilt, one person at a time”.

But is there another way of looking at all this? What if now, out of our fragility, we seek the caress of God’s mercy, and aim to find new ways to relate to young people, as a more humble Church, facing this reality?

After all, Holiness and fragility are linked. Our young people combine tremendous energy with great fragility. They are tossed around by the cruel storms of life. Too many of them suffer from mental health problems and take their own lives. They need to know that someone is there for them. We, as Christian communities can offer them space to find meaning and purpose; we can whisper to their fragility: God loves you no matter who else lets you down. Put your trust in God.

Perhaps the storms we are enduring in the Church can help us walk more humbly with our young people, to listen to them with understanding and with empathy. At the pre-synod, young people said they wanted a Church that

“witnesses to authenticity on the path to holiness, which includes acknowledging mistakes and asking for forgiveness. Young people expect leaders of the Church – ordained, religious and lay – to be the strongest example of this” (See Pre synod summary no 7 p. 2).

In short, if we are authentic and vulnerable, then young people, on the path to holiness, are free to be authentic and vulnerable themselves.

We must, of course, submit to the demands of justice, but to a society which sometimes seeks summary judgment, punishment and “heads on a plate”, we must also find ways of seeking forgiveness, and, in helping survivors to find healing and reconciliation.

[01558-EN.01] [Original text: English]



## **Relatio – Circulus Anglicus B**

### **Interaction with the Youth of the World**

Our small group, aware that the final document from the Synod is directed to the pope, considered how the Synod might want to present itself to young people. In itself, this is starting the work of improved attentive engagement

with young people that we are considering in this Synod.

This is in addition to the important communication currently underway.

*We propose a two-element solution.*

Firstly, a series of small messages, updates, perhaps at the end of each week from the Commission for Information. To be accessible to youth, these should have a component which is in video format and is short (less than 3 minutes). Any text should be less than 400 words and be accompanied by pictures. ('If there isn't a picture, it didn't happen.') These should be done in at least the major languages of the Synod.

Secondly, a message from the Synod to the Youth of the World. This message should be inspirational and missionary in character. It should be scripturally based and start from Christ. We picture a simple, direct, honest message that would contain elements such as:

- We want to listen to you
- We are sorry for our failures
- We love you and have faith in you
- We want to walk with you in hope

We recommend that two Synod Fathers, with two Youth Auditors (chosen by the auditors from among themselves), be asked to prepare a text.

*Apostolic Exhortation*

Further, we hope that the Holy Father will again take the opportunity to write an Apostolic Exhortation which takes into account the experience of the Synod. A few young people will read an Apostolic Exhortation, we encourage

the Holy Father to consider releasing an aid to help young people read the Exhortation and to increase their interest in it (a “study guide”?). And we further ask the Holy Father, with the help of suitable experts, to make both the Exhortation and aid interactive. For example, they might end each major section with some direct and open-ended questions that could help the youth in their reflections and could be used to promote personal sharing ideas in small groups. Also, at the end of each major section there might be a QR code (Bar Code) which takes young people to a special website which (i) has a chatroom where the youth could meet and discuss the questions, and (ii) might have also short evocative videos, some of which could be a direct message from the Pope.

We also invite the Holy Father to consider ‘road testing’ or workshopping the condensed version of the Apostolic Exhortation, and perhaps even the Exhortation itself, with a number of young people.

Perhaps if this is successful, all major church documents could be presented with such youth-friendly characteristics.

## **The Text**

Our proposals have largely centered around enriching the reality presented in the text and occasionally providing some balance.

Some of the discussions with more energy in them were around:

### *The role young people already play as protagonists*

Youth are already involved in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue by the way they live, study, play, pray and work with and beside others. Sometimes this is intentional. The document often misses the opportunity to recognize the role that young people already and currently play as active agents, for

example in the areas of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, especially in Asia (discussed in nos. 10, 24, and 25). We likewise propose that the indispensable role of young people as active agents in the life of the Church and society be acknowledged and underlined.

*The many ways in which family acts and is formed*

In many cases and places, the family is still very much the domestic Church as well as a sociological or biological reality. It is the font and primary nurturer of the spiritual life. The effects of brokenness of families and diminishment of the passing on of relationship with Jesus is captured very well but this positive aspect is not sufficiently well recognized.

Also, there are many other forms of family other than the nuclear family or the extended family. We had a debate in our small group about non-ideal groupings from the Christian perspective. Does leadership in the Church require bishops and priests to proclaim the Gospel truth by denying that these are families? Or does our leadership require us to accompany the young people in the reality in which they find themselves? Perhaps these are not contradictory realities: St John recounts that Jesus both accepted the woman caught in adultery and proposed something else. Is it possible for us to both accept and even honor the family unit that a young person finds herself in and to share the Gospel ideal to her?

In addition, families of origin are not the only family context for people in this age group. There are young adults who are preparing for or entering into marriage at this period of their life. As well, many families are headed by people in the age group considered here.

*The faith and thirst for deeper faith that many young people do have*

The Instrumentum Laboris captures well the reality that there are many

young people who are distanced from the Church and also from a relationship with God. There was energy in our group around a need also to be attentive to and appreciate the openness of young people to faith. The document is weak in this area. We are not accompanying an empty glass. There are already gifts in this area present in young people that we want to recognize, accompany, strengthen and send into the Church and the world. The dynamic when we accompany is to lead a person to the more.

Many of our young people are thirsty for the more. Some of these are thirsty and know what they thirst for. There are others who thirst and do not know what they thirst for. These young people are in a much more difficult place.

### *Friendship*

There is a paragraph on peer relationships in a section under the heading of Intergenerational relationships but there is nothing on friendship *per se*. The feeling was very strong in our group that the reality of friendship and its importance for young people needs to be recognized in the document that this synod produces. Friendship is yearned for by our young people. They find community through this and they find family in this way.

[01559-EN.01] [Original text: English]

### **Rela**



## **tio – Circulus Anglicus C**

### Chapter 1 – Being Young Today

#### Fears

- Chapter 1 discusses a lot of fears: corruption, drugs, employment. This is a whole area to address.

#### 11-13: Families

- The kind of families they have been brought up in is very important. The families in the Western world are shrinking in terms of natality. Need to focus on motherhood, fatherhood, spending time generously with their kids.
- One important challenge we face: the number of young people who come from single-parent families. In some societies, it is quite high. Lack of knowledge of motherhood or fatherhood (what it means). This makes many challenges for young people as they grow older. *Is this in the document?*
- Family ministry is a challenging area for us to engage in. Parents want to

make money to support their kids. If we tell them to stay at home more, our words not be well received.

- Young person agrees in the centrality of family, but we need a village to raise a child. If we can create communities that support families, then families can do a better job of providing good lives for their children.
  - The Church has to be a family. We have a tendency in developed countries to make church just mass for 1 hour on the weekend.
- Ukraine is experiencing an “emancipation”. A few years ago, they noticed a big crisis in families. Half of all families failed. Many fathers left to Western Europe for jobs, sending money back: young people have money but no education (so-called “social orphans”). What does Church mean for youth today? For many, it means a holy building, not a community. They have churches & parish priests, but not parishes. The UCC survived the Soviet era because it was a community, a people, even without a building. Now the Catholics are attractive because there is a community. The war is creating PTSD among youth. We need the church to be a place of family, of human relationships.
- Our communities must be sharing communities. Even material sharing, like in the Acts of the Apostles. Small basic communities are an opportunity for this mutual sharing of material and spiritual concerns. There are a number of initiatives that create small groups, such as Neo-catechumenal Way.
  - We have a lot to learn from immigrant communities (speaking a bishop from USA). The families felt the need to come together and support each other, but sometimes they are rejected for that!
  - One of the fastest grouping groups of ecclesial groups are new movements. Those growing most are those where families and groups of families are coming together as units.

- In Namibia, the problem of children becoming parents (14 or 15 years old).
  - Siblings are often the most significant “adult” in the life of a young person.
  - In Myanmar, young people go away – villages only have children and older people.
  - #11: what do you mean by a traditional family? This term should be explained.
- Does it mean nuclear family? A wider family? A family with a man at the head?
  - Did this come from African setting, where it means extended family?
  - Is it being used to oppose “non-traditional” families?
  - Single parent? Grannies?
    - The Church can supply for what is missing in the family – need a modus, perhaps added to #12
    - mixed marriage families and the transmission of the family – not mentioned at all

## 14 & 15: Intergenerational relationships

- Pope Francis sees youth and elderly as both being “thrown away”. We need to find ways to bring them together. It does good things for both sides.
- Often youth do have a good relationship with older people, it is the 40-60 group they have trouble with. The older generation seems to be better listeners. In religious life, one particular community always includes older sisters because they are the ones that sit and listen.

- Experience of young people: relationship with elders is good when they recognize the need and have the ability to listen to younger people. No matter the age, the ability to have dialogue and conversation is key for a good intergenerational relationship.
- In the Asian context, one bishop said he has never seen old age homes. Older people are “adopted” into families.
- In Europe, there is no one to build a bridge between elder and youth. Each seems isolated to each other.
- In South Africa, there is often a grandmother taking the place of a parent (perhaps parents have died). The grandmothers often say they are not appreciated despite their sacrifices.
- In Kerala, the old age home is often imposed by work-related needs (e.g. migrant workers who can't be close to the parents).

#### 16-18: Life Choices

- this sounds more like language from an educational book, without much mention of God
- nothing mentioned of divine intervention in the life of youth
- no listening to God in making life choices

#### 19-21: Education

- In Myanmar, children often have to work to feed their family, so they cannot study.
- Zimbabwe: Other religions are maximizing on education. Those who are unable to pay school fees are lured in to schools via paying of school fees. Our Catholic schools have become more academic and a place of formation into a Catholic ethos.
- Nigeria: While growing up, parents studied free of charge, but many cannot go to school as it is too expensive. Can Church make Catholic

schools affordable? Or raise funds for those who cannot go? For those who don't have a mind for academics but have skills. Pentecostal churches pay for services that require skills – they promise jobs, accommodation, food, a place to develop and sell skills (so even if volunteer work they go there for other benefits). Catholic schools built with contributions from faithful, but only children of elites can do to those schools.

- His Beatitude: education can be used to promote a form of manipulation, and globally we are seeing this – education is instrumentalized to manipulate human beings today – so we see a tendency to eliminate the church presence
  - no mention of pastoral care and spiritual guidance as part of the formation context; can chaplaincies be mentioned, e.g. Newman centers (see 147-148)
  - Home-based schools – a model coming from America.
- USA has many homeschoolers – bishops in USA are not united, as homeschooling can have an ideological basis – kids may have special needs
  - are parents qualified to homeschool them?

### 23: Jobs and professions

- can also involve lots of internal migration
- volunteerism needs to be included as a theme, as some people depend on what they get in volunteerism – volunteering in the church should be fruitful in the church

### 26: Experience and types of languages

- Language is not really mentioned here! We'll call it experience and forms

of expression

## 28: Social engagement and participation

- While young people may see failures in the prophetic side of the Church, in a more positive way they want to see the church as a place of honesty, safety, and impartiality

## 29-30: Spirituality and religiosity

- Holy Spirit is not mentioned at all — does that reflect reality? should a modus be placed elsewhere in the document? — in Indonesia the Holy Spirit should be mentioned — the new movements include a strong mention HS — need a modus for this part
- no mention of religious or para-religious sects
- the psychological way of finding your self-actualization should also be included
- Jesus as a magician? superstitious relationship with him?
- where is the place of liturgy in the spirituality and religion section?

## 31-33: Young people in the life of the church

- difficulty of finding space because others don't make room for them
- church as a school of discipleship (need a prescriptive modus later)

## 34-35: the digital continent

- remember that lots of youth don't have access to the internet!
- how is the digital environment allowing for new forms of expression eg chat, online groups, sexting
- are these media allowing to meet new people and make new connections, i.e. diversity? or are they being used to empower friendships already

present, i.e. sameness? sameness can allow for a contact of diversity when a common interest is present

### 63: Beyond secularization

- Hearing that young people are spiritual but not religious – the spirit is not only in the Church but in society. Secularization is not something we should be opposed to.

### 36-38: Music and other forms of artistic expression

- Need to mention TV, video and video games
- Need to distinguish producers and consumers

### 39-40: The world of sports

- Vincent: people with an interest in sports ppl are seen as those who are wasting their time; but now protestant churches set up sports clubs for their members, used as a form of proselytism
- Betting: gambling on sports
- Video poker, other video games betting
- Use of sports to build character and build teamwork — A MODUS WILL COME
- Professional sports as the new gladiators — exploiting talented people from poorer countries
- People like to combine physical and spiritual activities e.g. yoga — no place in church for that
- Card. Coutts would like to see a paragraph on sport as something that is fun

## Chapter 3 – In the throwaway culture

### 45-47: Young migrants

- special attention should be paid to those in refugee camps
- Myanmar bishop: internally displaced persons should also be included; it is not quite the same thing

#### 48: The various sources of discrimination

- we should add legal & citizenship status as a source of discrimination
- we should add youth with disabilities as a source of discrimination

### Chapter IV — Anthropological and cultural challenges

#### 52-53: Body, affectivity and sexuality

- We should mention transhumanism
- need to add plastic surgery to the concept (modus sent)
- we need to make sure we are clear that young people who don't agree with the church on sex are still members of the churches
- what does “extreme experiences” mean? extreme sports? extreme sexual activity? extreme drugs? also need to mention social pressure

#### 58-60: Disaffection with institutions

- why is so little mentioned as forms of new forms of participation? such as networks for social support?

#### 61: A decision-making paralysis etc.

- The title should be made more clear to show it reflects the long-term decisions. There is no paralysis for short-term decisions.

### Chapter V title

- This chapter is not just about listening, so the title should be amended

## 65: The Hard work of listening

- The issue is not just listening to young people; lots of people want the Church to listen!
- How can we create a listening culture in the church?
- We need to listen to engage — park the “how to listen” for a future section e.g. empathetic listening, which we already do but could do more
- Brother Alois: “listening with humanity” is something they see a lot of at Taizé — could we have a “ministry of listening”

[01560-EN.01] [Original text: English]

### **Relatio – Circulus Anglicus D**

It is my privilege to report on behalf of the English-language small group “D,” an extraordinarily diverse and lively community of English speakers from all over the world. For the sake of brevity, I will highlight seven themes from an extremely wide-ranging conversation.

First, there was a strong consensus in our group that the document should commence, not with sociological analysis, but rather with a Biblical icon that would serve as a leitmotif for the entire statement. We felt that the story of Jesus’ encounter with the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus—already referenced in the IL—would be the ideal choice, for it beautifully demonstrates Jesus in both his listening and teaching manner. Further, the image of the disciples—still fascinated by the Lord and yet wandering in the wrong direction—aptly describes the condition of many of the young today. Once that elaborated icon is in place, we feel that the overall “see, judge, and act” interpretive framework of the IL should be retained.

Secondly, there was a strong sense in the group that the opening section of the IL was too negative in tone, focusing excessively on the dangers and

challenges that young people face, especially in regard to the faith. We wondered whether a greater stress might be placed on the many examples of young people who are joyfully living out their Catholicism, despite the difficulties of this cultural moment. The suggestion was made that the still massively successful World Youth Days, inaugurated by St. Pope John Paul II, are one of the principal signs of this positive engagement of young people.

A third theme, brought up by many in our group, is that the text of the IL remains, in many ways, too Western in focus and tone. More specifically, it overlooks the situation of young people in those parts of the world where Christians suffer active persecution and are, quite literally, fighting for their lives. And it fails to take into account the struggles of those in many third world countries where economic and medical assistance from wealthier nations is frequently tied to an acquiescence to Western moral values in regard to sexuality and marriage. This ideological colonization, as Pope Francis has rightly characterized it, especially harms the young. Also, contemporary advertising, which teaches people to be dissatisfied with the goods that they have, contributes mightily to the throwaway culture so decried by Pope Francis. This dynamic is especially destructive in poorer countries.

A fourth motif from the IL that found particular resonance with our group was that of spiritual paternity and maternity. Many thought that this image lyrically expresses what young people want and expect from the Church. They desire mentors, guides, spiritual friends willing to walk with them. Especially at a time, at least in the West, when the family is in crisis, this trusting relationship between young people and mothers and fathers in the spiritual order is of crucial importance. One of the African members of our community reminded us that in many African languages, there are no words for cousin or uncle or aunt since everyone in the family is considered brother and sister. This same sort of unity and connectedness ought to mark the life of the

## Church.

Fifthly, we focused on the prevalence and influence of the digital culture. We would like first to make the stylistic observation that the digital reality is discussed, here and there, in many sections of the first part. It might be wise to bring all of it under one heading. In terms of content, there was a universal consensus that the social media produces both light and shadow in the lives of young people and that the IL was correct to point this out. Two particular observations of our group are especially useful here. On the one hand, the immersion in the virtual world has produced a kind of “digital migration,” which is to say, a wandering away from family, cultural, and religious values into a world of privacy and self-invention. Just as many immigrants feel uprooted from their spiritual homes, so many young people in the West can experience the same kind of rootlessness, even while remaining physically in place.

Sixthly, we spent a good deal of time discussing the sex abuse crisis in the Church, especially regarding its effect on the evangelization of the young. As is obvious to everyone, this scandal has undermined the work of the Church in practically every way, precisely because it has compromised our credibility. A Church that cannot be trusted is simply incapable of reaching out to young people in an effective way. Though some members of our discussion group felt that this matter should be addressed at the very beginning of the document, the consensus was that it ought to remain in paragraph sixty-six, but also be considerably expanded. For instance, even as we acknowledge our sorrow and guilt in this regard, mention should be made of the very positive and effective steps the Church has taken since 2002 to address this matter concretely. And we should make it clear that the commitment to reform, in both matters sexual and financial, is operative at all levels of the Church’s life. Relatedly, we ought to articulate the Church’s understanding of body lines and sexuality, but we should not hesitate to utilize the language of our

theological tradition, including body and soul, the call to virtue, and the ideal of chastity. Many expressed the concern that the terminology of the IL in this area was too marked by contemporary psychological categories.

Seventhly and finally, we had a particularly energetic discussion around the complex issue of the play between listening and teaching in the life of the Church. Some members of our group wondered whether the IL's strong emphasis on listening didn't compromise or underplay the Church's authentic teaching mission. It was observed that many young people today, in the midst of a postmodern culture so marked by relativism and indifferentism, long for the clarity and confidence of the Church's doctrine. Others insisted that the stress on listening and relationality is indispensable in the measure that no doctrine, however beautiful and true, will be accepted unless it comes from a trustworthy source. One member observed that the maternity of the Church is a helpful image in this regard, provided that we remember that the manner in which a mother teaches her infant child is radically different from the manner in which she teaches her adult child. One of our elders in the group insisted that we move away from any antagonistic construal of the relationship between listening and teaching as if the two are in tension or competition. Rather, he insisted, they are mutually implicative moments in any constructive conversation. An observation that especially caught the attention of our group was that, in speaking of a Church that listens to young people, the IL inadvertently positions the young as somehow outside the Church. We must always remember that they are listened to, precisely as members of the Mystical Body.

By way of conclusion, I might mention that, alongside of the Biblical narrative of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the image of the restless heart proposed long ago by St. Augustine still sings to young people today. We could use this as another leitmotif throughout the document.

[01561-EN.01] [Original text: English]