



JOURNEYING TOGETHER

A NATIONAL CATHOLIC INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTER
FOR MINISTRIES WITH YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Most Reverend Nelson J. Pérez, Archbishop of Philadelphia
Presentation to the USCCB General Assembly on Journeying Together
November 17, 2021

Brothers,

Thank you for this opportunity to present to you an update on Journeying Together. Journeying Together is a synodal and intercultural process of dialogue and accompaniment of young Catholics and those who minister to them. It was inspired as a response to Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, and the 2018 Synod on Young People.

For the last 18 months or so, amidst a pandemic, the social unrest, the racial reckoning, and the polarization affecting U.S. society, and even the Church, the Journeying Together process has provided a "sacred space" and an opportunity for bishops, young adults, youth ministers and campus ministers, and leaders of various other ministries with young people, to engage in respectful yet honest dialogue in matters of faith, culture, racism, inclusion and the issues that affect them as young people.

Since the official kickoff in July last year, 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 both from intra-cultural and intercultural perspectives. The planning and the consultation began much earlier, as part of the Committee on Cultural Diversity's last strategic plan. A consultation with teens of diverse cultural backgrounds attending the NCYC 2019 conference was also part of this conversation.

Providence and the COVID-19 pandemic determined that what was to be dialogued and discerned over a long weekend turned out to be a two-year long (and counting) process, mostly carried out virtually. Perhaps it was the Holy Spirit's way of telling us bishops that we really needed to take time to listen to young people, those who minister to them and, especially, those who are in the peripheries, feeling unimportant and unloved, and often alienated from the Church.

The social unrest and lack of civism, the violence and the racism we have witnessed, as well as the desperation and isolation brought about by the pandemic also made us realize that this was not a time to quit on dialogue but to double down on it, to continue to accompany each other, to seek reconciliation and understanding, and to

empower young people to guide us along a different path.

And engage they did! Young adults in particular, who form about 50 percent of the more than 1,600 people nationwide that have participated in the process thus far, not only accepted the challenge, but have been instrumental in shaping and leading this process. Participants hailed from 147 dioceses and eparquies. As we mapped participation, we were amazed to discover that not only every episcopal region is represented but also every ecclesiastical province.

I want to thank the hundreds of volunteers and USCCB staff from various departments that have worked uncountable hours behind the scenes to make this experience happen, despite our initial doubts that a virtual process could have such an impact or create the intimate atmosphere needed for some of these conversations to be fruitful. We owe you a huge debt of gratitude.

I am also grateful to the more than 60 bishops—63 to be exact—that have accompanied the process thus far, at one point or another. You have been exceedingly generous with your time. Personally, I have participated in over 20 of these dialogues. Some of you have been persistent in your commitment to listen and walk with young people. If I could give you an award, I would probably nominate a few of you for the “Official Companions of the Journey” award. You know who you are. Please receive my gratitude on behalf of the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church and the entire Journeying Together team. And please continue to walk with us.

I want to give a special shout out to our Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, who has also been along for the ride from the very beginning and did not miss one of the six intercultural dialogues from January through June. Your Excellency, you have made us feel the presence and spiritual nearness of the Holy Father on this journey. But I must say, your own insights, closeness, approachability and sense of humor have not gone unnoticed by the participants.

As a bishop, I have been deeply touched by the testimonies of the young adults participating in this process. I admire their resilience, and their faith, despite the many challenges they face; I have witnessed their love for the Church and a yearning for inclusion and for finding a space and their voice in the Church. I have also been inspired by the love, dedication, care and concern of the ministry leaders who have participated and helped us identify such a diverse and remarkable array of young adults from every cultural family.

Although the journey is not complete, it has already been tremendously fruitful in many ways. Rather than attempting to summarize the many learnings and ideas exchanged, we decided to bring you along for the journey, even if for just a brief moment. And so, I would like to share the following: video with you.

Brothers, as you just witnessed, this truly has been an amazing journey thus far. We have shared painful experiences and had honest and, at times, hard conversations. We also had joyful moments of hope and celebration. We have learned so much about the richness and diversity present in our Catholic Church. We have met promising young leaders from multiple ethnic and cultural communities who give me so much hope for the present and the future of the Catholic Church in this country. Young people and ministry leaders who take seriously the mandate to “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28, 19).

An important next stop on the road will be



the national in-person Journeying Together Encounter, planned for June 23-26, 2022 in Chicago. I thank His Eminence, Cardinal Cupich, for welcoming us with open arms to the Archdiocese.

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. There are some things that are simply better achieved in person!

The National Encounter in Chicago will also be the moment in which we turn input into action, ideas into concrete actionable steps, recommendations and commitments, as we complete the journey towards a ministry that is more 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. Or as Pope Francis states in *Let Us Dream*, it will be the time to "propose" that comes after the "contemplating" and "discerning".

Making honor to its name, this Journeying Together process has been eminently synodal in nature. The bishops' presence and accompaniment at this pivotal stage in the process is also very important. So, how can you help?

1. First, join us in Chicago. I am happy to issue a very cordial, joyful and strong invitation to attend the national event in Chicago. Bishop registration for the national Journeying Together Event is now open. Registration information has been posted on the bishops' portion of the USCCB website.

2. Second, you can support current participants from your area so they can attend the national gathering; and also encourage additional local young adults, youth ministers, campus ministers and others working with young people in various fields, to engage in the process at the local level. It is not too late! Inquiries can be sent to journeytogether@usccb.org.

3. Third, you can help by sponsoring a meal, a session, or a group of individuals to attend, or simply by donating to our scholarship fund, so that we can help those who need it the most. The pandemic has increased the requests for assistance exponentially. Let's not forget that the success of this process and its long-term impact hinges on our ability to ensure participation and representation of diverse cultural, ethnic and ministry voices throughout, including at this in-person event.

4. Finally, and very importantly, you can pray for the successful completion of the Journeying Together process and for all who are participating in it. Without prayer, we can do nothing!

Brothers, I am convinced that the recommendations and tools, currently under development, that will come out of the Journeying Together experience are sure to benefit the Church's ministry and outreach to young people for years to come. In the wake of the V [Fifth] National Encuentro for Hispanic Ministry, and the 2018 Synod on Young People; and in light of efforts such as the National Dialogue on Catholic Pastoral Ministry with Youth and Young Adults, and the findings of the Pew and CARA studies on young people and religion; it is imperative for the Church in the United States at this time to listen to all of the voices that form the rich mosaic of youth, young adult and campus ministries in our country and to involve them in charting a path forward together, in and with the Church.

Journeying Together has been working closely with those in charge of developing the National Pastoral Framework for Ministry with Youth and Young Adults, and it is our hope that the Framework will be heavily impacted by the Journeying Together conversations. We are also joining the Eucharistic Revival efforts during the national Journeying Together event and beyond.

Brothers, come along for the journey. And we hope to see you in Chicago!